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Generations, Styles, and Emotional Change. The Case of the Chilean Social Outburst. 2019

Generaciones, estilos y cambio emocional. El caso del Estallido Social chileno, 2019

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| Abstract: This article seeks to analyse and understand the emotional dimension of the banners, graffiti and slogans deployed in Chile during the Social Outbreak of 2019. In order to do so, I base my study on the debates and categories of the history of emotions, particularly the concept of "emotional style" coined by Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns. The main argument of this work is that the Social Outburst exposed the existence of a different emotional style from the existing one, as a distinctive element between generations. It is possible to perceive this emotional style in at least five elements that form part of its elemental features, which played a crucial role in how politics was conducted during the event.

Keywords: Social Outburst; History of Emotions; Emotional Styles; Chile.

| Resumen: El artículo busca analizar y comprender la dimensión emocional de las pancartas, grafitis y consignas desplegadas en Chile durante el Estallido Social de 2019. Para ello, baso mi estudio en los debates y categorías propias de la historia de las emociones, particularmente el concepto de "estilo emocional" acuñado por Peter Stearns y Carol Stearns. El argumento central de este trabajo es que el Estallido Social puso en evidencia la existencia de un estilo emocional diferente del existente, como elemento distintivo entre generaciones. Es posible percibir este estilo emocional, al menos, en cinco elementos que forman parte de sus rasgos elementales, y que tuvieron un rol crucial en la forma de hacer política durante dicho acontecimiento.

Palabras clave: Estallido Social; Historia de las emociones; Estilos Emocionales; Chile.

INTRODUCTION

Starting in October 2019, Chile experienced a series of protests and demonstrations that grew rapidly in terms of duration, radicalism, and massiveness. In just a few days, the so-called "Social Outburst" (*Estallido Social*) became the most relevant and deep political phenomenon in contemporary Chile after the end of the Military Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). The causes lay precisely in the economic and political legacy left by the Dictatorship, in particular the deepening of a privatization model of basic goods and social rights, as well as a drastic reduction of public spending resulting from it. Over the years, the neoliberal economic model amassed a gradual discomfort among Chileans that ended up being expressed in a sudden and massive way. Nowadays, after some historical distance from the mentioned event, we can surely argue that the Social Outburst marks a milestone in late Chilean political history (it has also led to a constituent process and placed a new generation in the presidency). Nevertheless, its relevance lies not only in its impact but also in what shows:

Mass media and public opinion were inclined to interpret the events in an emotional key, highlighting anger as the main emotion that characterised the protests and the protesters, and with utter reason. A survey carried out by psychologists and sociologists after two months since the protests began showed that half of the people claimed to feel angry due to the country's political circumstances.[1] Nevertheless, a closer look might bring a constellation of emotions that, altogether, are expressing more than a mere anecdotical feature of the protests, but a turning point in the "style" Chileans experience and practise their emotions.[2]

In the last decades, the history of emotions has been a flourishing field, which brought many insights to rethink historical processes, politics among them. Its contributions implied the formulation of useful debates and concepts that illuminates overlooked phenomenon. In 1985, Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns coined the concept "Emotionology", a neologism which can be interchangeable with "Emotional Style", which they defined as:

> the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains towards basic emotions and their appropriate expressions; ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct, e.g., courtship practices as expressing the valuation of affect in marriage, or personnel workshops as reflecting the valuation of anger in job relationships (Stearns and Stearns 1985, 1).

Based on this concept, my main argument is that the Chilean Social Outburst evidenced the existence of a new emotional style embodied in a younger generation

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1 "Enojo y entusiasmo: las emociones que más intensamente sintieron en Chile desde el estallido social". https://www.diariomayor.cl/ciencia-um/enojo-y-entusiasmo-las-emociones-que-mas-intensamente-sintieron-en-chile-tras-estallido-social.html (16 de febrero de 2023).

2 This statement also refutes those attempts to reduce the phenomenon into one single emotion. Such is the case of Ros Velasco y Moya Arriagada (2021).

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of students and sub-30 that pushed for and led to political changes in Chile since the 2000s. The emergence of this new emotional style headed by this generation did not imply the replacement of the previous style (embodied mostly in a generation that participated and experienced the dictatorship and the transition to democracy), but a coexistence -sometimes conflictive or less conflictive- between them. The Social Outburst does not represent the corollary of this change and not even less its beginning, but another milestone in an underlying process of emotional change.

To support this argument, I am mostly basing my analysis on the banners, graffiti, and slogans deployed during the Social Outburst, and collected by Raúl Molina Otárola in his remarkable book: *Hablan los muros. Grafitis de la Rebelión Social de octubre de 2019* (Molina Otárola 2020). This work is a significant contribution to taking account into the demands and especially the collective moods experienced by the population. Therefore, I put attention to the emotions expressed therein.

Although Peter and Carol Stearns's concept involves the assumption that the emotions expressed do not show emotions *per se* but the forms of expressions that were possible in a given society, on the contrary, I consider them as direct expressions of the emotional experience of those who participated. Using William Reddy's concept, these emotions can be conceived as *emotives* namely: the performative capacity that every emotion word has to alter the reality they refer to. In that regard, an *emotive* encompasses an attempt to translate inward feelings through cultural conventions in order to match the two (Reddy 1997).

Throughout this work, I will also be referring to emotions as something people experience and practice. Following Monique Scheer, emotions are not something we have, but something we also do. Quoting Antonio Damasio, Scheer insists: "I don't think sadness, I feel sadness", suggesting that emotional expressivity does not follow exclusively cognitivist patterns, but that there is a body involved, participating in and executing the emotion that is manifested through cultural practices (Scheer 2012). This theoretical approach will be even more useful to understand performance as a political practice.

Expressions of emotions were not only abundant in graffiti and banners but also organize a narrative of those who participated in the protest. One of the most relevant aspects of these expressed emotions refers to the gap between generations or differences in emotional style, as a clear acknowledgement of this change.

"I WAS BORN IN A DEMOCRACY. I DON'T WANT TO LIVE IN A DICTATORSHIP"[3]

In the last few decades, students became relevant political actors for political change in Chile. While the capacity for political agency and the impact was significantly re-

[3] I am also taking these subtitles from the graffiti of Molina Otárola's book.

duced for other social groups during the 80s and 90s (such as peasants, workers and *pobladores*), that of the students grew in quantity and content. Since 2001, this process began to be perceived and took place mostly outside formal institutions. Within 10 years, public opinion was able to clearly identify an active and relevant student movement in the Chilean political scene, after a series of protests and mass mobilizations led by them.

The rise of the students as a relevant social actor is due, in part, to the increase in school and university enrolment through access to private debt (bank debt due to the high fees) which had rapid and massive growth since the 90s. The same argument was claimed by Francesco Penaglia and Silvania Mejías: "When studying social conflict in post-dictatorial Chile, it is not surprising that the student movement has been a leading actor with a high level of mass marches, interventions, demands and popular support" (Penaglia and Mejías 2019, 11).

However, contrary to the country's auspicious macroeconomic numbers during the 1990s and 2000s, daily life in Chile was perceived as unsatisfactory. This was particularly conflictive since the promise of Democracy after the end of the Dictatorship in 1990 was that "the joy is coming". Many think tank reports, NGOs and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were warning about this (PNUD 2012). The subjective meaning of these conditions produced a limitation of social and labour expectations and an increase in hopelessness and distrust in the promise of a free market and meritocracy (Silva 2017, 82-83).

Although social exclusion was a situation shared by different social groups in the country, the singularity of the students lies in seeing politics as a way of channelling discontent, but also as a way of making amends. Unlike the previous generation which, as a result of the traumas of the dictatorship, opted for a depoliticization and avoidance of social conflict (Moulián 1997, 48-51), Chilean society was beginning a new cycle of politicization led by the students, whose hopes were not in the social ascent promised by the neoliberal market, but in the possibilities of changes in the country's economic and social conditions (Silva 2017, 93-94). This explains the most significant protest episodes (2006 and 2011), whose demands were aimed at the foundations of the Chilean economic model.

In these protests, a new political language and practices could already be warned, which were critical both of the social and economic conditions of the country, as well as of the forms and discourses that the past leftist and progressive political sectors used as a means of struggle. This new political language also entails a new emotional language, especially in the ways of experiencing and practising them.

When the Social Outburst took place (2019), many of the students who led the past protests were already working as young professionals, and the student political leaders in formal state positions, as one graffiti read: "The students of 2006 today we are professionals. We are back on the streets". Initially, it looked like just another cycle of protests like those that had gone before. However, it was more than that.

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In less than 48 hours, what seems an isolated protest against the rise of public transportation fees, suddenly and rapidly turned into a national-wide paralysation. Hundreds and then thousands of people erupted in the biggest Chilean cities to denounce their discomforts, using different ways. Through banners, graffiti and slogans, students –and then broad groups of society– expressed their motivations and demands for which they were protesting. These reasons pointed again to the economic and social conditions promoted by the neoliberal model. Nevertheless, the constant emotional translation of the political conflict was something striking after analysing public opinion and, of course, the demands: “It was not depression, it was capitalism”; “Are you happy?”; “Without social justice, there is no mental health”, were some of these slogans. Therefore, the conflict was not only analysed but felt; not only produced precarity but an emotional impact.

Over time, this way of expressing political motives and demands called the attention of those who also attended the protests, but who were part of an older generation, and consequently embodied other emotional styles, as shown by other slogans: “Thank you young people for shouting what your parents and I kept silent out of fear”; “Thank you brave youth”. But the referred generation also perceived these generational and emotional differences: “We are the generation that is not afraid”; “We are not the same as in ’73” (referring to the 1973 coup d’état); “The students will not let you sleep, as long as they do not let you dream”; “Sorry mum for leaving you worried, but today I am fighting so that when you retire you can be as happy as I have been thanks to you”.

Thus, the Social Outburst became a platform for encounter, dialogue and coexistence between different generations as the banners, graffiti and slogans showed, and although they had different ways of expressing and practising emotions, had in common their discomfort with the country’s social and economic conditions. According to this material, this new emotional style that burst onto the political scene has at least five aspects that distinguish them from the previous generation:

The first points to fear as an emotion that clearly defines this group, not by its presence but by its absence. The reference to a “generation without fear” was frequent, and referred mainly to the way of dealing with police repression. The police and military repression of the military dictatorship was still fresh in people’s historical memory, especially for those who consciously experienced it. And, after decades, the military was again used to contain public order, bringing back the most rooted fear of many Chileans.

Although young people and students also carry this memory, through a generational memory (or post-memory), it was not mediated by fear. This meant that the deterrent role of police repression had not the same effect and that protesters remained on the streets despite police violence which, in turn, made the protests last longer: “I am more afraid of retirement than of your bullets”; “They stole everything from us, even our fear”; “I am not afraid of dying, I am afraid of retiring”; “They stole everything, even my fear”.

Secondly, and as I already mentioned, a dominant emotion during the Social Outburst was rage, which was expressed through massive and sustained acts of violence throughout the country: looting, collapsing statues, and police confrontation, among other forms: “Let our rage be transformed into resistance”, claimed one of the banners. As Barbara Rosenwein eloquently describes, modern philosophers and politicians reframed anger, from one of the Deathly Sins to a righteous passion that comes from social injustices. In other words, rage became more and more allowed to denounce social inequalities (Rosenwein 2020, 120-121).

So, the Chilean case was no exception. Rage made evident the existence of inequality and deprivation, mainly in terms of access to basic social rights (health, education, housing, pensions, etc.), an aspect that also distinguished between social classes: “Not feeling rage is a privilege”. The massiveness of the protests (which attracted around 20% of the total population) generated a temporary legitimacy of anger expressed in violence in public opinion: “We are not violent, but we are outraged”; “Your anger is a gift”.

Despite the rage was experimented by many social groups and generations (and its different ways of enunciation, such as anger, fury, outrage, and so on) (Candina Polomer 2019, 56-57), the distinctive mark of this new emotional style refers to the intensity of rage. Looking at the members of the so-called *Primera Línea* (First Line or Frontline) of protesters is a clear example of this generational distinction, which was formed by students and young people, whose actions were driven by acute feelings of anger, practised through organised violence. While older generations share their malaise, they only practised its denunciation.

But this emotional style was not only reactive, since the slogans also communicate a sense of comradeship on the basis of common emotional experiences: “Your sorrow is my sorrow”; “Feeling makes us equal”. These references were also conceived as opposed to what we could call “neoliberal subjectivity”, which would be promoted by the social and economic dynamic of neoliberalism (Pavón-Cuéllar 2017). This way of being was depicted as one of the reasons that sustained the social inequalities: “Those who only have individual aspirations will never understand a collective struggle”; “Kill your ego, let’s fight together”, and “Your indifference is also violent”. The aim was to overcome individual identifications in favour of the formation of a political community in solidarity: “My only homeland: friendship, love, affection”.

However, this comradeship was selective, since its solidarity spectrum does not reach everyone, but “those at the lowest ground” as opposed to “those at the top”. The emotional style reproduced the inclusion-exclusion dynamic and deployed emotional and moral evaluations for those in dispute.

The fourth aspect refers to dignity. Although the Social Outburst produced many narratives, most of them coincided with the idea of dignity: “Your privileges would give us dignified treatment”. The protests put the idea of dignity at the centre as an aspiration that organized political action: “Until dignity becomes a habit” was a much-repeated slogan. Dignified health, dignified housing or dignified education were

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the parts of a dignified life to which people aspired, and its centrality was such that the protesters renamed the meeting point as "Plaza Dignidad" (Dignity Square).

As Ute Frevert argues, both honour and dignity particularly arise and react from experiences signified as humiliating, therefore the discourse around dignity gained significance to encourage respect for the human condition (Frevert 2020, 31-38). So, the constant enunciation during the Social Outburst reflects how people signified living under these social and economic conditions. While the macroeconomic statistics may have been encouraging for the country, it is crucial to understand and engage with the way in which meaning is given to these conditions, and emotions play an important role in this.

"WE ARE NOT HYSTERICAL, BUT HISTORICAL"

The fifth feature of this emotional style does not point out a single emotion, but the way people managed their emotions. This management or emotional agency is striking since it implies two assumptions. First, the emotional impact that has to live under certain structural conditions –something we already mentioned; and second, having management over that impact is one of the ways to fight back against those structural conditions. In doing so, emotions and bodies became political tools.

One example of the emotional agency was the emphasis on therapy as a way to modify mental health. This reinforces the idea that mental health is closely attached to economic and social conditions, and therefore its access was seen as a needful social right: "Let's normalize going to the psychologist", and in a humorous way: "I am struggling for my boyfriend's 'ex' to have the right to mental health". These slogans responded to the significance of neoliberal life as a life leading to depression, humiliation and rage, as noted above.

But with regard to emotional management, the feminist movement deserves a special mention in the Social Outburst context. A month after the protest began, the feminist collective from Valparaiso called *Las Tesis*, stepped into the public arena with a performance called *Un violador en tu camino* ("A rapist in your path"). Based on the work of Rita Segato, Silvia Federici and other renowned contemporary feminist theorists, the performance denounced the engendered violence against women and LGTBQ+ in its individual (the men) and a collective form (the State). Within a few days, the performance had spread across the country, and within weeks, it was being performed in more than 50 countries and translated into 15 languages.

In this regard, and following once again Monique Scheers' argumentation, performance was used not only to denounce gender inequalities but also as a way to "mobilize" emotions of whom execute the performance. "And the fault it wasn't mine, not where I went or how I was dressed" preached one of the sentences of the performance. Many of whom participated in this performance claimed to feel relieved and freed from guilty feelings and rage generated by the experience of sexual aggression. The

performance was played as a ritual to bring back that experience to the body, but to take the unwanted emotions away. Many of them burst into tears and hug each other after the performance, which confirms its emotional impact.

The collective execution of the performance, reinforces the systematic element of sexual transgression, offering shelter to those who denounce through the performance. In other words, there is not just one person doing the performance, but a huge number of women. And the fact that the performance had spread all over the world insisted even more on it. "Because we women can continue walking without fear," said one of the slogans in Santiago. This collective dimension involves a woman comradeship, or "sorority", as a way to support each other: "Self-care is rebellion"; "The state rapes, friends care".

"WE SHALL OVERCOME, AND IT WILL BE BEAUTIFUL"

As historians, the key question here is why did a generation choose to transform an emotional style rather than reproduce it? Or, in other words, what are the elements that make this change in emotional style possible? In my opinion, the central factor that explains this change refers to the experience of two different political regimes: dictatorship (1973-1990) and democracy (1990-present), particularly in terms of their political and economic aspects.

Using the argument of fighting the threat of communism, the military dictatorship restricted civil and political liberties, it also developed a systematic and massive repressive policy of disappearances, assassinations, torture and setting up hundreds of concentration camps throughout the country. This, together with the control of the media and public attacks, made possible that the dictatorship carried out a "policy of terror", in the words of Freddy Timmermann (Timmermann 2015), which had a significant impact on the emotional significance of the political conflict in Chile. In other words, political conflict could cost lives, hence conciliation and mediation became an integral part of the emotional style of the generation that experienced the dictatorship.

At the same time, the economic policy of the dictatorship was abrupt and profound. From the 1980s onwards, the dictatorship implemented measures promoted by economists such as Milton Friedman and his Chilean disciples (the so-called "Chicago Boys" in reference to the University of Chicago, where they were formed). These resulted in a drastic reduction of public spending, the deindustrialization of the country and the wide-opening of the Chilean market, which was radically opposed to the previous model in Chile and in many other countries (Klein 2007). It would now be the private enterprise that would give Chileans access to basic social rights (education, health, pensions, among others), no longer the state.

Among many historians, the term "post-dictatorship" is commonly used to highlight the elements of continuity of the dictatorship once it formally ended, particularly in reference to the repression of left-wing groups, Pinochet's continuation as

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general-in-chief of the army, and the deepening privatization of economic sectors. Despite the accuracy of these assessments, the policy of repression and terror was significantly less. This element, together with institutional factors (democratization of institutions, civilian governments, economic stability), created favourable conditions for the development of a different emotional style compared to the generation that directly experienced the dictatorship. In this way, it is possible to draw a continuity between institutional conditions and their impact on emotional styles in contemporary Chile. The shaping of this emotional style is not pre-existent to that generation or a later consequence of it, but a process that developed as a constituent part of the experience of a generation in a democracy that took shape when the dictatorship ended.

It is not yet possible to know whether this process is still being nurtured, or whether current political conditions could give rise to a different style. What we do know is that the Social Outburst made this change in the emotional style of a social group of the country more visible to the researcher, a group that pushed for and played a leading role in the most significant political and social changes of the last 30 years.

"This revolution gave me back the will to live, I am not joking".

FINAL WORDS

These five emotional aspects: fear, rage, comradeship, dignity, and emotional management are showing the features of what we called as a new emotional style in Chile, which in turn is a distinctive mark between generations. This distinction was something older generations already perceived, even before the Social Outburst began, and of course, became clearer as the banners, graffiti and slogans claimed. The significance of this emotional changing process lies in identifying an emotional style developed by a generation that, instead of reproducing or continuing the emotional style of their parents, chose to change it.

The emergence of this emotional style was not something isolated but had an impact on the political arena, which invites us to think about how emotions and politics are mutually related. After analysing political language in different circumstances and places, it has been my conviction that the emotional dimension of political language is not anecdotal or derivate, but an integral or constituent part of political language, without which we would have only a limited understanding of it. In other words, this emotional language is one of the ways politics is formed.

The banners, graffiti, and slogans deployed during the Social Outburst in Chile clearly show the relevance of emotional language to expressing their motivations and aspirations. Talking about politics using an emotional key, made politics something familiar, something in which everybody could participate using their own emotions. So, emotions are important in doing participatory politics possible. Politics is felt, and it is through emotions that people became part of politics.

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