Elements in Contentious Politics

Protest Walls

Yao-Tai Li and Katherine Whitworth

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Elements in Contentious Politics
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PROTEST WALLS

Co-authoring Contentious Repertoires

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Abstract: Protest walls have played an important role in movement communication and mobilizing the public. We focus on contentious performances and the way diverse actors co-authored spaces into the protest walls that were seen in Hong Kong and other countries including Lebanon, Iraq, and Taiwan. We argue that once created, protest walls can become objects symbolic of dissent. They exist as a lexicon – a complex language of symbols and spatial practices. This language is now an internationally understood method of protest which has a high degree of transferability and can be adapted into local contentious contexts or used to transmit local concerns into the international consciousness. Finally, we show that the protest wall can shed new light on the relationship between activists, their claims and their targets that does not exist in other types of contentious performance.

This Element also has a video abstract: Cambridge.org/ECTP_Li

Keywords: protest wall, contentious repertoire, modular performance, social semiotics, symbolic objects

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> Finally, there is the writing of the city: what is inscribed and prescribed on its walls, in the layout of places and their linkages, in brief, the use of time in the city by its inhabitants.
>
> —Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*

1 Making Claims in Contentious Times

In August 2023, a wall on London's famous Brick Lane became the canvas for supporters and opponents of China's authorities to express their views. The original artwork replicated Chinese government's propaganda in both style and content presenting red stenciled words such as love, nation, harmony, and rule of law. The work was immediately graffitied on, with passersby making small additions such as "without" before "rule of law" and "doesn't love me" after "nation." These additions were soon overlaid with references to the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, along with phrases including: "Free Taiwan," "Free Tibet," "Free Xinjiang/Uyghurs," "No freedom in China," and "Fuck the CCP." This process, whereby a series of anonymous individuals expressed their views on the wall, led to a coauthorship of space where new meanings were made and shared.

Protest walls have played an important role in framing social movement claims, mobilizing public support (McGahern, 2017; Panlee, 2021), and defining boundaries between groups and identities. The collective narration of movement claims along with the physical and ideological conflicts that occur at protests wall sites constitute core elements of contentious repertoire. Hong Kong's Lennon Walls may be the most well-known example in recent years, but the mode of social movement communication through and on walls did not originate in Hong Kong. Similar forms of collective, spatial expression of opinion have been seen across disparate contentious events such as the Chinese democracy movement of the 1970s, the First Intifada of Gaza in the late 1980s, the Egyptian Revolution in 2011, Hong Kong's Umbrella movement of 2014, and Iraq's Tishreen Uprising and Lebanon's October Revolution both in 2019.

To date, uses of walls in protest claim-making processes have been dealt with as isolated events or empirical examples of contentious performance that emerge in a unique sociopolitical context. Given the numerous instances of contentious performance that have involved walls over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we set out to explore two related questions, one empirically based and the other taking a conceptual approach. We begin with the empirical question: *What, if any, social, political, and material elements connect these contentious performances? Do these performances constitute what Tilly (2006, 2008) would call a "modular performance"?* Through a series of comparative case studies we trace universal and localized aspects of the

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material and digital form of protest walls; political opportunity structures in place when they emerged; collaborative practices adopted by individuals to coauthor a narrative of resistance in physical and discursive space; and the ritualized responses to protest walls, including opposition.

The second conceptual question asks how *walls can be understood to transcend their materiality in contentious politics.* With this question, we acknowledge walls as objects and places that have become symbolic of protest. We consider how the intersection of object, place, human activity, and meaning making allows the protest wall, ultimately, to be understood beyond the physical form created in contention, and instead as an abstract representation of the claims of the protesters, leaving the focus on the claims rather than on the protesters and their actions.

Conceptual Framework

The Element engages with important literatures to explore how the practices of human actors intersect with spaces and objects during times of protest, thus giving objects meaning and creating new vocabularies. In this engagement, we note that the literature of social movements tends to have two aspects, the one underlining the empirical, providing insights into the practices of protesters, and the other the conceptual, providing ways for scholars to engage with notions of protest in the abstract. To highlight the role of social actors and the ways patterns of behavior can become a language of contention, we draw on Tilly's (2006, 2008) ideas of modular performance and contentious repertoire. We start from these concepts as presented by Tilly, with the intention of extending them. However, we acknowledge influences on our understandings, in particular Wada's (2012) work on the transferability of contentious repertoires. Social semiotics provides a useful analytical tool to explore how meanings can be interpreted from text, visual representation, and even objects. While we begin from the classic works of Barthes (1977) and Hodge and Kress (1988), Abrams and Gardner (2023) work that introduces the concept of symbolic objects to contentious repertoires and Johnston's (2018) analysis of how "material things" come to hold meaning are significant extensions. Once objects and artifacts carry meaning in a contentious context, Benford and Snow's (2000) conceptualization of framing and counter-framing is useful in showing how these artifacts become discursive tools in claim-making processes.

Modular Performances, Transferability, and Contentious Repertoire

During times of collective political struggle, there is a range of familiar and standardized ways in which one group of political actors (claimants) make

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claims on another, including but not limited to petitions, marches, and occupations (Tarrow, 2008). These actions are akin to an internationally understood language of protest and are important because of their transferability across different contentious contexts and their consistency in form over time. Tilly and Tarrow (2015) refer to these universal practices of protest as "modular repertoires of contention." These modular performances can be adapted to suit local or issue-specific needs, as Tilly and Tarrow have shown. Over time certain localized variations may come to constitute a "contentious repertoire" or set of actions with meanings specific and unique to a sociopolitical context or group of claimants and their target (Tarrow, 2008; Tilly, 2006, 2008). Whereas Tilly implies that a performance is either modular or not, acknowledging the existence of a dichotomy, Wada (2012: 568) argues that it is more appropriate to consider degrees of transferability of performance across actors, targets, issues, and locations, and suggests the need for cross-national comparisons.

These localized repertoires are not static. Practices and the meaning ascribed to them can change through transformative or "great events" that radically reorganize societal structures (Sewell, 1996, 2005). Here, the status quo is temporarily interrupted giving space for bursts of creativity and innovation in protest action and discourse (della Porta, 2008, 2011). Methods of protest also change through the discrete interactions of individuals which, cumulatively and gradually, shift the internal processes and knowledge that structure social movements (Tarrow, 2008; Tilly, 2006). Protesters often improvise within certain bounds of learned familiarity to make claims that are easily recognizable by the audience, but catch the target off-guard (McAdam et al., 1996; Tilly, 2006, 2008; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015).

Degrees of transferability can be seen in the negotiations that occur between people to reach a consensus, as well as the dialectic interactions between people as claimants and their targets that influence the form the contentious repertoire takes and the trajectory along which it travels. These negotiations and interactions bring into play a set of processes associated with meaning-making, boundary-making, framing, and counter-framing that are fundamental to mobilizing people to participate in contentious actions, and that influence the particular performances adopted.

Meaning Making and Social Semiotics

Processes of meaning making, that is signification and interpretation, are a central element of all social interactions including those of social movements. For meanings to be shared, message senders are reliant on audiences familiar with

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culturally and individually specific lexicons, or vocabularies, in order to interpret the intended message (Barthes, 1977; Hodge and Kress, 1988). Signification occurs in many ways, including but not limited to the attribution of meaning to sounds, signs, symbols, and objects. Rather than being fixed into unchanging "codes," signifiers are resources that people use and adapt to make meaning (Hodge and Kress, 1988). The meaning potential of semiotic resources can be vast but is constrained through use in a particular community and in response to certain social requirements of that community (Aielo, 2006: 91). Once a set of semiotic resources is recognized by a community as having organizing principles for meaning making, they can be considered a "semiotic mode" or a complete language system (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Each language system provides a unique set of tools and opportunities for actors to make meaning. This idea is referred to as a "modal affordance." In the context of social movements, each contentious performance type – march, occupation, picket line – will have its own modal affordances that are also shaped by material and social histories.

In the context of contentious repertoires, an "iconography of protest," "symbolic objects," and "cultural artifacts" are recognized by scholars (Abram and Gardner, 2023; Gaufman, 2021; Johnston, 2018). Movement-specific signs, symbols, and objects are developed to convey movement messages. These can take a literal form, metaphoric form, or the form of satire or parody whereby certain traits or events are exaggerated in such a way that new meanings can be inferred. By cross-referencing symbols and the meanings they hold in different social worlds, message senders are able to highlight their stance on political conflicts and draw a boundary between "us" and "them" (Doerr and Teune, 2012). Signs, symbols, and objects can echo a collective action repertoire and have equal importance as action itself (Tarrow, 2013).

Symbolic Objects

Protesters rarely act without objects that hold symbolic meanings and communicate movement aims (Abrams and Gardner, 2023), nor do they choose sites for staging their protests at random. Focusing on materiality, Lofland (1996: 130) suggests symbolic objects are material artifacts that hold the potential to physically express a message to observers. They can be artifacts, places or persons. Johnston (2018) considered a larger category of cultural artifacts, which he defines as objects produced either individually or collectively, such as music, art, and literature that stand alone in their materiality and are available to others after the initial (cultural) behavior that produced them. This definition reinforces the notion that meaning continues to exist beyond human action and its materiality. Both of these conceptual approaches are relevant to this study of protest walls.

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In a Tillian vein, some artifacts are universally recognized as symbols of protest such as the placard stating aims or grievances, the fist raised in solidarity against oppression or capitalism. Other material things such as the yellow umbrella in Hong Kong or the yellow vest in Paris are only signifiers of a cause in specific sociopolitical contexts. Cultural artifacts shape actions and imply a prescribed range of appropriate responses (Johnston, 2018). Some objects act as a substitute for the message or claim. For example, the blank sheets of A4 paper held by protesters in China during the COVID-19 pandemic to express their silent resistance against perceived censorship and government control are a good example of this kind of metonym. Other artifacts require the input and interactions of other social actors to fully express claims. For example, the song "Glory to Hong Kong" truly became an anthem of unity for Hong Kongers during the 2019 protests when groups of strangers came together in shopping malls to collaboratively create the piece with their voices and instruments (Li and Whitworth, 2022). Some artifacts can be both metonymic and identifiable as requiring the active complicity of social actors (Johnston, 2018). We argue that people's protest walls are one such example.

Place can be semiotically important in contention, but the intersection between "place" and "object" is not always clear. When symbolic objects are created in a particular *space*, the space is given new social meaning transforming it into a *place*. We draw on Lefebvre's argument (1991) that "place" is socially constructed not only through architectural design and material features but also through the performative acts that occur there. Places can be exclusionary as certain practices or cohorts may not be welcome in them. An individual's race, class, gender, and socioeconomic background shape their experience of place. These different relational experiences of space ultimately contest the meanings of a place.

Significant for this research is the power of symbolic objects to "store" complex meaning. This power comes from the symbol's "presumed ability to identify fact with value" (Geertz, 1957: 422). In the context of contentious politics, movement actors can summarize what is "known" about the world alongside claims of how the world ought to be, all in a neat signifier that can be easily understood and transported across contexts but also transcend time. Symbolic objects create tangible points of visibility for movements that endure beyond the people and context that produced them. The protest walls, we argue, are symbolic objects in the sense that once created, they exist as sites of dissent even without the continuing complicity of social actors.

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Framing and Counter-framing

Every contentious performance is itself a form of communication. At their core, movements are an expression of one group's claims against another. To be successful, movements must "transform perceptions of reality, enhance the egos of protesters, attain a degree of legitimacy, prescribe and sell courses of action, mobilize the disaffected and sustain the movement over time" (Stewart et al., 2007: 19–20). They can meet these requirements through coercion, bargaining, and persuasion. Persuasion relies on verbal and nonverbal cues (or frames) to shift the perceptions, thoughts, and actions of audiences (Benford and Snow, 2000; Stewart et al., 2007). To do this, these cues often frame people or events in a particular light. In other words, framing denotes a process whereby actors intentionally construct and curate presentations of reality in ways that will trigger an emotional response in their audiences, prompting them to take action (Benford and Snow, 2000: 614). At the same time, framing can be paired with or offset by counter-framing, where claimants or the target use the same tools of communication to present a different reality. Framing and counter-framing create narratives that help people give meaning to their experiences. It can also produce "new" collectivities, creating or redefining meanings of action and enhancing the resonance and legitimacy of political actions (Cheng and Yuen, 2019; Gahan and Pekarek, 2013).

Framing (and counter-framing) often utilizes biases and stereotypes that guide individuals to understand and reflect on social events in particular ways and create boundaries between "us" and "them" (Goffman, 1974; Silver, 1997). These frames connect ideas within sources including texts, images, or audiovisual presentation that include a particular interpretation or judgment, making a particular worldview or stereotype more salient (Hardin et al., 2002). The way in which an issue is framed can change the impression and opinions of audiences without altering the actual facts (Bryant et al., 2013) as it draws out a point of view more clearly. In the social movement context, framing occurs through textual and visual processes that link claimants, the object of claims, and a "public" or audience (Tarrow, 2008).

Collective action frames have two important features. The first is an action-oriented function that defines a shared understanding of the problem in question and the source of the problem (diagnostic framing), the solution to the problem and possible future realities (prognostic framing), and who must take action (motivational framing). Collective action frames often contain a moral imperative that recipients feel obligated to act upon (Jasper, 1997, 1998; Eyerman, 2005). The second is the discursive processes that enable the action-oriented functions and in turn reproduce the collective action frames (Almeida, 2019;

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Benford and Snow, 2000). The different frames and counter-frames seen in each localized contentious repertoire help us better understand the reasons and emotions behind collective identities and behaviors.

To be specific, this study extends the discussion of protest walls beyond only as a major dialogical site to thousands of citizens or to enhance solidarity and support mobilization. We argue that coauthoring the space through Lennon Wall (Valjakka, 2020) should also consider the evolution and contention that associated with such a coauthoring process. The coauthoring process involves the power dynamics between different actors including protesters, protest sympathizers, the state, and government supporters. In other words, the social actors cocreated a vibrant, agentic, and living contentious repertoire during the movement. Such a repertoire also goes beyond space (as can be seen from the conflicts on the Lennon Wall sites overseas) and over time (as can be seen from the connection with other movements in different periods of time).

Arguments

In the empirical sections, we argue that communication on and through walls has become a "modular" contentious performance (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015), similar to a march, an occupation, or a strike, that is internationally understood as a method of protest. This performance can be adapted into local contentious repertoires anywhere (Tarrow, 2008; Tilly, 2006, 2008). We refer to this modular performance as a "protest wall." The walls become places where discourse between protesters and their targets is not only projected but also reinforced in space. While imitation of the performances of others is a factor in the adoption of a performance across geographic settings, actors, targets, and issues, we noted the influence of access to technologies as well as the structure of political systems on the way a particular protest wall was created (Wada, 2012). We understand each of these performances as arising from social interaction, which in its way involves a measure of creative engagement. Therefore, we adopt Valjakka's (2020) concept of "socially engaged creativity" and apply her definition to the protest wall:

> *the spontaneous, cumulative and voluntary placement of political opinions on walls in prominent public places by many individuals during a time of contention. The cumulative effect of these actions by individuals allows them and others to recognise a co-authorship of spatial and political narratives that creates the opportunities to reclaim space from the state or movement opponents to express their message.*

On protest walls, these creative practices take the protest walls beyond the practical actions of writing, highlighting the ways in which the role of sharing,

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learning, and enhancing awareness of sociopolitical and cultural issues by citizens is exemplified, ultimately fulling participatory citizenship in the public space and leading to social transformation.

The features that must be present for the series of actions to constitute a "protest wall" rather than, say, clusters of graffiti containing social commentary, are divided into four main categories: *form*, *action*, *discourse*, and *recognition*. *Form* refers to elements of the physical manifestation of the wall, who brings it into being and how. *Action* refers to activities that shift the locus of control over discursive power in the physical (and sometimes and digital) spaces associated with the walls. These activities can be divided into two distinct groups. First, protester-led place-making activities such as posting or painting on walls in public spaces, the establishment of memorials for fallen heroes of the movement, and makeshift movement headquarters or neighborhoods with canteens, places to sleep, and learning hubs. Second, place-breaking activities led by the state or movement opponents that seek to censor the discourse on the walls by removing it, painting over it and or by dispersing people gathered around the walls. *Discourse* refers to the communications between claimants and their targets that takes place on the walls or online in connection to the walls. Finally, implied in the collective nature of the elements that constitute form and action is the notion of recognition. The act of placing one's opinion in these spaces is recognized by movement participants, targets, and the public alike as being a political statement associated with the contentious events of the day. This category of recognition goes beyond the recognition of the contribution of individuals. The individual messages become a collective statement of protest and recognition enables the four categories of form, action discourse, and recognition to be brought together to create the protest wall.

To build this argument through the Element, each section deals with one feature of walls – form, action, discourse, and recognition. Section 2, "Walls of Dissent," is concerned with the form that protest walls have taken across different times and places. The contentious context in which each wall emerged, the materials used to construct the protest walls, and the discourses are mapped to highlight recurring elements of people's power and resistance. Drawing together the features common to all examples explored and noting where space for localized variation exists. Section 3, "Walls as Battlegrounds," focuses on action cycles of place-making and place-breaking associated with Hong Kong's Lennon Walls in 2019. The struggle for control over spatial and discursive power both online and offline at Hong Kong's Lennon Wall sites in 2019 serves as a case study to showcase that the contentious repertoire surrounding the wall could be manifested in space such as destroying and rebuilding the

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wall. Section 4, "Walls as a System of Meaning," compares the content of messages and images on walls that emerged in 2019 across contentious episodes in Hong Kong, Iraq, and Lebanon. We explore how persuasive functions of movements have been distributed across text and image. Echoing Abrams and Gardner's (2023) notion of "symbolic objects in contentious politics" and Johnston's (2018) cultures of protest artifacts, we identify symbols across the three places that hold similar meanings and those with specific meanings to the local society. The existence of symbols that are easily recognizable and display regularities in use across events and contexts suggests the emergence of a semiotic system. We highlight the importance of understanding the relationships between the components of an image, its producers, and the audience. Section 5, "Walls as International Front," takes the emergence of Lennon Walls in Taiwan during and after Hong Kong's protest in 2019 as a case study. In this section we engage with the transferability of protest walls between similar cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical contexts. We show that the Lennon Walls in Taiwan were simultaneously an extension of the walls in Hong Kong and a separate contentious performance with distinct claims. This shows *how* differences in political context influence the localization of contentious performances.

Just as when the constituent features of a contentious repertoire are read together, they form a new contentious performance – the protest wall, the arguments in each section of the Element combine to show that the set of discursive and spatial practices associated with protest walls constitutes a modular contentious performance (Tilly, 2006, 2008; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Wada, 2012). These same discursive and spatial practices can also be understood as a language system with socioculturally shaped resources for meaning making that is shareable and transferable to wider audiences. Finally, bringing together our analysis of protest walls through each of the sections allows us to understand protest walls as symbolic objects of dissent, with meanings that can transcend space, time, actors, targets, and issues (Wada, 2012). In this sense, protest walls can exist beyond the individuals that created them and take on identities of their own.

Methodological Approach and Data Collection

Having set out the argument to be made in this Element, we turn now to the research method and the data that support the argument. Taking a case study approach, four walls from three contemporaneous (2019) contentious episodes were selected – the Lennon Walls from Hong Kong's 2019 Anti ELAB movement, and their extension into Taiwan; the Walls of Thawra in Lebanon from late October and early November 2019; and the Tishreen Walls that evolved in the area of Al Tahrir Square in Baghdad during the Iraq's 2019 Tishreen

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Movement up until March 2020, when the worldwide lockdown started. Each of these walls and movements they emerged in are explored in further detail in the following section ("Walls of Dissent").

In Hong Kong and Taiwan, the data was collected from the wall locations in forms that allowed us to reconstruct the specific wall as it appeared on that day. There were multiple wall locations in Hong Kong and Taiwan. We took photos of each site in a grid pattern to capture the posted content systematically. In total, we took 2,500 photographs across every district of Hong Kong between June 2019 and April 2020 and 500 photographs across 3 locations in Taiwan during the same period. Each photograph contained multiple postings, including 10,000 post-it notes (mostly short and only containing text) and 2,076 images from Hong Kong's walls and another 1,200 post-it notes and 360 images from Taiwan's Lennon Walls.

We relied on photographic archives of the text and images people placed on the Tishreen Walls and the Walls of Thawra in Iraq and Lebanon, respectively. For the Iraqi case, a dedicated website, Baghdad Tahrir Art,[1] preserves the murals and messages against a map of downtown Baghdad pinpointing seven main locations for the walls. Most images have an explanatory blurb that interprets the images and messages for audiences not familiar with the context-specific language of signs and symbols. We coded 246 communications on the walls in Iraq (80 messages containing text only and 166 containing images). An archive of Lebanon's Walls of Thawra has been created on Instagram through coordinated and centralized efforts to crowd source photographs of the walls. Photographs were posted on Instagram in real-time and in many instances tagged the location where the photograph was taken. We selected one of the major Instagram accounts on protest walls: wallsofthawra,[2] from the archival pages on "Lebanon Protests – Oct. 2019: Art" at American University of Beirut.[3] We coded 389 communications on the walls in Lebanon (238 messages containing text only and 151 containing images).

This study also draws on communication *associated with* the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan that occurred online as we anticipated the claims made and frames used might differ to those that appeared on the walls themselves. Digital platforms such as Telegram[4] and LIHKG[5] played an important

[1] See: https://baghdadtahrirart.net/. [2] (www.instagram.com/wallsofthawra/).

[3] See: https://aub.edu.lb.libguides.com/c.php?g=981597&p=7106321&fbclid=IwAR3TCoSTCDGN9h2GjtDIFgvyQqWO9MgEfecdwMUSE05WTSVKXjc4eINP7Ew.

[4] Telegram is a not-for-profit, encrypted, cloud-based messaging app. It distinguishes itself from other platforms such as Facebook and Google by emphasizing its commitment to privacy and is therefore popular among protesters to share information and organize activities (Li and Whitworth, 2024).

[5] LIHKG was launched in Hong Kong in November 2016. It is a Reddit-like, multicategory discussion forum that allows people registered with an institutional or ISP email (not Gmail or Hotmail) to sign up and anonymously post, upload, vote, and chat (Li and Whitworth, 2024).

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connective role in organizing the mobilization of people to produce and disseminate messages on walls across the city or tear down the walls in opposition. During the movement there were popular Telegram channels used by movement sympathizers and government supporters, respectively, to mobilize actions around the Lennon Walls. We collected 1,042 posts from the Clean Up group (Youcangotojail) and 1,629 posts from the Rebuild group (Lennonovazed).

Regarding research ethics, the materials posted on physical walls as well as the photographic archives do not contain identifying details of individuals and are open to the public. The Telegram channels we collected data from are also open to the public. In accordance with National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research by Australian Research Council,[6] we did not collect data from private, member-only Telegram Channels. The posts made in these public Telegram channels did sometimes contain identifying details of individuals. In instances where an individual might be identified through their user ID or photograph, we have anonymized these posts.

Data Analysis

To tease out the meanings of the messages posted on the walls and in Telegram channels, text and images were coded and analyzed separately. For the text-based data, with the help of our Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking research assistants, the message on each post was translated and manually transcribed into an Excel file. Thematic text analysis was used to derive inferences for further analysis (Aslanidis, 2018). The text was coded based on themes including context, location, language used, subject, demand, sentiment, relationship between the claimant and object, and counter-framing work among claimants. Given the role emotion plays in persuasion and mobilization, key events within the movement were also coded to see whether these events were reflected in the data and whether they were associated with specific sentiments in different places.

For the images, given the diversity and complexity of the images recorded in the photographs (e.g., printed posters, memes, cartoons, and hand-drawn artwork), we drew on Barthes's (1977) method of "reading images" to understand the "intended meanings" of images – their symbols, ideologies, placement, the interplay between images and words, and how these are perceived by creators and their viewers (Doerr et al., 2013; Philipps, 2012). The Barthian notion of a "lexicon" is also important as it positions the signs, symbols, and practices found at Wall sites as mutually understood language that can evolve over time or

[6] See: www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/publications/National-Statement-Ethical-Conduct-Human-Research-2023.pdf.

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develop localized dialects. This aligns well with a semiotic analysis of the protest walls that can help us understand the connection between global diffusion and local adaptation of contentious performances.

We adopted Lieblich et al.'s (1998) interpretative model and created researcher-defined categories, including language use, purpose, target, sentiment, issue of concern, and frequency of certain slogans, and so on, to understand the meanings of the contents. Most posts were anonymous and undated, thus it was impossible to attribute authorship and time of production to much of the data (Veg, 2016). We examined the repertoire of sociopolitical meanings and the context in which text/images appeared as this can change the meanings that audiences attribute to them.

We were particularly interested in how contention was framed and who or what was the target (Tarrow, 2008: 235). To understand the interplay between two elements of protest walls – action and discourse – we identified key figures and the actions portrayed, as well as the sentiments evoked in the discourse. To do this, we used four broad categories to draw meaning from the images: language use, image producer and production method, image subject and sentiment, and image target audience and purpose. The possible purposes of the images were coded for mobilization, criticism, information sharing, supportive remarks, and hate speech.

2 Walls of Dissent

Communication through walls in public spaces did not originate in Hong Kong; it is one of the oldest means of public communication for many cultures of the world. Using walls to communicate during contentious episodes is also not unique to a single place or time. This section documents protest walls that have emerged in the last fifty years, from Beijing's 1978 Democracy Wall of Beijing to Baghdad's Walls of Thawra in 2019. The contentious context in which the walls emerged, the location of the walls, materials used to build the walls, and the discourse and spatial practices associated with the walls are presented. In this section, similarities are traced through each example to highlight consistent patterns in the features of protest walls across space and time and show how these consistencies in form and practices meet Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) definition of a modular performance, as well as Wada's (2012) idea of the transferability of contentious performances across time, space, targets, actors, and issues. The differences observed between the examples demonstrate areas of localized variation, supporting the argument that protest walls use established vocabularies, so that creators' intended meanings can be understood by the viewers (Barthes, 1977). This journey through examples of walls in different

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sociopolitical contexts provides a backdrop against which case studies can be used to explore action-related features of protest walls.

1978: Democracy Wall, Democracy Movement, Beijing, China

Between November 1978 and December 1979, people stuck "big character posters" (handwritten messages in ink on poster paper usually measuring 3 feet by 8 feet) on a brick wall in Xidan Street, Xicheng District of Beijing (Sheng, 1990). This became known as the Democracy Wall. The practice spread to Wangfu Jing Street, Tiananmen Square, and other major cities of China.

When talking about the physical form of Beijing's Democracy Wall, it is important to pause on big character posters for a moment. While big character posters were the primary means of self-expression on the Democracy Wall, they should not be conflated with "being" the wall. "Big character posters" are a politico-cultural phenomenon in and of themselves that date back to before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The order and layout of content on the poster has an established format and style. In terms of authorship, originally used by the people to express grievances, over time the distinctive style has also been co-opted by the state to disseminate propaganda. Thus, it is not the big character posters themselves (and the people who produced them) that made the Democracy Wall, it was the combination of mass mobilization, contentious context, and the concentrated placement of these posters in a geographic location mutually recognized as being significant.

The origins of the Democracy Wall lay in events that occurred three years earlier, and from a Barthian perspective, these events are significant. Premier Zhou Enlai, who had been viewed by the people as a symbol of stability during decades of sociopolitical upheaval, died on January 8, 1976. A few months later at Qingming Festival (a festival when Chinese families visit the tombs of their ancestors to clean the gravesites and make ritual offerings to their ancestors), Beijing residents assembled in Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou's death and express their dissatisfaction with the Gang of Four (a political group of four Chinese Communist Party officials, including Qing Jiang, Mao Zedong's last wife, and Chunqiao Zhang, Wenyuan Yao, and Hongwen Wang) and anger toward the destructive events of the Cultural Revolution. Rituals became an important contentious performance. During this memorial, people wrote poems and placed big character posters around the square. On September 9, 1976, Chairman Mao Zedong died, and soon after Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng arrested the Gang of Four. The death or removal of these prominent political and ideological leaders allowed space for different views to be tested and expressed as power shifted. Hua Guofeng, through his editorial "The Two Whatevers,"

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declared that the new leadership would follow Mao's ideologies and policies to the letter. In response, Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping wrote and published two essays in succession titled "The 'Two Whatever' Policy Does Not Accord with Marxism"[7] and "Pragmatism Is the Only Standard in Measuring Truth" (Chang, 1996). This second piece sparked a national discussion and movement in China known as the Discussion on Criteria of Truth.

On October 1, 1978, the words "to liberate thought, to provide the best service to the people are the duties of CCP members," a theme for the CCP Party, was posted on a long brick wall in Xidan Street, Xicheng District of Beijing. On November 23, 1978, Lü Pu posted his writings on the wall. His critique of Mao Zedong suggested the real reasons behind the April 5 Movement were the widespread poverty, the faltering economy, and rigid thought control. This poster was called the "Fire Lighter of Democracy Wall." Two days later, the Democracy Assembly Group was formed, and on November 27, 1978, the group gathered at Xidan Democracy Wall and led a public march to Tiananmen Square. This overview of the contentious context identifies the key figures and their actions, the events and a sense of the sentiments expressed.

Despite differences in philosophical and political orientations, the various groups formed a loose coalition around the demand for democracy. A prominent member of the movement Wei Jingsheng, dubbed democracy "The Fifth Modernization"[8] in reference to the CCP's policy statement of "The Four Modernizations." The Four Modernizations articulated the aspiration to transform China into an industrialized society by 2000 through the modernization of industry, defense, agriculture, and science and technology. The demand for a Fifth Modernization did not imply resistance to the CCP's policies, but instead suggested that the modernization program was inadequate because without democracy, it would not be possible to achieve the other targeted modernizations.

Representing the people's voice, the Democracy Walls were a place where people could express their grievances and opinions of those in power both anonymously and with self-identification. The discourse that appeared on the Democracy wall could be divided into three themes. The first theme included those messages criticizing Mao and other leaders, especially the "whateverist" faction led by Wang Dongxing. In these messages, people expressed anger at the sociopolitical persecutions that occurred during the Cultural Revolution and called for reinstatement and rehabilitation. As exiled figures were allowed to return, this theme in the discourse began to taper off. The second theme encompassed messages airing personal grievances and complaints in the hope

[7] See: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1977/124.htm.
[8] See http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/wei_jingsheng_fifth_modernization.pdf.

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the government officials might read them and take action. Third were demands for human rights (Goldman, 2005).

As mentioned, in the discourse on the posters, the claimants and their targets were generally the people and those perceived to represent the state. The act of penning a big character poster and placing it on the wall was a contentious performance itself. It served as a way for individuals to flout norms of behavior in public spaces and reassert themselves in relation to governance by the state. As time passed, the struggle between the people and the state at Democracy wall sites became more intense as arrests occurred and the personal cost of posting on the wall increased. On July 1, 1979, the National People's Congress passed the Criminal Law (Jones, 1980). The law criminalized "counter-revolutionary acts" including putting up big-character posters.[9] If caught, an individual could be sentenced to gaol, criminal detention or be deprived of political rights for up to three years. The following year, the National People's Congress repealed certain provisions from the Constitution guaranteeing the right to put up big character posters and "Great Freedoms."

1987–1993: First Intifada, West Bank, Palestine

The First Intifada, also known as the First Palestinian Intifada or the Stone Intifada, was a sustained series of protests carried out by Palestinians against Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Abu-Amr, 1988; Said, 1989). The term "Intifada" has several meanings. Literally, it means "shaking something off," denoting the desire to physically shake off the occupiers at the heart of the uprising. It can, however, be used in a more figurative sense, implying a form of awakening (Nachmani, 2001).

The intifada began on December 9, 1987, in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, after an Israeli truck driver collided with a civilian car, killing four Palestinian passengers. Within weeks, the Palestinians established local grassroots resistance organizations guided by a Unified National Leadership capable of sustaining – mass demonstrations, worker strikes, boycotts of the mechanisms of governance, violent attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers, and the persecution of collaborators (Degani, 2016). On April 26, 1990, thousands of Palestinians stormed the Israeli Defense Forces compound at Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Violence increased over the coming months, resulting in more Palestinian deaths (Gerner, 1991).

Along with demonstrations and boycotts, graffiti and slogans were painted on the walls and barricades within the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Merari et al., 1989), as well as in villages and refugee camps. These writings contained political

[9] See: www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/13/content_1384075.htm.

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demands for immediate action such as the release of detainees, the cessation of deportation policies, and resignation of appointed municipal councils. Long-term or strategic political goals including self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state were also articulated (Abu-Amr, 1988). Symbolism played an important role in conveying the psyche of the uprising and raising people's morale. Images of people, objects, and events, whether rooted in past history, or part of the present, or representing future hopes, were elevated and transformed into highly charged symbols, rituals, or myths (Nachmani, 2001).

The messages were predominately in Palestinian Arabic and contained references to local events (Toenjes, 2015). There was, however, occasional use of English to target international delegations. These messages included the language of the cosmopolitan and focused on transnational ideals of peace, hope, and justice. In this context, the walls became a "global canvas" to communicate experiences of occupation to transnational audiences. Issues were often framed in a local context through the use of the colors of the Palestinian national flag, and through communications related to nationalist political parties such as Fatah and Hamas. The national framing acted as an organizing tool and source of information for Palestinians, and it was read as a threat and act of insubordination by the Israeli occupying forces who tried to cover up the graffiti as quickly as it appeared (Peteet, 1996).

In 2002, the Israeli government began construction of an 8-meter-high and a 708-kilometer "Separation Wall" to surround and cut through much of the West Bank of Palestine. This wall added another dimension to the role of graffiti in the Palestinian struggle and offered a massive canvas where Palestinians developed a more substantive level of graffiti and murals. It became the primary site of political expression, artistic creation, and resistance. Compared to the framing tasks and language use in the graffiti during the first Palestinian intifada (1986–1993), the graffiti on the Separation Wall contained more English and international symbols of freedom and liberation. Individuals and symbols like Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, and even the Statue of Liberty were featured. English language messages as well as the deliberate choice of writing messages on the Separation Wall rather than other city walls or buildings created opportunities for the images and their messages to circulate transnationally and to link up with transnational activist networks that could apply pressure on their own governments and the Israeli government from the outside.

1989: Lennon Wall, Velvet Revolution, Prague, Czech Republic

On November 17, 1939, protests were held against the Nazi storming of the Prague University. During these protests 1,200 students were arrested and 9 lost

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their lives. To mark fifty years since this event, in 1989, students organized a peaceful demonstration. This too was violently dispersed by riot police that angered many and triggered a wave of anti-communist protests. A week later the leadership of the Communist Party resigned, paving the way for a transition of power.

The Lennon Wall, which became a focal site of these protests, had emerged almost a decade earlier in 1980, when John Lennon of the Beatles was killed. At the time, Czechoslovakia was a communist country, where freedom of speech, political association, and demonstration were limited and Western images, symbols, and pop culture were banned (Willams, 1997). Being in possession of such material, let alone replicating it in graffiti in public space, could result in a prison sentence for what authorities labelled "subversive activities against the state" (Evanson, 1986). Dissidents created music clubs and published home-made periodicals. To mark John Lennon's death, an image of his face and pacifist lyrics from the Beatles was painted on Praha 1, next to the French Embassy in Prague and a small group of dissidents gathered together. This became a ritual whereby every year, on the anniversary of Lennon's death, dissidents came together at the wall and began to express their demands or dissatisfaction with the government (Veg, 2016). By 1984, the size of the group had grown substantially and claims included the introduction of a substitute civil service, the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Czechoslovakia, the release of political prisoners, and the removal of nuclear weapons from Czechoslovak territory (Blažek et al., 2020).

The ritualized contentious repertoire also manifested in the Communist police regularly painted over the wall in green paint, but images, poems, and the hopes of protesters continued to appear on the wall (Bren, 2008; Šmidrkal, 2016). This cycle of expression followed by censorship became a small battle between the Czech people and the Communist police who cleaned the wall. The authorities' censorship on the protest wall shows the power imbalance between claimants and their targets, and the contention between state control, social order, and freedom of speech.

With the passage of time since independence, the Lennon Wall no longer serves the same purpose with which it was first established. Discussions over whether and how the wall should be preserved or permitted to evolve have occupied the public and authorities. In 2019, the Prague authorities announced new regulations to prohibit spray painting by the public and announced that Prague's Lennon Wall would be monitored by TV cameras and converted into an open-air gallery with graffiti strictly regulated (Tait, 2019).

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2011: Street of the Eyes of Freedom, Egyptian Revolution, Cairo, Egypt

In November 2011, people used colored paint and spray paint to create murals on the concrete and brick walls of the American University of Cairo and other buildings along Mohamed Mahmoud Street near Tahrir square. The materials, which were diverse, included artworks combined ancient Pharaonic and Islamic artistic traditions as well as contemporary ones to engage in political and social commentary. Later during the same protests, the state placed concrete blocks on the streets surrounding the Interior Ministry and the Egyptian Parliament creating a partition between the state and protesters. In response, protesters engaged in a "No Wall" movement (Lennon, 2014), which urged artists and people to make the wall "invisible" by painting images of scenery and open spaces (Mohamed and Mohamed, 2022). Murals depicting state violence were painted alongside images of ocean vistas, family life, and the streets that lay behind the wall. Many of the images on the partition showed bright and positive imagined futures.

The Street of the Eyes of Freedom (the Street) emerged amid the Egyptian revolution of 2011, which saw the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak after thirty years in office. The revolution began in response to perceived increases in police brutality and the lack of political freedoms. A series of marches and occupations were staged across the country on January 25, 2011. This date coincided with "National Police Day" and was intentionally chosen as a statement against police. These contentious performances, as one can understand these marches and occupations, evolved into the Egyptian Revolution which saw violent clashes between security forces and protesters during which 846 people died. After almost three weeks of protest, on February 11, 2011, Mubarak resigned as president handing leadership to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Many Egyptians were fearful that the SCAF would want to retain their hold on power (Abaza, 2013). Over the next eighteen months protests continued and were often violently dispersed.

The Street was a place where people could express their frustrations with and communicate their demands. Claims focused on legal and political issues and demanded an end to police brutality, state of emergency laws, corruption and most importantly the end of Hosni Mubarak's presidency. Other grievances included increased cost of living due to inflation, high unemployment, and low wages. Discourse on the walls can be grouped along four topic areas. First, popular slogans of the revolution included demands for the handover of power to civilians and an end to military rule. Second, criticism of key figures in the regime such as Lieutenant Mahmoud

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Shinawi, Field Marshal Tantawi, and President Hosni Mubarak was often delivered through caricatured depictions. Over time, Qur'anic verses also appeared on the walls in response to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. The verses denounced sins such as pride, power-seeking, and hypocrisy. Third, condemnation of state violence was communicated through illustrations of the blue bra scandal[10] and people wearing eye-patches.[11] Some images represented clashes with Copts in front of the TV building in Maspero in October 2011, the Maspero Massacre. Finally, images celebrating revolutionary figures such as Sambo, Mina Danial, and Sheikh Emad Effat also appeared.

In addition to the act of painting of the walls, collective activities that reclaimed "public" space from the state became commonplace. Parts of Mohamed Mahmoud Street were repurposed and given new meaning as a memorial site to ritually remember protesters killed during and following the 2011 Egyptian Revolution (Abaza, 2013). Several murals depicted victims of the state-led violence and mothers in mourning (Abaza, 2013). These murals became memorial spaces as well as "revolutionary art" (Baker, 2015; Winegar, 2016) – where the public could participate in the ritualized performances of laying flowers and lighting candles to pay their respect to the dead.

A cycle of painting and whitewashing became embedded within the contentious repertoire of actions between the people (claimants) and the state (target). During 2011 and 2012, the provincial government of Cairo painted over the murals several times to erase the insults against the SCAF (Abaza, 2013). Protesters interpreted this as an attempt to erase the events of the revolution from history and from the site. Protesters reacted with anger and returned in large numbers to paint the walls again. Newer murals focused their criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood and new government of the time lead by President Mohamed Morsi, with slogans such as "Go on erasing, you cowardly regime" and "Erase and I will draw again."

In the years since the events of the Revolution, the meaning of the Street and its surrounding space has evolved and been contested. In 2013, the military tried to erect a statue at the site to commemorate those who died there. This was ridiculed as the military's memorial to "its own massacre." Like in the Czech Republic there has been debate among artists and the people about whether the

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[10] The incident refers to Egyptian soldiers were filmed and photographed brutally beating a female protester in Tahrir Square, dragging her by her abaya to reveal her torso and her blue bra (Hafez, 2019).

[11] As many protesters were shot in the eye during these protests, the eye patch became a symbol of resistance to state violence. The activists marched to the Kasr el Nil bridge, wearing eye patches in solidarity with the injured protesters (Hamdy, 2016).

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graffiti should be preserved to reflect a moment in time – the revolution of 2011 – or allowed to evolve and reflect contemporary events as they unfold.

2014: Lennon Wall, Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong

On September 29, 2014, a small group of individuals began handing out post notes and pens to passersby in an attempt to collect and share citizens' opinions. The first post was reportedly, "Why Are We Here?" Pens, pads of post-it notes and sticky tape were then left by the wall to invite more people to coauthor in space by sharing their thoughts and responding to each other. Post-it notes and messages, and the hopes and dreams they carried soon covered the whole of the polished concrete wall leading into the Central Government Office in Admiralty. It was first referred to as the "Memo Wall," and later a yellow banner was hung above the post-it notes announcing the site as the "Lennon Wall" in reference to the wall in Prague (Valjakka, 2020; Veg, 2016). The wall became an important site of movement communication and came to symbolize the people's peaceful resistance against the government (Patsiaouras et al., 2018; Valjakka, 2020). Installations and sculptures such as "Umbrella Man," a 3-metre statue created out of wood blocks, with an arm outstretched holding an umbrella were created in the thoroughfares below the Lennon Wall and become icons of the movement.

The contentious episode in which the wall arose centered around proposed changes to Hong Kong's equivalent of a constitution, the Basic Law 1990. Articles 45 states "the ultimate aim is the selection of the chief executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures." In August 2014, the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress issued a decision to reform the Hong Kong electoral system. The decision was seen as restrictive and in contradiction with the Basic Law as it would establish a system whereby the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing could prescreen candidates for Hong Kong's chief executive position. On September 22, 2014, students led a strike against the decision. A week later, the Occupy Central with Love and Peace initiative began. For seventy-seven days, people occupied prominent areas of downtown Hong Kong including Mong Kok, Admiralty, and Causeway Bay in peaceful protest. Police cleared the three sites on November 25 and December 11 and 14, respectively. The government did not give any concessions to protesters.

The main demand of the movement, known as the Umbrella Movement because participants used umbrellas to protect themselves from police pepper spray, was the genuine implementation of "universal suffrage" mentioned in Article 45 of the Basic Law. Protesters argued the decision made by the National

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People's Congress was a betrayal of the principle of "one person, one vote." Some also called for the then chief executive Chun-ying Leung to step down. Themes in the discourse that appeared on the Lennon Wall included: the call for universal suffrage, the importance of maintaining democratic structures in Hong Kong, and the need for all citizens of Hong Kong to take a position on the issues.

While the Occupation continued, activities that gave new meaning to the space underneath the wall outside the Central Government Office were organized and became ritualized practice. People gathered and sang anthems of the occupation including an improvised Cantonese version of "Do you Hear the People Sing?" from the musical Les Misérables about the French Revolution, "Under the Vast Sky," "Lift Your Umbrella," and John Lennon's song "Imagine" (Rühlig, 2016). Groups of people who were against the movement attacked protesters on October 3, tearing down their tents and barricades in Mong Kok and Causeway Bay.

In December of 2014, after the dispersal of the Occupation, the Lennon Wall was taken down by the police. In the days and months following the removal of the wall, a series of actions to rebuild it, including posters printed with "It is just the beginning," "We will be back," and "Never forget" on the wall, and counter-actions to remove them occurred between protesters (claimants) and police (target). The same month, a new tool in the peoples' repertoire of contentious performances emerged. A Facebook page, "Hong Kong Lennon Wall Redux" was created as the "ultimate rebuild" – something the police couldn't easily erase. The page documented most activities at the Lennon Wall site over the following months in real time. It proclaimed, "The HK Lennon Wall is back because the government can remove our post-it notes but not our desire for democracy." This page can be seen as an early prototype of the digital archives that have since been created to preserve the protest walls of contentious episodes across the world.

2019: Lennon Wall, Anti-ELAB Movement, Hong Kong

The Lennon walls reemerged in response to the government's proposed Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019. At the time, under the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance Hong Kong did not have extradition agreements with China, Taiwan, and Macau. In response to an active homicide case, the Hong Kong government proposed an amendment to the Ordinance so that arrangements for mutual legal assistance could be made with any jurisdiction outside Hong Kong. The bill was seen as mechanism that would erode political freedoms and the rule of law in Hong Kong as it would permit China to arrest not only those alleged to have committed

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crimes outlined in the Criminal Code but also political dissidents. There were fears that those extradited to China would not get a fair trial.

On March 15, 2019, protests commenced with a sit-in at the Legislative Council complex. Three weeks later, thousands of people gathered outside the Legislative Council complex in an effort to stall the bill's second reading speech. On June 15, 2019, the government suspended the bill. The following day, 2 million people marched from the Victoria Park to Legislative Council Complex, demanding the withdrawal of the bill and to express anger at Hong Kong police's perceived excessive use of force and collaboration with triad members at an incident in Yuen Long metro station days earlier. Chief executive, Carrie Lam formally withdrew the bill on September 4, 2019, but would not yield to other demands from protesters. Protests continued and were fueled by perceptions that state violence was escalating and increasingly excessive. Several notable events included July 21 Yuen Long attack, a general strike on August 5, August 31 Prince Edward station attack, the passage of anti-mask law in October, the siege of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Polytechnic University in November, and the passage of the national security law in 2020. On June 30, 2020, the Standing Committee promulgated the National Security Law.

The spatial practices adopted by participants in Hong Kong in 2019 referenced those of the Umbrella Movement of 2014 – people wrote messages, often anonymously, on post-it notes and placed them on public walls. However, in 2019, the action was much larger in scale and diverse in form. People also stuck professionally printed glossy posters to the walls or images they had printed at home on A4 sheets of paper. The Lennon Wall evolved and exceeded the spatial confines of its 2014 origins in downtown Hong Kong, where it had been within the so-called occupied zone. Lennon Walls sprang up in metro stations, footbridges, pedestrian underpasses, and at shopping malls across the eighteen districts of Hong Kong. By late July 2019, more than 150 Lennon Walls had been established within Hong Kong. Extensions of Hong Kong's Lennon Walls also emerged in cities around the world including New York, London, Sydney, Oslo, Toronto, Tokyo, among others. "Mobile Lennon Walls" were also created through the production of stickers and pins that could be attached to bodies, bus seats, bikes, and school bags. Lennon Walls "moved" around the city, symbolizing that the wall (and its pro-movement sentiment) was everywhere all at once.

The walls also took on a digital form. An interactive Google Map of Lennon Wall sites[12] was created to assist people to find the sites. Building on the Hong Kong Lennon Wall Redux Facebook page (and others) established in

[12] See: www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1uGqynlkWVRvvtVr-e1-7vOUbpqFvcDvP&hl=en_US&ll=22.37141353758716%2C114.11628028612266&z=9.

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December 2014, pages and channels quickly emerged on platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and LIHKG (Stempack and Teng, 2019). Some of these digital spaces became archives that preserve the physical walls through photographic histories, others became hubs for people to upload digital artworks and content they had created, disseminate information, and mobilize people to take action at physical Lennon Wall sites. Both types of site have sometimes been referred to as "digital Lennon Walls"; however, we suggest this is a misnomer, particularly when viewed in context with similar innovations in contentious episodes occurring in other parts of the world at the same time.

The slogan "Five demands, not one less" became a rallying call of the movement. Protesters' five demands included: (1) the withdrawal of the Extradition bill; (2) the government to retract its characterization of the protests as "riots"; (3) an independent investigation into police use of force; (4) unconditional release of anyone arrested in relation to the protests; and (5) political reforms to ensure genuine universal suffrage as envisaged by the Basic Law 1990. As the movement progressed, more radical demands were also articulated and expressed – for example, "Hong Kong Independence" and "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times." Overall, the Anti-ELAB Movement was marked by a combination of concrete yet moderate demands and a provocative yet ambiguous ideology (Lee et al., 2020).

2019: Tishreen Walls, Tishreen Movement, Baghdad, Iraq

Even though the movement included young and old, the Iraqi youth was the driving force in the Tishreen movement, with massive participation by women. The role of women in the movement is emphasized by the statement, "A Woman's Voice Is a Revolution," written on a wall painting in the tunnel under Al-Tahrir Square. Participants included accomplished artists and others with experience in cultural performance, including actors and musicians.

People painted colorful murals or used spray paint to write messages on concrete and brick walls in at least twelve key locations in Baghdad radiating out from Al Tahrir Square, also known as Liberation Square, in the center of Baghdad. When makeshift partitions appeared, they were painted too. Demonstrators combined Arabic, Iraqi dialect, and English language to deliver their messages to diverse audiences (Mustafa, 2023). The walls entered the digital space first through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, and Instagram. These were used to spread information about the movement and coordinate people to paint the walls. Later in October 2019, a dedicated archive in the form of a website (Baghdadtahrirart) was established. Here photographs, video and audio files have been collected to preserve the

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walls as they were during 2019, and the practices in space that occurred alongside them. The files are organized according to the type of contentious performance, figures, and groups within the movement and location in space.

These walls grew during the Tishreen movement, referred to by some as a revolution. Momentum was sourced in previous protest cycles, but in 2019, two unrelated events sparked demonstrations. On September 25, 2019, a group of graduates gathered in front of the prime minister's office protesting against the lack of job opportunities. Riot police attempted to disperse the demonstrators using water cannons, only provoking more public outcry. Shortly after, on September 25, Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi demoted Lieutenant General Abdul-Wahab al-Saedi, widely regarded as a national hero and known as the "Liberator of Mosul." This decision was perceived as being unjustified and further angered people. In October 2019, young men and women marched toward Al Tahrir Square in the heart of Baghdad. Demonstrations continued for a week, and on December 1, Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi and his government stepped down. Mustafa al-Kadhimi was nominated as Abdul-Mahdi's replacement on the promise he would hold early elections and old security forces to account. Elections were announced for June 2021, a year earlier than scheduled. Several new political parties were founded in anticipation of the elections claiming to represent the October Protest Movement. For example, the Democratic "Nazil Akith Haqi" Movement, the Fao-Zakho organization, and the Tishreen National Organization also registered for the elections.

The demands of protesters started with calls for improved economic growth and employment opportunities, but soon expanded to include a broader spectrum of sociopolitical changes. Protesters insisted on the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, provision of reliable public services, the end to corruption sanctioned under the *muhasa* system (the ethno-sectarian power-sharing arrangement which has shaped Iraqi politics since 2003), and political reforms through early and credible elections and amendments to the constitution. Popular slogans (and hashtags) included "#Nazl_okhz_haki" or "Coming for my rights" and "*Inreed Watan*," meaning "we want a country." Performances in space, predominantly sit-ins, converted the space around the walls in Al Tahrir Square into a communal space known as "The Guest house." People erected tents and a support network quickly evolved to deliver supplies, including money, food, water, and clothing to protesters.

2019: Walls of Thawra, October Revolution, Beirut, Lebanon

The walls in Lebanon took two forms – physical and digital. The physical walls emerged in Beirut's downtown area around the main protest hubs of Martyrs'

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Square and Riad Al Solh Square in Beirut. People, including established graffiti artists, painted murals and used spray cans to paint messages on brick and concrete walls. Where walls were tiled or had smooth surfaces such as plastic cladding, people stuck professionally printed glossy posters to the walls or images they had printed at home on A4 sheets of paper.

Just four days after the protests began, the Art of Thawra Instagram account was created specifically as a place for people to come together and express their views and experiences of the revolution through digital art.[13] This can be seen as a digital protest wall rather than an archive like those seen in the Hong Kong and Iraqi examples, which were intended to preserve the physical protest walls at a moment in time. Unlike the significant overlap between content online and on the Lennon Walls in Hong Kong, the works posted on the Instagram site are markedly different from those that appeared in downtown Beirut. In this sense, the discourse in the text and images on the Art of Thawra site evolved somewhat independently of that found on the physical walls, making it possible to interpret them as two linked but distinct walls.

The walls appeared during protests sparked by a series of austerity measures proposed by the government. During the 2010s, Lebanon's economic situation declined, and by 2019, GDP per capita was at its lowest point in a decade and the national ratio of debt to GDP had reached its highest at 151%. On October 17, 2019, the Lebanese cabinet declared fiscal measures that included new or increased taxes on petrol, tobacco, and VoIP calls on commonly used platforms such as WhatsApp. A small number of civil servants began protesting against the proposed taxes. After an altercation between these protesters and the minister of higher education's bodyguards, large numbers of protesters began to gather in downtown Beirut. Demonstrators occupied public spaces and blocked important arterial roads. On October 29, 2019, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation, but many figures who had been longstanding members of the Lebanese political ecosystem remained in positions of power. In January 2020, a new cabinet was appointed, but protests continued as it was perceived that little had changed.

Claims quickly expanded beyond demands for the abandonment of the austerity measures to include complaints about poor living conditions and criticisms of sectarian rule, corruption, and legislation that favored those in power by limiting transparency over certain areas such as banking. Repression of these protests escalated during December. On December 17, 2019, authorities in Beirut set up metal barricades near Place de l'Etoile to keep protesters from getting close to Parliament and began to strictly control access to the city's main

[13] See: https://artbreath.org/coffee-talk/art-of-thawra.

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sites. The next day, they built a concrete wall near Place Riad el-Solh, which was known as the epicenter of the protest movement.

Commonalities of Protest Walls

Commonalities as well as evolution in practices across time, space, targets, issues, and actors can be traced through the abovementioned empirical examples. Important commonalities emerge from this cross-national analysis, going beyond the four dimensions identified by Tilly (2006, 2008) including the political contexts in which protest walls have emerged, the material forms protest walls take, their locations, and the creators and their targets. These are covered in greater detail here. Evolutions in practice have been linked to evolutions in technology (Wada, 2012) such as the development of spray cans, the internet, and social media. These examples also show that many people across different political and cultural contexts recognize protest walls as a form of protest. The existence of both consistency and evolution in practices as well as social recognition of these practices not only shows a high degree of transferability (Wada, 2012) but also meets Tilly's requirements for a set of actions to be considered a modular performance. Protest walls can be considered alongside other universally recognized performances such as the march, occupation, or strike.

To date, protest walls have only emerged in places where the political opportunity structure is repressive in some way and citizens require an outlet to express their claims publicly but anonymously. The contentious context has typically involved the attempt of activist citizens (sometimes realized) to radically transform society and structures of power, such as the political regime or class and religious structures. The political context in which protest walls emerge influences the actions and interactions of activists as they make their claims. The political regime and any institutions that support its retention of power have been the target of claims, and the particular context will give rise to the specific issues behind the claims. Claims have involved calls for political rights such as democracy and freedom of speech, socioeconomic rights, and human rights. In these repressive contexts, protest walls represent Lefebvre's (1991) idea of places that citizens have claimed back from the government to provide narratives that counter official rhetoric. In conceptual terms, this manifests Tilly's (2008) "claimant-object pairing." The pairing in the examples covered in this section involves the people as claimants and the government as the object of the claims. However, it may be inappropriate to include such a prescriptive definition of the contentious context in which protest walls arise, and thereby limit this form of contentious performance only to those walls where the claimant-object pairing is the people against the government. In order

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to make space for this aspect of contentious context in our conceptual frame, we instead suggest the target of movement claims is likely to be some form of institutional power that can involve the authoritarian regime, the police, capital, and even pro-government supporters.

In terms of authorship, the messages on protest walls may or may not be made anonymously. The anti-ELAB movement in Hong Kong relied on ordinary citizens to support the opposition to the legislation proposed by the government to remove certain institutions of democratic processes. Their very number removed the need for actions to be linked to a given individual. Even those artists who created the images for posters mostly did so under a cloak of anonymity, in a context where the continual sharing and re-production of these posters meant that the original creator was soon unidentifiable to those who continued to use the image as part of their own action. In contrast, the walls of the Tishreen movement and the Tharwa walls were sometimes created by established street artists, who were already known by their Twitter/X handle or Instagram page, and who were willing to attach their names to their actions, that is, to their protest art. This difference in authorship might prevent some walls of dissent being labeled "people's walls," to the extent that that implies "created by ordinary citizens," but it does not prevent them meeting the criteria for being labeled protest walls, and in time becoming, themselves, an expression of contention. They became a symbolic rallying point for other forms of contentious performance, including demonstrations, and focal points for government intervention, usually through the use of the police or other security forces.

The location of protest walls has always been carefully chosen by protesters. Protest wall sites are often public spaces that are seen as central to the inhabitants of the city. They are high traffic areas, whether as pedestrian access to major transport hubs and entrances to public squares, or as roads and bridges leading to important buildings. These prominent locations raise the visibility of claims and support mobilization efforts. The location of protest walls also informs the material form protest walls have taken. In general protest walls are created through the collective, creative endeavors of protesters on physical structures and barriers in space. In the aforementioned examples, the materials used to communicate claims fell into two categories. Claims were either painted directly onto the surface of walls or written on paper or some other medium and then attached to the wall.

Protest walls could be said to carry with them a set of "modal affordances"; that is, they are affected by the kind of communication mode employed and the ease with which it can be implemented (Jewitt et al., 2016: 72). In other words, the materials used influences the length, type, and speed with which messages can be produced and communicated. For example, the post-it notes seen on the

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Lennon Walls in Hong Kong facilitated the production of very short written messages, taking only a few seconds of the time of passersby, and A4 posters could easily be duplicated in printers and photocopiers. Both could easily be attached to the tiled walls of the tunnels and walkways with sticky tape – all materials easily available to everyone. Like the messages posted on the Democracy Wall in Beijing decades earlier, the materials appeared ephemeral, never intended for permanent display. On the other hand, the Lennon Wall in Prague, and the walls of the Tishreen movement in Baghdad and the Tharwa walls of Beirut, with their murals and painted images, present a sense of permanence. The murals required expertise and significant planning, as well as the acquisition of specialist paints and brushes. In this, they followed a lengthy tradition of protest art. They could not be created in a few seconds, but with collaborative effort, large and complex images could be painted in a matter of hours.

3 Walls as Battleground

During the height of Hong Kong's 2019 Anti-ELAB movement, one way for government supporters to assert their position in the political discourse was to tear down the Lennon Walls, not a difficult action, given the flimsy nature of the materials used. This set in motion a contentious repertoire (Tilly, 2006, 2008) specific to protest walls, the creation, destruction, and rebuilding of protest walls. Physical altercations between government supporters trying to "clean up" the walls (whom we name as "Clean Up" groups), protesters trying to "protect" the walls (whom we name as "Rebuild" groups), and police trying to enforce public order were widely reported at Lennon Wall sites in Hong Kong, and have also been noted at Lennon Walls sites internationally and online. These activities were facilitated by the existence of connective technologies. Here we focus specifically on Telegram and LIHKG, where protesters and government supporters used a range of action frames and boundary making practices to mobilize people to guard the walls, destroy the walls, and rebuild the walls.

In addition to contesting frames, posts consolidated ingroup solidarity and exacerbated inter-group conflicts both discursively and physically. As the physical space taken by Lennon Wall became an icon of dissent in Hong Kong (Cheng and Chan, 2017; Valjakka, 2020), those who opposed the movement could walk through the spaces choosing to engage with or ignore the content displayed there. However, they were excluded from posting content, because their posts would be "buried" by pro-movement messages on the wall. Instead, they had to find other means to engage in ideological and spatial dialogues and make themselves heard. In other words, they had to develop

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a corresponding repertoire of actions. Paradoxically, while the physical space is perceived as a protest wall by participants, it remains public space for those not engaged in the protest or counter protest. It is this emergence of oppositional actions, presenting a discourse of contentious performance, that creates the protest wall as battleground.

In this section, we show how a discursive and physical battleground is created, with a battle enacted across digital and physical spaces. As a symbolic object, protest walls manifest and influence contentious performances discursively and spatially. However, it is not the physical fights between individuals that is most significant. Rather, it was the struggle over the ability to express oneself freely. This battle of ideologies given physical form at Lennon Wall sites became an interesting example of censorship and the struggles against it. The censorship operated at two levels: (1) censorship of the *messages* posted on the walls, through attempts to tear down the post-it notes and posters; and (2) censorship of *the walls themselves* at the various sites, by the attempts to eradicate them. We contend that the battles of the walls in the various sites across Hong Kong were symbolic of and in alignment with the broader discursive battle about Hong Kong's future. This ideological boundary making and contestation of frames through the physical acts of tearing down and rebuilding the wall became part of a contentious performance that demonstrates what a civil space for expressing ideals of democracy or social change could look like in the physical world.

Introducing the Battleground Discourse

The notion of wall as battleground is best exemplified in the first instance through images, showing a "before" and "after" comparison at three Lennon Wall sites in Hong Kong in October 2019 and May of 2020. These images present the narrative of struggle for control over the civil space of the walls (see Figures 1 to 4). In the images along the top row, the walls were filled with post-it notes posted by protesters, representing exchanges of information and messages in support of the anti-ELAB movement. The images beneath show the same walls after being "cleaned up." The images on the left and in the center were taken in the lead up to the passage of the National Security Law in June 2020. The walls were barricaded or whitewashed to reestablish "social order." In these cases, the action to mobilize to articulate this counter-frame was not taken by government supporters, that is, by other citizens. Instead, authority figures, the mall owner and the local government, reasserted their institutional power, and the dominance over public space and citizens were deterred or prevented from using this public space to express their dissent.

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Figures 1 and 2 Space before and after censorship (Photo taken by Yao-Tai Li)

A more nuanced understanding of the battleground discourse emerges from an analysis of the messages posted in the Telegram and LIHKG sites. The discourse of both camps identified a perceived cause of the social unrest, painted a picture of an imagined future, and used dynamic calls to and reasons

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Figures 3 and 4 Space before and after censorship (Photo taken by Yao-Tai Li)

for action. The prognostic, diagnostic, and mobilization frames used by both camps centered on similar topics such as what it means to be a Hong Konger, the meaning of the wall itself, and the sense of social order, morality, and justice. Each group attributed markedly different meanings to these concepts and their actions and devised alternate strategies and tips to implement their core principles.

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Both protesters and government supporters identified strongly as Hong Kongers, but the meaning of Hong Konger was contested. In their building and rebuilding, protesters conjured images of comrades; Lennon people and children; and like-minded people who were peaceful, rational, and nonviolent (*wo lei fei*). The cleaning teams, government supporters removing messages and cleaning up the civil space occupied by the walls adopted an identity of the silenced citizens; ethical cleaners; unsung heroes; brothers and sisters; and volunteers for the social good.

The two groups ascribed different meanings to the wall itself and thus to the actions of rebuilding or cleaning the walls. Movement sympathizers suggested the meaning of the Lennon Wall was held simply in its very existence rather than in an unchanging physical form. This belief is encapsulated in the statement: “Tearing down the Lennon Wall cannot tear down the truth, public opinion, memories, and our beliefs in fighting.” From this perspective, tearing down the walls causes frustration among movement sympathizers, but ultimately is an act with fleeting utility as the walls will endure in individual and collective memories. “There is no torn down wall, there is only ignorance.” Rebuilding the walls became associated with a project of public education to reduce ignorance “as long as one person reads it, rebuilding has its value.” It was understood as a symbol of dissent: “Rebuilding the wall shows that dissent will not be silenced by totalitarianism.”

Government supporters also understood that the meaning of the wall was held in its existence, but for them this was primarily held in its physical existence. Where protesters framed tearing down as a temporary solution, those against the movement framed it as a “war,” with a finite end, the total destruction of the walls, and with a winner and a loser. “We fight the war through the wall; clean up rubbish for our neighbourhood and beautify Hong Kong; let’s clean it up together!”

Protest Action Frames

The analysis of the online messages showed striking differences in the use of framings (cf Benford and Snow, 2000). The two groups identified the perceived source of threat to the social order differently (diagnostic frames) and placed significantly different emphasis on it. For protesters, the roots of the problem grew from: the proposed amendments to the law, inadequate implementation of existing laws, an un-responsive government and increasing police brutality. Government supporters framed protesters as rioters and the cause of social unrest. For government supporters, online statements coded as diagnostic framing made up 41.26% of their statements, but only 7.83% for

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protesters. The majority of online messages for protesters were coded as being mobilization framing. These calls to rebuild or destroy the Lennon Walls were further broken into two groups – logistical and motivational. The logistical calls focused on how to rebuild (75.22% of protesters' online messages) or clean up (33.14% of government supporters' online messages) the walls and sought people to contribute resources such as time, labor, and objects. Motivational calls to action were more general in nature. They accounted for 11.3% of protesters' messages online and 21.43% of government supporters' messages. These were often quite general calls to action, such as "Let the propaganda blossom everywhere!" and "Rubbish cleaning is everyone's responsibility!" They were also often intertwined with reasons for rebuilding the walls and descriptions of the imagined future outcomes of taking, or not taking, action (prognostic frames), although these made up only a small proportion of the messages. Protesters typically focused on the consequences of *not* acting and projected a dystopian future where Hong Kongers lost all civil and political freedoms under the authoritarian rule of Xi Jinping (2.17% of messages). In contrast, in 4.17% of messages, government supporters focused on the benefits of taking action and pictured a return to the stable and harmonious status quo. Meanwhile, the dystopian future that Clean Up groups presented is a disharmonious and polarized society (1.19% of messages).

The logistical category of the mobilization framings show how actions were coordinated and carried out. They provide significant insight into how the contentious performances were planned and enacted. Objects required for rebuilding the walls included scissors, paper, post-it notes, and pens, whereas those needed for cleaning the walls were sprays, scrapers, and brushes. Movement participants and their opponents coordinated across time and space by placing specific calls for people to contribute their labor including when and where to: clean up walls or make propaganda together, distribute the propaganda, and volunteer as "guardians" of the walls. Examples include: "Shatin has some dump piles that need to be cleaned up" and "Shatin needs volunteers to put more materials back."

Similarly, tactical strategies were shared about how to make it harder to tear down the walls or easier to clean up the walls. Examples included gluing posts to the wall and covering the walls with plastic wrap. Movement participants curated the narratives that appeared on rebuilt walls through "content requests," which might include calls for more content on Chairman Mao, police brutality, party-controlled media, and the harms brought by CCP to Hong Kong. They shared tips on how to participate effectively, as the following post shows.

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Way to Participate

1. Prepare your own post-it notes.
2. Write things down before going to work or school.
3. Post it on the walls wherever convenient when you walk past by metro stations or underpasses.
4. Go to work or school.

Benefits

1. It takes you very limited amount of time to do it, simple and easy!
2. Accumulative power: 1 person creates 1 post and 1,000 people do it we will have 1,000 posts.
3. Stick and go, low risks of being attacked by the blue ribbon.
4. Stick on Lennon Wall, a channel to show our free voices.
5. Share the protesters' burden to make propaganda; we are the strong backup for them.

A common topic associated with the logistics and physical acts of rebuilding or cleaning the walls was safety. Tips shared among protesters were to not directly engage in conflict with government supporters or the police; be flash mobs; post and go. The idea of "being water" was a significant reminder of the need not to endanger oneself and others. "If others interfere with the rebuilding process, then move to other places to continue posting or rebuilding; safety is the priority." Government supporters also cautioned each other to be careful when at the Lennon Wall sites and to watch out for "propaganda rioters!" Police were co-opted into the action through suggestions for "cleaners to see if there are police around who can protect you."

The motivational category of the mobilization framings often contained hashtags. Popular pro-movement hashtags included: #GuardMyWall, #GuardMyCity, #TearOneOffStick100Back, #EveryoneisLennonMan, #LiberatetheWall, #ILoveHK, #HandandFeetPost, #MyhandWriteMyHeart, #RaineOrShine, #StickWithYou, and #WeWantYou. Pro-government hashtags included: #TheWallofWar, #NeverYield, #ThankYouCleaners, #CleanUpWall. These hashtag slogans were easy ways to remind participants from both groups of their reasons for taking part.

Assessments of the cost-to-benefit ratio of participation were also common to both groups, emphasizing the low personal costs involved. For example, the "Stick and Go!" hashtag highlighted the ease of participating in efforts to rebuild the wall. Government supporters also demonstrate how easy it could

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be to engage in cleaning the walls: “During the COVID-19 lockdown, exercising is still necessary – tearing down the posts could be one of the exercises we can do everyday.” Whereas government supporters sought to routinize the tearing down the posts on the wall, “Let tearing down be our daily routine!,” protesters were aware of the changing political context and the shift in approaches to suppression instituted by the government and its supporters. They acknowledged the need to make their actions, including the format of the wall more flexible and creative, moving away from routine, so that calls like “Let’s evolutionize Lennon Walls!” can also be found in the group.

In this context of a battleground, participants from both sides commonly used narratives of civic duty and morality to persuade people to take action. Duties were framed as “duties of allegiance” to particular imagined communities – Hong Kong(er) and those fighting for the same cause – who are drawn upon. Posting on the wall or cleaning the wall became an act of patriotism and solidarity: “We should all contribute effort to our beloved Hong Kong!” (Rebuild) “The road of resistance is long, everyone needs to be involved!” (Rebuild) and “Protect Hong Kong’s next generation from being brainwashed” (Clean up). These statements imply that those who are not engaged in the battle, who do not post on or clean the walls, do not love their homeland and are not playing their part to support collective efforts.

Protesters emphasized values such as democracy and freedom of speech. Examples include: “This is the symbol of public opinion, showing we are not afraid of the tyranny!” “Even though I am nobody, I refuse to be silenced;” and “Liberate the wall, free our voice.” In contrast, government supporters foregrounded values such as public order and social stability. “Echoing environmentalism and let’s clean up the trash!,” “Return citizens clean walls,” and “Cleaning up the wall everyday gives you good karma!”

The notion of the wall as battleground was carried across into the media, where images of citizens carrying out their civic duties were presented as part of the news update on the actions of government supporters (see Figures 5 and 6) and protesters (see Figures 7 and 8).

Constructing “the Other” and Its Mobilizing Effects

The battleground discourse established boundaries between movement sympathizers and government supporters. The posts in each Telegram channel often used pronouns such as “I,” “we,” and “you.” When read from the perspective of the owners of the group, these statements are delivered as the monologue of a collective of like-minded individuals; the groups did not regularly cross post. However, reading the statements as though they are directed at an imagined

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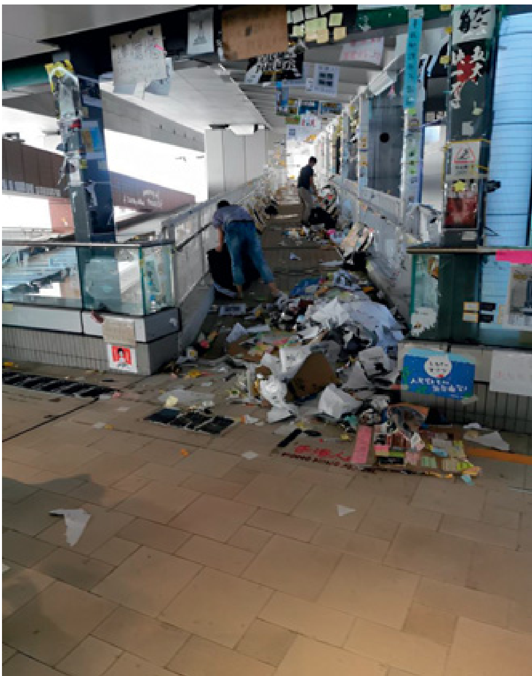

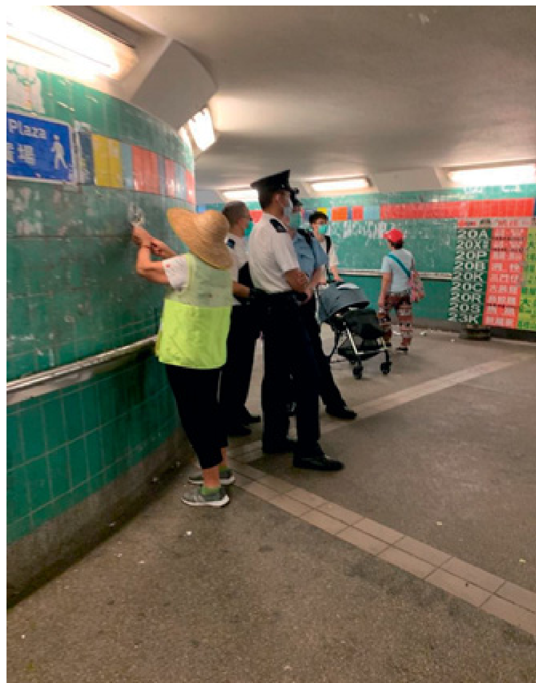

Figures 5 and 6 Lennon Walls being cleaned up (photo taken by Yao-Tai Li)

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Figures 7 and 8 Lennon Walls being rebuilt (source of Figure 7: https://bit.ly/48EZUUM; source of Figure 8: Photo taken by Yao-Tai Li)

subject within an audience from the opposing group suggests both groups assumed that their messages were being read by the other. More importantly, when pairing the monologues of both channels, this use of language can be seen

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to establish a dialogue, as it creates two distinct subjects – an "us" and a "them." Read in this way, these exchanges between the opposing groups represent a form of conversational engagement and boundary making that is not readily seen in the discourse that appears on the walls themselves. An example created from posts in both Telegram channels demonstrates these conversational moves and countermoves:

> *Protester: "You can tear the posts off, but you cannot change the public belief."*
> *Government supporter: "Don't let your life be an unrealistic fairy tale."*
> *Protester: "You can't remove our demands for democracy."*
> *Government supporter: "Selfish people wrote rubbish slogans on the public walls."*
> *Protester: "You take off one post and we stick 100/1,000/1 billion back!"*

To reinforce the boundary-making, each group highlighted its positionality on civic duty and morality. The same frameworks of civic duty that was used to persuade people to take action are used to reenforce boundaries between the two groups. Protesters referred to government supporters in the clean-up groups as: tearing-down monsters, old fogeys, destruction dogs, dirty cops, trash, Mainlanders, and Hong Kong pigs (a term for those who are indifferent to politics). Government supporters referred to the rebuilding teams as yellow trash, mobs, rioters, rascals, yellow loser, poor guy, evil cult believer, street kid, and school students.

Both groups championed patriotism, but patriotism to a different construct of Hong Kong and its future. Protesters advocated for the right to freedom of speech: "Let the blue ribbons know we will not be easily silenced by tyranny!" There were also discussions about the function and impact of the Lennon Wall. For example, one narrative warns, "Do not underestimate the power of one memo. Lennon Wall has its value even just one passer-by read it!" This message seeks to shift the impression that posting on the Lennon Walls would not change anything, and instead it has an important outreach impact to the civil society. They also state clearly that everyone can do something small to participate. The fifth point in the step-by-step guide to participation shows that the participation of creating/rebuilding Lennon Walls is not just for protesters and activists, but can also extend to every citizen who may be willing or able to be involved. Each action is powerful in both a symbolic and practical sense. Through engagement with Lennon Wall the protest repertoire has blurred the traditional definition of movement participants as frontline demonstrators, to include those who are supporters through individual acts that are inconsequential by themselves but

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which aggregate into a significant show of support. A post from Telegram expresses this clearly:

> *Take one off and stick 100 back is a movement concept. It does not mean when one blue ribbon takes one flyer down and one yellow ribbon sticks 100 back. No. It means 100 of us, or 1,000 of us, each will stick one back.*

This post highlights the idea of group power and a strong public base that will make it possible to keep increasing the scale of Lennon Wall – a site reflecting the "mainstream" citizens' voices as a way of resistance to the government's imbalanced power. Such boundary framing and the constant use of "we" and "us" mobilized ingroup solidarity and reinforced distance from government supporters or those who were indifferent to the protests.

Government supporters also champion patriotism. They are concerned with the threats to public order. They call on protesters to "behave" and refer to their own actions as "cleaning up rubbish." They find the Lennon Walls "very annoying" and believe that "the materials on the walls create so much pollution and chaos." Their concern with "messing up Hong Kong" goes beyond creating physical disorder that may "make a city look cheap." This "messing up" refers also to the "brainwash[ing of] citizens," to disseminating what is seen as "fake news," "mis-information," and "cheap propaganda." Thus, it is "the duty of a good citizen to clean up the city." Like the protesters, they assert the importance of the actions of individual citizens. For them, these small actions to restore order, like tearing down a single post-it note, are seen as "a good deed." Government supporters also have a focus on the future of their society: "Clean up not just for ourselves, but also for our next generation." The use of "we" and "our" also worked to consolidate ingroup identity.

These boundary-making frames on the physical walls and digital outlets further attracted support and mobilized action to rebuild or tear down the walls (Chan et al., 2022). The contested frames also show that normative values were adopted by both groups to motivate ingroup members and create a moral boundary between the outgroups. Definitional boundaries drawn around what it means to be a "good citizen" were used to convince those who share similar ideologies to contribute to the work of the group. The adoption of these positions becomes part of the contentious performance.

Claiming the Right to the City

The practices of protestors to construct the wall and government supporters to destroy the wall represent a physical language of protest or "contentious repertoire" (Tilly, 2006, 2008) that imbue the site with new meanings (Lefebvre, 1991). This new "place" represents a site of struggle for the right to define

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"Hong Kong" and "Hong Konger" and carries with it a language of practices and behaviors deemed appropriate by those with discursive control of the site. Both groups claimed they were acting morally and used civic duty to justify their actions. It is important to expand discussion on the way both groups identified civic values such as freedom of speech and rights to the city. The Rebuild groups saw posting materials on the wall as a bottom-up exercise of their freedom of speech and right to fight for democracy, especially when the government was irresponsive. The Clean Up groups highlighted the importance of making space for all views to be expressed. For this group the wall was a particularly harmful form of brainwashing as it effectively silenced the voices of those with different perspectives. Thus, the notion of silence was also contested. Protesters argued that the state is silencing voices, and in the face of such oppression it is imperative for people to raise their voices and demands through and on the wall. Government supporters framed the spatial practices associated with the protest wall as exclusionary because there was no space for messages expressing support for the government. The only way to free themselves from this forced silence was to tear down the wall.

To movement sympathizers, the Lennon Wall signifies their resistance to state's infringement on their rights. For the government supporters, the Lennon Wall infringed upon citizens' right to the city – a city that should represent the "majority's" interests and "diverse" voices, rather than just the opinion of those who are against the government. The struggle to claim physical space became symbolic of the struggle for control of discursive space – a struggle for the "right to the city" (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1996) and the right to "write the city" (Zieleniec, 2016). Thus, the Lennon Wall becomes a battleground, a contentious site for people with different political stances to do battle, ideologically or physically, in space. It transformed spaces such as metro stations, tunnels, and shopping malls into sites symbolizing protest. The Lennon Wall and the space it occupied became imbued with symbolic meanings and moral or ideational boundaries. When a battle over censorship of expressions of ideology and of behaviors as well as of the space itself occurs at a protest wall site, the protest wall exists as a particular urban space that reifies lived experience and mobilizes people's memories, emotions, identities, and even their behaviors. Writing messages on the walls, therefore, can be seen as a socio-politically engaged practice, leading to "coauthoring" or "cocreating" locally recognized contentious repertoires. This process, which involves sharing, learning, negotiating, contesting, developing aesthetic tactics and strategies for reconstructing moral boundaries, redefining subjects and meanings of participation, and re-appropriating urban space in everyday life, will be considered in greater depth in the

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following section, but meaning is also created through the dialogue of ritualized practices in space of actors.

4 Walls as a System of Meaning

In this section, we demonstrate that protest walls function as a semiotic system, creating what Barthes (1977) refers to as a lexicon. A lexicon is, essentially, the knowledge that individuals have about their world and that they use to make sense of it. Meaning is created in many ways, including but not limited to the interpretation of written and verbal signifiers, performances of social actors in space and the placement of objects in space. The concept of lexicon is important to the understanding of protest wall as it can encompass the various systems of meaning that exist at protest wall sites including the signs and symbols placed on the wall as well as the dialogue of ritualized practices and behaviors that occur there. Knowledge and norms that can be understood by people create a lexicon that provides the semiotic resources to construct a system of protest and protest communication. The creators and perceived audiences are both familiar with the rules of representation and can interpret the intended message.

Using data from the protest walls that emerged in 2019 in Hong Kong, Iraq, and Lebanon, and introduced in the previous sections, we reveal similarities and differences in the form of message, in message creators. and in message content and iconography that enable us to establish the existence of a shared lexicon, common to all, yet accommodating the local context. Following Barthes, we began with the sociopolitical environment in which posts were created, and the description of the materials and formats used to convey the messages of protesters and their targets; these are already set out in the previous section. An approach focusing on the vocabulary, iconography. and materials used to convey the messages on the protest walls (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov, 2022; Hamdy and Karl, 2014) and interpreted by others allows us to go beyond Benford and Snow's (2000) analytical approach to movement communication. Our analysis demonstrates that the protest wall has become a symbolic object in itself (Abrams and Gardner, 2023), which represents resistance against a regime. More importantly, we show a lexicon of protest walls exists. In the previous sections we have evidenced the existence of a language of practices in space. In this section we show there is the language of signs and symbols common to all protest walls in different contexts. There are also local variations, what we have referred to as a local dialect, which emerge from the particular sociocultural environment and protest cultures (Johnston, 2018).

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International Language of Protest

Protest symbols play a significant role in mobilizing action and constructing a shared identity and solidarity for a group pressing for social change (Awad and Wagoner, 2020). Here, we explore their role in creating an internationally recognized lexicon for protest walls. The iconography of these walls reveals the existence of a number of symbols that are core to this lexicon. Consistencies in the topics discussed and the visual signs and symbols used to represent them were observed across the three sites. Easily recognizable people such as leaders and objects such as guns, fists, and flags were used to symbolize abstract concepts such as the state, state violence, resistance, and "we" as a collective identity.

The representation of movement participants and their targets (typically institutional power), the claimant-object pairing, was a prominent feature in the discourse on the walls. In each case "the state" as a concept was represented by renderings of the respective head of state. Notions of state violence were conveyed through objects such as guns and tear gas canisters, tanks, and people in army fatigues or police uniforms. Attributes given to these individuals to signify their "evilness" include devil horns, red eyes, and handcuffs. Depiction of the state appeared most frequently in Iraq. Images of the police were most prominent in Hong Kong. The visual presentation of police terrorizing movement participants with violence served as a counter-frame to the government's official narrative of protesters as "rioters" and "terrorists" (Wang and Ma, 2021). The claimant-object pairing was not confined to the government and the corrupt system and its leaders. In each case, message senders identified "co-conspirators" of the state including the media, large corporations (banks in Lebanon and the Mass Transit Railways Corporation in Hong Kong), and the international community in the case of Iraq.

"The society" was represented in two ways, either as a faceless group of protesters or as an identifiably diverse group of individuals. Diversity was signified through the depiction of people with disability (signified through a wheelchair), individuals of different age (signified through walking sticks and toys), race, gender, and religious affiliation. These visual representations that blur the lines between society and protesters suggest two important meanings in movement communication frames. First, that the protesters represent the views of the whole society – that the people are united in their claims against institutional power. Second, that anyone can (and should) participate in the movement – the audience can see themselves reflected back in the images on the walls. In the international language of protest, this notion of an imagined community of like-minded people is further cemented through visual links to

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more established notions of collective identity such as “citizenship.” This is signified through the national or adoptive flag and use of national colors.

Human character traits are also represented in similar ways to make superheroes or legendary figures out of ordinary citizens. Bravery and heroism in the face of institutional power was a common visual frame across all case study sites. To signify these traits, protesters as individuals were depicted in similar poses or with objects that constitute of a self-sourced “armor of resistance” – a gas mask, goggles, gloves, tennis racket, and in the case of Hong Kong an umbrella (1.35% of messages). Lifelike portraits of prominent figures in the resistance who lost their lives signify the bravery and heroism of “movement martyrs.” This notion of “martyrdom” was most common on the Tishreen Walls of Iraq where images of Ghaloubi Al Tememi, Ali Ammar Al Shahmani, Ahmed Karim Kadhim Al Hulfi, and Ahmed Mhana were included in the messages (14.52%). It was least common on Hong Kong’s Lennon Walls. Images memorializing Marco Leung, known as “the raincoat man” for the yellow slicker he was wearing when he died on June 15, 2019, were seen in 0.58% of messages. In the context of social movements, a connotation of martyrdom is innocence in the face of institutional power. The innocence of protesters (and by extension “the people”) was signified in several common ways. Children and young people in school uniform, weeping mothers, and unarmed civilians featured in 7.13%, 10.48%, and 6.68% of messages across Hong Kong, Iraq, and Lebanon, respectively.

In movement communication, and according to Barthes’s analytical interpretive approach, the visual relationship between depicted subjects is of equal importance to the subjects themselves. In the social movement context, action is of equal importance to claimants and their targets. Resistance was the most common action depicted on the walls across the three case study sites. Peaceful resistance was universally depicted through doves and flowers. These images also hold connotations to an imagined utopian future and highlight the hope for peace, ceasefire, and the abandonment of war and state/police violence. Resistance was also symbolized by images of raised fists (2.1%, 2.83%, and 0.33% across Iraq, Lebanon, and Hong Kong, see Figures 9 to 11) and the raised finger (0.53% and 1.8% in Hong Kong and Lebanon). Both symbols have long been a symbol of opposition across a wide range of social movements. Blood (2.89%, 7.31%, and 0.51% across Hong Kong, Iraq, and Lebanon) and fire (0.67% and 1.62% in Hong Kong and Lebanon) were also commonly seen in depictions of resistance. Audiences may feel empathy for the wounded and fear of the destructive capability of institutional power and imagine a dystopian future. With the exception of state violence, representations of the past actions of figures of institutional power were absent from images on the walls. Message

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Figures 9 to 11 Fist symbols in Iraq, Lebanon, and Hong Kong (source of Figure 9: https://baghdadtahrirart.net/; source of Figure 10: www.instagram .com/wallsofthawra/; source of Figure 11: Photo taken by Yao-Tai Li)

senders instead relied on the literacy of their audience in localized sociopolitical affairs. The assumption that "everyone knows" the wrongs of these bodies of institutional power reinforces the sense of a shared collective understanding and an imagined "we."

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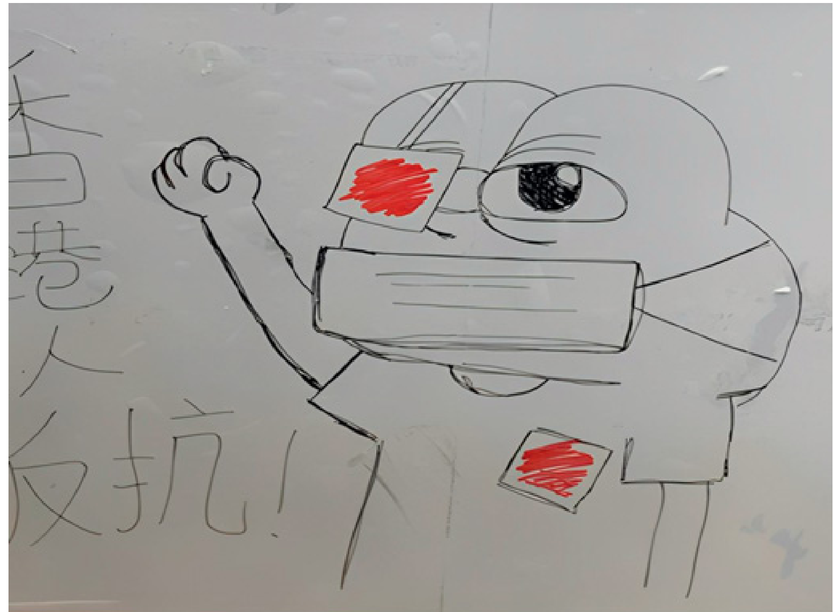

Figures 9 to 11 (cont.)

Symbols that May Integrate into the International Language

Anti-establishmentarian heroes from contemporary culture have been incorporated into protest discourses around the world for a number of years (Garrett, 2014). Two instances drawn from popular culture are particularly noteworthy in our case studies. Images of Guy Fawkes and the Joker appeared on the Lennon Wall of Hong Kong and the Tishreen Wall in Iraq. The Guy Fawkes mask, originally created for a character in the graphic novel V for Vendetta in 1982, represents a real man who tried to blow up the British Parliament in 1605. In recent years, the mask has been increasingly adopted as a symbol of protest against institutional power (Awad and Wagoner, 2020). The Guy Fawkes mask was depicted on the walls in each of our case study sites Iran, Lebanon, and Hong Kong (see Figures 12 to 14), but each with a different anchor in popular culture. In Hong Kong, the mask was commonly associated with the protagonist in the film V for Vendetta, whereas in Iraq, links were drawn to the popular Netflix series *Money Heist*. The image of the Joker was drawn from the 2008 Batman film, *The Dark Knight*, and later the 2019 film *Joker*. The Joker is portrayed as a victim – his mania a consequence of the failings of neoliberal capitalism – who eventually leads a band of other victims of society in a revolt against institutional power. In Hong Kong and Beirut, Joker faces painted on the

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Figures 12 to 14 Guy Fawkes mask in Iraq, Lebanon, and Hong Kong (source of Figure 12: https://baghdadtahrirart.net/; source of Figure 13: www.instagram.com/wallsofthawra/; source of Figure 14: Photo taken by Yao-Tai Li)

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Figures 12 to 14 (cont.)

walls represent those neglected by the government and the need to protest against neoliberal policies and social inequalities (da Matta, 2020).

Going beyond pop culture, a mask can represent the anonymous citizens behind a protest. The wearing of the mask has enabled citizens to hide their identity when confronting a powerful figure in society, including politicians such as Carrie Lam and Xi Jinping in Hong Kong and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon. The wearing of a mask itself became a symbol of protest when the Hong Kong government banned the wearing of masks during protests in October 2019. These masks have also been used as motivational symbols to mobilize the public to continue with demonstrations and to overthrow a corrupt government and its system.

Another example of a symbol that may slowly become part of a universally understood visual language of protest is the wounded eye. The phrase "eye for

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an eye" is recognized in many cultures, being found both in the bible and in the Quran as indicating accountability or retaliation. Thus, when a protester incurs injury to an eye, and an image of the injured eye is circulated, the real-life wound becomes a symbol of the detrimental actions of the government. This symbol is easy to imitate in real life and to reproduce through images. The bandaged or bloodied eye appeared in Egypt in 2011 and in many other protests since. In Hong Kong, eyes took on particular significance when a female volunteer medic was shot in the right eye with a pellet round in a violent police crackdown in August 2019. Immediately, eyes with blood became a new rallying symbol for the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and many protesters wore eye patches or bloodied bandages over their right eyes as a symbol of resistance to state violence and police brutality (Chan et al., 2023).

A Local Dialect

Discourses in each place can be separated based on Benford and Snow's (2000) movement communication frames (see Table 1). Examining the framing tasks is useful here in understanding the transferability of issues, targets, and actions (Wada, 2012). Message senders in each location utilized some communication frames more than others. This lends itself to the establishment of a local dialect.

Exploring these frames further, we also begin to see that although the meanings of some symbols, such as the fist and fire, are shared across different protests in countries and cultures across the world, there were instances where the same symbol represented a specific meaning based on the local context (Barthes, 1977). Flowers are a good example of this. In a Western cultural tradition, flowers may typically be associated with spring and the hope of new life after a harsh winter. In social movements more generally, flowers may be associated with peaceful resistance.

Table 1 Prognostic, diagnostic, and motivational frames in Hong Kong, Iraq, and Lebanon

	Prognostic	Diagnostic	Motivational
Hong Kong	8.72%	39.05%	25.84%
Iraq	4.84%	7.26%	16.53%
Lebanon	10.69%	22.01%	48.42%

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However, in many cultures a language of flowers in which meaning is ascribed to specific flowers also exists. For example, in the European context, rosemary is often understood to symbolize remembrance, the rose as love, and oleander as a warning. Flowers commonly appeared on the walls in each site, and message senders assumed audiences had a rudimentary understanding of context specific floriography. White flowers were painted on the Tharwa protest walls, symbolizing purity and comfort during times of grief. In Hong Kong, by contrast, white chrysanthemums (funerary flowers) were pictured on or placed at the foot of wall sites to mourn those who died during the protests. The national or state flower also featured heavily on the three wall sites. The bauhinia is the national flower of Hong Kong and is stylized in the flag of Hong Kong. In some images, the flower is wilted or tipped with red, representing the sacrifice that people are making to protest. In others, the five stars in each of the petals of the flag have been removed, which represent a political system that the protesters disagree with. In Iraq, where the red rose is the national flower, roses were common in the protest imagery. The red rose is more than a national symbol. It is an integral part of the country's historical significance and cultural resonance. Love, passion, and respect are often associated with deep red roses. In the Islamic countries like Iraq, the rose is the symbol of the Prophet Muhammad.

There are symbols unique to a location or protest that amplify a lexicon. These have meaning only for those engaged in the particular protest. They are relevant to the sociocultural context of the contentious performance. In Iraq, the tuk tuk has become the symbol of resistance (Kiley, 2019). Tuk tuks are usually used as public transportation in specific neighborhoods in Baghdad. It is an affordable way for Iraqis to move in the city. During the protest, however, tuk tuk drivers flocked to Tahrir Square where they took on the role of the peoples' ambulances and helped in transporting goods to protesters, even though some of them reported being attacked. The "tuk tuk generation" refers to the new generation of citizens who are not accepting of the government's rule. In addition, what became known as the Turkish Restaurant served as another symbol of the protest. A multi-storey, crumbling building that once housed a Turkish restaurant on its top floor became the headquarters of protesters and was called Uhud Mountain, in reference to the only battle in a seventh-century war in which the Muslims did not defeat their opponents. The Iraqi flag is often added with figures from Jawad Saleem's "Freedom Monument" in Al Tahrir and the portrait of the poet and activist Safaa Al Sarray, murdered in Al Tahrir on October 28, 2019.

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Coauthors around the World

The emergence of an international iconography of protest is likely to generate global social movements. The advancement of technology and social media makes it easier to download, edit, replicate, and disseminate symbols for incorporation in posters, for example, based on the needs of the local contexts. The raised fist has long been a symbol of opposition, presented in various forms of citizens' dissent such as marches and mobilizing for participation. It is easy to coordinate protesters to make this symbol with their own bodies, and appearing on posters and as graffiti has it become an international movement symbol of opposition. Similarly, the raised middle finger is also commonly used to make a gesture that shows disrespect for institutional power.

From these depictions the audience can understand that message senders saw corruption, state violence, and loss of control over land and resources emerge as key sources of the problems afflicting society. Diagnostic framing was apparent in the discourse across all case study sites; however, it was most prominent in the discourse on Hong Kong's Lennon Wall that vividly illustrates the negative outcomes of Hong Kong's future if democracy and freedom are removed by the government, followed by that communicated through the Wall of Thawra in Lebanon. This suggests message senders in these two cases sought to encourage mobilization by triggering emotions such as anger or frustration in their audiences. In contrast, utopian prognostic frames were most commonly seen in Iraq suggesting that hope for a new future was the galvanizing force of the movement. These messages can garner symbolic meanings in contentious politics; that is, they are transferable to different settings and can contribute to an international protest language, becoming part of a global semiotic mode. At the same time, the international protest languages also allow flexibility to accommodate local variations of protest cultures and reinforce the local semiotic system where the messages are readily understood by the recipients (Johnston, 2018).

5 Walls as International Fronts

We saw in Hong Kong, Iraq, and Lebanon that protest wall sites evolved in several different locations within the city. In the case of Hong Kong's Anti-ELAB movement, Lennon Walls even bloomed in cities internationally. In this section, we explore the question of whether to consider the multiple walls that emerge during a contentious episode as a single instance – one protest wall – or as separate and distinct performances. We compare the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan and identify similarities and differences in themes and imagery that

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appear on the walls in the respective places. Examining the contentious performances manifested on protest walls in similar sociopolitical contexts allows us to draw often latent concerns with movement dynamics into a discussion of the meanings of collective identity and how localized political concerns are connected to international solidarity. It also permits insight into whether and how contentious repertoires change over time and across places (Tilly, 1977, 2008), and connects to Wada's (2012) transferability of contentious repertoire. In considering these questions, movement communication frames provide an important analytical tool, as does an analysis of the claimant–object pairing. We identify the locally specific, distinct, but connective messages that played a part in mobilizing Taiwanese in support of the Anti-ELAB movement in Hong Kong.

Taiwan and Hong Kong have similar geopolitical and identity tensions with the People's Republic of China, and pro-democracy activism has been a strong tradition in both places (Li and Fong, 2022). In 2014, a wave of protests took place in Taiwan known as the Sunflower Movement. These demonstrations were sparked by the Kuomintang's passage of Cross Strait Service Trade Agreement without giving the opposition – the Democratic People's Party – the opportunity to perform a clause by clause review. This treaty aimed to liberalize trade between Taiwan and China in service industries such as banking, healthcare, tourism, film, and telecommunications. Many perceived the treaty would strengthen ties with China in ways that would have a negative impact on Taiwan. Taiwan and Hong Kong also share some cultural similarities. Of importance to the present discussion is language. Although Cantonese is spoken in Hong Kong and Mandarin is the dominant language spoken in Taiwan, traditional characters are used in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Linguistically this distinguishes both places from China, where simplified characters are used. As a result of this partial linguistic similarity, Taiwan has been identified as one of the major destination countries for Hong Kongers to migrate to during and after the Anti-ELAB movement (Nachman et al., 2020). According to the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department, 113,200 Hong Kong residents left between mid-2021 and mid-2022, representing a decrease of 1.6% of the population, and more than 11,000 Hong Kongers went to Taiwan in 2021.[14]

The widespread Hong Kong diaspora and the use of social media played a particularly important role. Protesters directed mobilization strategies to those external to Hong Kong. Frequently used slogans of the Anti-ELAB movement

[14] See: https://ws.mac.gov.tw/001/Upload/295/relfile/8816/75805/d219871c-c50d-4cd4-be97-32e9a96fccb5.pdf.

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were “Stand with Hong Kong,” “blossom everywhere,” and “be water.” These encouraged movement sympathizers everywhere to pick up and spread movement claims across all the districts in Hong Kong and to different parts of the world (Chan et al., 2022). The widespread Hong Kong diaspora, and the use of social media (Fong, 2022; Ho, 2024), saw Anti-ELAB movement sympathizers based in other countries including Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Hou, 2020) create Lennon Walls and post messages in support of the movement. These walls served as sites that manifest the different versions and understandings of long-distance Chinese nationalism and political identities that generated conflicts in space between movement supporters and its opponents outside Hong Kong (Birtles, 2019; Zhou, 2019). Online sites were an important part of this diasporic and globalized action, becoming a part of movement repertoire and contentious performance where discourse debates and censorship happened between different parties (Jones and Chau, 2022). Common messages that can be seen in Hong Kong and other countries during the protest, both physically and online, include: “collect gas globally!” (collect the support and energy from overseas).

One Wall: United in Support for Hong Kong’s Anti-ELAB Movement

We did not note any differences between the walls located domestically in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Walls located across the different districts of Hong Kong all presented the same discourse topics, and local district-based issues were not used in the analysis using Benford and Snow’s diagnostic or prognostic frames (Li and Whitworth, 2023). Motivational calls sometimes used local place names, for example, “People of Shatin stand up!” or “Let’s go people of Taipo!” We did not interpret this as a localized variation, as the substance of these messages was the same and mirrored prominent slogans of the movement (“Hong Kongers stand up!” and “Let’s go Hong Kongers!”). The same is true for the walls across the three major Lennon Wall sites in Taiwan.

There were also similarities between the walls across the international boundaries of Hong Kong and Taiwan. In both places the same claimant-object pairings were identified – the people, the Hong Kong administration, the Hong Kong Police, and the People’s Republic of China. These subjects and objects were also presented in similar ways. Protesters appeared frequently and were depicted positively on the walls in Taiwan as well as in Hong Kong. In both places, the images of police officers presented them engaged in violent acts toward protesters and innocent citizens and were often accompanied by the

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words "dirty" and "dogs." The prominence of police violence helped frame the violence of protesters as a justified response to oppression. To borrow Sewell's (1996) words, it served the "need to distinguish the just violence of the sovereign people from the unacceptable violence of the dangerous mob." Other individual figures that appeared regularly as targets included Hong Kong's former chief executive, Carrie Lam, and China's president Xi Jinping. They are both presented as anti-democratic and authoritarian. Some small but significant differences did exist in terms of how prominently each subject featured in the respective discourses of the Hong Kong and Taiwan walls. These differences, which were somewhat unexpected, will be discussed in the next section.

The limited space on the post-it notes that were the primary material used to post messages led to the creation of slogans that were often repeated. There was little variation in the slogans that appeared on the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Motivational slogans or mobilization frames and statements of solidarity predominantly appeared on both walls (25.84% and 55.46%). Examples include "Hong Kongers, add oil!," "Be water," "Free Hong Kong, revolution now!," and "Keep fighting!" A small number of posts express dissatisfaction with the government and criticisms of police violence, as demonstrated by posts such as "Bad cops," "It was you who taught me that peaceful marches are useless," and "Carrie Lam Resign!" Values such as "democracy," "freedom," and "human rights" are also commonly found. The discourse seen on the wall in Hong Kong and Taiwan was also similar in that there was little diversity in the views expressed. Very few posts from government supporters appeared in Hong Kong (1.54%) and Taiwan (2.38%). These messages were often buried under messages in support of the movement. The messages left by government supporters used words and phrases such as "rioters," "support police," "anti-violence," and "social stability." In these few instances, it was possible to see Benford and Snow's framing and counter-framing in action. A frequently occurring example was the way message senders framed the actions of movement participants. Government supporters claimed that protesters are violent "rioters," and movement sympathizers countered this with the slogan, "No rioters, only tyranny."

It was not easy to determine whether messages were written by Cantonese speakers or Mandarin speakers. However, differences in grammar, word usage, and message content sometimes make it possible to distinguish the language spoken by the author, and therefore to identify whether the author is part of the Hong Kong diaspora or a Taiwanese supporter. Language use did not differ much between the two places. Messages were mostly written in traditional characters; that is, Mandarin or Cantonese could be the language spoken by the creators (52.29% in Taiwan and Hong Kong 54.96% in Hong Kong),

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English (26.77% in Taiwan and 23.99% in Hong Kong) or both traditional characters and English (10.17% in Taiwan and 2.65% in Hong Kong). We identified a few posts written in Cantonese (8.67% in Taiwan and 16.47% in Hong Kong).

The content of these posts in Cantonese present on the wall in Taiwan suggested that the wall in Taiwan took on an additional purpose or function compared to the wall in Hong Kong. The wall became an outlet for members of the Hong Kong diaspora based in Taiwan to participate in political affairs back home in Hong Kong. Messages from this group conveyed a range of emotions from dismay and pessimism to gratitude and hope. Examples include: "Taiwan, please step on Hong Kong's body to democracy," "Appreciate Taiwan's support to my home and the movement," "I am a Hong Konger, I love Taiwan and democracy," and "Thank you, Taiwanese people! We will fight together!" This last message and its use of "we" to reference to an imagined community resisting in the face of a common threat is important. It is this notion of standing in solidarity against perceived oppression from China that begins to mark the discourse on the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan as distinct.

Two Walls: Mobilizing Taiwanese against Threats to Taiwanese Sovereignty

As noted earlier, similar slogans and motivational messages appeared across the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan, certain figures and communication frames were utilized more heavily than others in persuasive efforts to encourage mobilization. Prognostic and frames appeared almost twice as much in the discourse on Taiwan's (17.41%) wall than on Hong Kong's wall (8.72%). Similarly, message senders used a higher proportion of motivational frames in Taiwan (55.46%) compared to Hong Kong (25.84%). In contrast, diagnostic framing was more prevalent in Hong Kong (39.05%) than it was in Taiwan (27.13%). This suggests differences in mobilization strategies and possibly differences in the discourse between the two case study sites. For diaspora movements in Taiwan, the Taiwanese government's position on the issue, available mobilization networks, and linkages to local civil society all influence when and how diaspora communities adapt movement frames and claims to the sociopolitical context of their host society (Ho and Chen, 2024). To identify where differences in mobilization strategies lie between movement sympathizers based in Hong Kong and Taiwan, we looked at the distribution of particular themes within the discourses on Hong Kong and Taiwan's walls and how these topics were talked about. These differences, in turn, inform why the walls in Taiwan are not simply extensions of those in Hong Kong.

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Whether in Hong Kong or Taiwan, the issues were perceived to arise from the same sources. However, message senders in Taiwan identified a different *primary* source of the problem to structure their claims around when compared to their counterparts in Hong Kong, as might be expected, given the differences in local concerns. For Hong Kongers, the content of the messages suggests that Chief Executive Carrie Lam was the target of claims. However, in Taiwan, "China" (as represented by images of Xi Jinping, the Chinese flag, and Winnie the Pooh) was the focus of a larger proportion of visual messages. Text-based messages reinforced this notion examples include: "China is the common enemy!" and "Protect Taiwan against China!" Here, it is clear how differences in Hong Kong and Taiwan's geopolitical status vis-à-vis China influence the way movement participants perceive and frame issues. Hong Kong's status as a special administrative region under the rule of the Chinese government and Taiwan's struggle to maintain political autonomy in the face of China's desire for unification present different political opportunity structures and shape the imagined futures.

State violence was prominent in the discourse on the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In Taiwan the police appeared more frequently in messages than they did in Hong Kong. Furthermore, they were framed as an extension of the Chinese state rather than the Hong Kong administration. Images of police brutality were accompanied by text such as "Hong Kong police murder citizens!," "Police are eager to kill you!," "Protesters were beaten until their bones fractured." The increased emphasis on uses of force by Hong Kong police in the discourse on the walls in Taiwan is also possibly a product of cross-strait politics and the author's views on unification with China. Some authors took the opportunity to explicitly express their position on Taiwanese independence with statements such as "Establish a Taiwan Republic!" To mobilize the Taiwanese population, movement participants triggered fear and anger in local audiences by framing the violence of Hong Kong's present reality as Taiwan's possible future reality under Chinese rule.

Segments of the population in Taiwan and Hong Kong perceive that the political futures of both jurisdictions vis-à-vis China are tied together (Li and Fong, 2022). The theme of "democratic alliance" appeared in messages on both Hong Kong and Taiwan's walls. In Hong Kong, there were calls on other democracies to "intervene" in the situation through legislation and diplomacy. Indeed, the United States passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act and applied sanctions to Hong Kong and Chinese political leaders. Messages appropriated posters seen in the United Kingdom and the United States during the first and second world wars and contained the call to action: "Hong Kong needs you!" Other messages included: "President Trump, please

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liberate Hong Kong and defend our constitution," "Calling the US to sanction Hong Kong/China leaders," and "Let's make Hong Kong Great Again!"

On the walls in Hong Kong, message senders also directed their calls specifically at their neighbors in Taiwan who they framed as "Comrades in arms" through slogans such as "Today's Hong Kong, Tomorrow's Taiwan." However, these slogans were a very small proportion of the discourse that appeared on Hong Kong's Lennon Walls. In contrast, these slogans were very prevalent in the smaller discourse on Taiwan's walls. Message senders in Taiwan referred to Hong Kong's situation extensively and focused on Taiwan's future. Dystopian imaginaries of a future Taiwan ruled by China were common in prognostic frames. Here, key slogans were: "Hong Kong has no future, and Taiwan will be the next" and "Protect the last democratic bastion [Taiwan]!"

Table 2 presents the key figures represented on the walls in each place: Hong Kong/Hong Kongers, protesters, the police, and the government as

Table 2 Key figures appeared in images (Taiwan vs. Hong Kong)

Figure	Taiwan (300 entries)	Hong Kong (1,460 entries)
Hong Kong	63.58%	56.99%
Taiwan/Taiwanese	21.33%	1.27%
Hong Konger	18.66%	30.42%
Protester	25.46%	54.55%
Police/Bad cops	36.63%	27.26%
Liberty/Freedom	12.45%	2.79%
Democracy	7.98%	2.36%
LIHKG pig, dog, Pepe the Frog[15]	10.57%	26.30%
Umbrella	8.42%	15.66%
China	37.35%	22.42%
Communism	9.45%	3.08%
Chairman Mao	0.99%	2.07%
Xi Jinping	9.01%	2.75%
Carrie Lam	4.53%	11.42%

[15] These are mascots to represent protesters and movement sympathizers, see Li and Whitworth, 2023.

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represented by Carrie Lam and Xi Jinping. Communism and China's threat to freedom and democracy is more heightened in Taiwan, with the connection to its perceived political future and the response to "One Country, Two Systems" promised by the Chinese government.

Message senders in Taiwan emphasized distinctions between China and Taiwan, specifically Taiwan's status as a democracy with freedoms of speech and association. Examples include: "Taiwanese style of democracy, freedom, and diversity" and "You are welcome to post your opinions here, this is Taiwan, not China." At the National Chengchi University a banner was hung along the top of the wall, proclaiming the site to be "The demonstration zone for the reform of freedom of speech in new China." However, others cautioned audiences with reminders that democracy is fragile and, with reference to the internationally accepted policy position on China-Taiwan relations, "Under One country, there will be no room for two systems!," and "Remember that One Country Two Systems is a lie!"

The Taiwanese Presidential election was scheduled for January 11, 2020. This local context led many posts to weave commentary on Hong Kong's fate together with reminders about the upcoming election. Focusing on Taiwan's political status and future, message senders called on readers to vote for the "right" candidate who has a strong determination to protect Taiwan. Thus, the discourse on the wall took on claims relevant only to those eligible to vote in the upcoming elections, that is, Taiwanese citizens. Said differently, the intent of some message senders was to mobilize Taiwanese citizens to vote in the Taiwanese election. From this perspective, the walls in Taiwan ceased to be an extension of Hong Kong's Lennon Wall. Instead, the discourse evolved to include distinctly local political concerns.

Both One and Many Walls

In considering whether Lennon Walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan constitute one wall or multiple walls, we have shown similarities and differences in the themes and the targets of the claims in the contentious episode. Many slogans were common to both places, suggesting that the walls in Taiwan were in fact an extension of the Lennon Wall in Hong Kong. While symbolically (Abrams and Gardner, 2023) there is one wall, the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan have distinctive semiotic systems that contain different messages and uses of movement communication frames attached to each context indicative of different geopolitical concerns and opportunity structures, and thus two separate protest walls. From Wada's perspective (2012) on transferability, these walls exhibit a lower degree of transferability from the social semiotic perspective.

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The comparison of content on the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan has given us a broad picture of people's concerns and attitudes toward the movement and institutional power. Connecting the Protest Wall's symbolic meaning as an international protest icon with local concerns, we can see how its role adapts in each context. At the same time, we can understand how one movement's concerns become abstracted as they are assimilated by activists into another sociopolitical context. Activists across different jurisdictions may be linked by belief in a core set of principles such as democracy, thus enabling claims to transcend space. However, as Benford and Snow (2000) suggest, in order for the movement to sustain momentum in new contexts, communication frames and mobilization strategies need to adapt to the local context.

However, the Lennon Walls outside of Hong Kong and Taiwan were often quite small and did not last for a significant amount of time. In this section, we identify the key targets of those making posts and show how these participants present opposing perspectives through their postings. We also highlight people in Hong Kong and Taiwan utilized sharable values (e.g., freedom, democracy, and human rights) but integrated them with their own concerns. For Hong Kongers, escalating the movement scale to the global scale was a way to sustain the movement energy, whereas for Taiwanese people, leveraging values of democracy and anti-authoritarianism contains its own self-interest to change its marginal geopolitical status vis-à-vis China. In other words, supporting Hong Kong is in Taiwan's interest, and Hong Kong only serves as a canvas onto which fears and anxieties regarding potential political outcomes and future for Taiwan are projected (Hioe, 2022). In this sense, while symbolically (Abrams and Gardner) there is one wall, the walls have different framings and importantly have distinct semiotic systems, and therefore they are two walls, each representing locally distinctive geopolitical concerns and respective struggles.

The shared values and bonded political future created a unique tie between Hong Kong and Taiwan. The replications of slogans and posters in Taiwan also suggest there are common goals among Hong Kongers and Taiwanese (and Hong Kong migrants in Taiwan). Yet, we reserve our conclusion about "one wall" when it comes to locally specific considerations in Taiwan. The prognostic framings like "Taiwan should not become the next Hong Kong" and "Learn the painful lessons from Hong Kong" suggest that Taiwan's support for Hong Kong movement may not be totally altruistic and can include self-interests (i.e., its geopolitical tensions with China). It is difficult to separate the "belief" in values such as democracy and the "benefit" Taiwan might derive by supporting the democracy movement in Hong Kong. Thus, whether, and to

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what degree, Taiwan and Hong Kong's protest walls can be understood as examples of the same symbolic object remain vexed questions.

We conclude, therefore, that from a Tillian perspective, although the protest wall exists as a performance within a contentious repertoire, and exists alongside other examples such as the march and demonstration, a protest wall prompted by a contentious episode in one country may not be replicated in another country, regardless of the size and strength of the diaspora, even though it may be recognized as the same symbolic object. In part, this is because specific claims at the heart of the claimant-object pairing can only be expressed at a level of abstraction, leading to communication frames that similarly lack specificity and relevance to the broader population in the different sociopolitical context of the diaspora. In order to mobilize people socialized in this different context and to enhance transferability (Wada, 2012), new and different frames relevant to their experience and concerns will need to be drawn on. Thus, the messages on the wall cease to simply reproduce the discourse and claims found on the original wall, with these new claims a new wall emerges to better suit individual context. This may, in itself, not be a surprising conclusion; empirically, local variation is to be expected. This comparison of the walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan shows the value of an approach, such as that proposed by Wada, which is not based on a dichotomy between modular performance and non-modular performance, but rather argues for degrees of transferability.

Final Thoughts

We started our intellectual journey with Tilly's concept of modular performance in the context of contentious repertoires. In the preceding three sections, we have used cross-national empirical examples to highlight three aspects of protest walls, the wall as a performance of dissent, the wall as an expression of a lexicon of protest, and the wall as a single performance in multiple locations or as multiple performances. The analysis of these examples enables us to return to the theoretical underpinnings of the study including social semiotics in contentious politics as well as the transferability of modular performances. We posed the question *how* can *walls be understood to transcend their materiality in contentious politics?* This is a question that requires a more elaborated answer than can be provided here to ensure that every aspect of it has been given due weight. However, the approach that we have taken allows us to sketch the outlines of an answer.

We go step by step through this intellectual journey. Taking up Wada's (2012) challenge for cross-national analyses, we examined how protest walls across different sociopolitical contexts present commonalities in form, action,

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performance, and role in movement communication. At one level, there is little surprising there. However, our approach contributes to ongoing conversations about the diffusion of social movements, both national and transnational and the creation of symbolic objects in contentious politics. Weaving together the fields of social movements, contentious politics, communication, and spatial practice, we highlight how processes of mobilization and collective meaning making may come together to constitute modular performances. We have shown that protest walls do meet Tilly's requirements for a modular performance. Echoing Wada's (2012) position that identifying performances as either modular or not, in a dichotomous relationship, may not be sufficient. Wada's (2012) concept of degrees of transferability provides a way of comparing protest walls across time, space, cultures, and political systems. This allows for a more nuanced consideration of commonalities and differences than is possible using a strictly Tillian approach.

The text and images posted on protest walls are acts of socially engaged creativity, as Valjakka (2020) proposed. Protest art encourages mobilization (Patsiaouras et al., 2018; Williams, 2017), and its spatial practices and manifestations subvert traditional power relations of the specific location (Cheng and Chan, 2017). Thus, protest walls exist as a form of discursive democracy that highlights diverse cultural and historical repertoires and political legitimacy and identity (Veg, 2016; Whitworth and Li, 2023). Even as non-hierarchical, structureless communiques, these messages can connect to anyone (Chan et al., 2022) and serve as a medium for shared discursive emotional expressions and non-discursive affective intensities (Liao, 2022). In the digital era, protest materials can be replicated and disseminated on social media and transcend space-time limits. Protest walls are interfaces between physical and digital spaces, in some instances they are portals between countries, most importantly they are always connective (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

Our analytical tools for meaning-making, that is, social semiotics and framing tasks, facilitated interpretation of understandings that go beyond the immediate context. The use of framing enabled us to identify motivations that led to differences in messages on walls in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Even though, superficially, the walls in Taiwan purported to be in support of the protests in Hong Kong, the analysis showed how the motivations differed, indicating different relationships between those who wrote on the walls and their supporters as well as between the protesters and their opponents. The use of social semiotics enabled us to demonstrate the significance of a lexicon of protest, and the ways in which protesters can share a lexicon of protest with those from other cultures and at the same time use a lexicon of protest that may have different meanings in a different context. This approach led us to connect the literature on

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the significance of symbolic objects (Abrams and Gardner, 2023) with the transferability of modular performances (Wada, 2012).

Finally, we conclude that protest walls can become symbolic objects (Abrams and Gardner, 2023). As symbolic objects that exist at the nexus between place making and claim making, protest walls present a relationship between activists, their message, and their target that does not exist in other types of contentious performance, such as the march, or even other text-based performances such as the petition. As places protest walls manifest specific protest cultures and can hold the collective memories of people long after the wall may have been destroyed. As a contentious performance, protest walls are the product of multiple authors or creators, and we have used the concept of coauthorship to express this idea. Individuals make their contributions to the protest wall without necessarily engaging in acts of collaboration. At the same time, in most instances, these authors are anonymous; there was never any intention that they would claim ownership of their statements. In the petition, the intention is that the document stands in place of those who are signatories. They identify themselves as making a particular demand of an institution of power, within a political system that acknowledges the right to make such a demand. The anonymity of the protest wall facilitates a relationship between protesters and their target where the message itself stands in for the protesters. The ideas inherent in the messages posted, both text and image, exist in the absence of the bodies that created them. The messages themselves are subsumed into the meanings they convey, and these meanings, in turn, can be taken on by others, as imitation, as shown in the replication of post-it notes in Hong Kong, and as appropriation, for example, in the use of the raised fist. Protest walls may evolve and reappear in other contexts or even as digital archive preserving the messages of individuals and the claims of the collective in perpetuity. Protest walls not only transcend their materiality in contentious politics, but once created, they take on an identity of their own that can transmit claims across time and place.

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This Element is dedicated to all those in resistance.

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Cambridge Elements

Contentious Politics

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