

depth analysis of Simmel's scholarly contributions, this book endeavors to construct a new theoretical perspective, redefining Simmel's position in the history of sociology

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**Vázquez, J. (Coord.), *Emociones, poder y conflicto. Perspectivas teóricas, género, resistencias y políticas de Estado*, México: IBERO/UAM/Universidad del Rosario, 2023, p. 340.**

Reading a work like the one I will discuss in this review<sup>1</sup> is always both a challenge and a pleasure, especially because it was crafted by various brilliant hands, minds, and hearts. This book was coordinated by Juan Pablo Vázquez Gutiérrez and edited by Universidad Iberoamericana and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, both in Mexico City, along with Universidad del Rosario (Bogotá, Colombia).

This compilation features contributions from eleven colleagues, some of whom provide an introduction that serves as a broad corridor leading us into the theoretical frameworks that form the backbone of the book. In its twelve chapters, which cover a range of highly suggestive and diverse topics, there converges a single objective: to analyze the intricate interweaving among the categories that make up the title of the work: *Emociones, poder y conflicto. Perspectivas teóricas, género, resistencias y políticas de Estado*.

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation was done by Iván Alejandro Aguilar Aldaz, Anthropology student at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, Mexico.

Without delving deeply into a dense description of each chapter, or spoiling the enjoyment each reader should experience on their own, I will generally share some points that resonated with me as I navigated through the chapters of this work. The task I was given, which I gladly accepted, to comment and now review this book, was to focus on what challenged me or related to my areas of study, centered on the intersection of religion, women, and sexogenaric dissidences.

I'll start with the book's cover, titled "Cloud." The illustration was crafted by Ixshel Morales González. This is a fuchsia cloud, with lilac tones and some whites –what clues does this fuchsia cloud give us? –It's no small matter that in this book, out of the eleven people writing, eight are women, reflecting that in the study of emotions, we are mostly women, both yesterday and today–. Just to leave a note, at last year's 2023 meeting of the Research Network on Emotions and Affects from the Social Sciences and Humanities (RENISCE), the coordinators, along with a large team, voiced by Victoria Rojas, pointed out that of the collections published from 2014 to 2023, of the 105 chapters, 74 were written by women and 31 by men. This could lead to many readings which, due to the length of this text, I cannot delve into here, but I wanted at least to lay it on the table as one of those urgent reflections to think about in terms of gender the themes addressed in the affective interlace.

This fuchsia cloud also heralds that current discussions on power cannot be understood without the reassessments proposed by feminisms and queer theory. Like the importance of understanding it through the symbolizations about sexed bodies and the identity constructions that transcend gender binarism – in my view, this is crucial to understanding, now, issues such as what in a *culto cuir* (queer cult) I attended a few months ago, they called "dissident emotions," mobilized by uncomfortable bodies such as those of LGBTQ+ people.

In this regard, the definition of power has broadened, diversified, and shifted towards forms not only of domination and control from

high hierarchies, but as a form of articulation (power to) of social movements, resistances, care and solidarity networks, executed through the practice-language-practice, through notions such as embodiment, sisterhood, discomfort, rage, among others that form part of the political language of feminist struggles and that shape the fuchsia cloud marking the movement of the book.

A cloud, according to the Real Academia Española, is the “aggregation or very large amount of something that travels through the air.” This cloud moves, changes shape, and precipitates, depending on the meteorological conditions. Power could function like this cloud that we cannot always touch but that materializes through networks of relationships and their symbolizations. That is, power is exercised, mobilized. And for such exercise to be possible, hierarchies, positions, statuses are established, and played out in fields characterized by different capitals such as cultural, social, economic, among others, that are historically determined, making the exercise of power something flexible and dynamic. In this sense, the basis on which the people who write in the book stand is “the multidimensional and polysemic nature of the concept of power” (p. 10), regardless of the nuance we give it.

Another central point of the book is to make clear that power and the emotional/affective dimension cannot be dissociated. There is a mutual influence relationship that allows identifying processes both at the micro and macro-social level. Following the approach of authors such as Spinoza, Elias, Simmel, among others, the perspective that crosses the book is that emotions have a relational character, they do not occur only in individual isolation but are constructed, nurtured, reproduced, and circulate within the framework of the collective. As the authors point out, they can be assumed as “structurant elements of social life”, while analyzing their “specific configurations as differentiated emotional worlds” (p. 11); hence the importance of historicizing and, as anthropologists would say, context.

In this sense, this publication is a significant contribution for those who wish to continue delving into the study of emotions. It opens new avenues of exploration to reconnect with classic social theory, read through the emotional lens, as done by Juan Pablo Vázquez Gutiérrez when revisiting the proposals of authors like Durkheim and Bourdieu, making evident that the emotive factor in the analysis of the ritual and the social effervescence of the former, forms part of the production of the sacred and how the religious feeling produces society within frames of power relations. In Bourdieu, the emotional dimension in his analysis is understood from his notion of *illusio* as belief in the social game and at the same time adaptation to the rules of that game. This encompasses the agents' interests, their desires, the social libido oriented towards different movements and social changes. Adriana García Andrade, by retaking Randall Collins' proposal, analyzes how the interaction ritual not only reinforces the sense of belonging or a unified identity but also explicates power relations and social stratifications among its participants, disputing capitals such as cultural, with the purpose of establishing which/who is more valuable. It is in this way that "being included in a ritual does not automatically generate high levels of emotional energy and trust. Each group, each ritual provides different levels of emotional energy according to 'the power of the group' relative to others" (p.126).

On his behalf, Enrique Gutiérrez Márquez, by recovering the letters Gramsci wrote to his mother while he was in prison, accounts for how this Italian Marxist thinker not only shaped his theoretical stance on power and hegemony but also his political position regarding the life and future of modern societies. The book proposes creative approaches to understanding social reality, power, and emotions in their linkage with different contemporary social problems and phenomena through a review of symbols and social movements of yesterday and today, as done by Edith Kuri Pineda and Marisol López Menéndez, in their respective chapters. A common bridge is to point out that emotions are indispensable in the gestation and unfolding of resistance, where religious and

secular symbols are articulated to give meaning to struggles, for example, by recovering illustrious figures from history like Lucio Cabañas, to legitimize current social demands and mobilizations of students and peasants. Hope, utopia, solidarity, as well as anger, shame, and grievance provoke various actions aimed at achieving an end that in different ways question, both implicitly and explicitly, the rules of feeling as discussed by Hochschild and the deep-seated sense of obedience rooted in society. These rules of feeling are embodied through corporal conditioning in bodies of male dancers and female boxers, as Daniela Sánchez López accounts in her text.

Thus, just as when the density of the cloud is such that we experience rain, power also precipitates, splashes, and has its implications on bodies, space, and territories; it unfolds through myths that reinforce gender roles and justify violence against women, as shown by Gabriela Alejandra López Miranda in her work with mazahuan women. Also through notions such as citizenship, a question that José Omar Pérez Baños exposes by revisiting the work of Norbert Elias, focusing on soundscapes through the analysis of national anthems and the "tensions that embody between political intentions and artistic criteria, dispositions of self-control and emotional links in communities framed by a state apparatus and its aspiration to a unified culture" (p. 336). Another chapter where we can analyze these paradoxes is that of Fernanda Vazquez Vela, in her text on the Sikh community-State conflict in India, where the smell of blood, the product of a massacre in a sacred place, reminds us that the sacred and the profane are not pure states, as Mircea Eliade (1983)<sup>1</sup> would say, and leads us to think about the Agambenian notion of "bare life," which establishes hierarchies of existence between those who belong to a nation and those considered pariahs.

In the context of these conflictive relationships, we can also rethink the notion of person and, particularly, that of a gendered recognized person. This in itself is conflictive because we have thought of power in its linkage with a binary gender notion that

constructs and establishes how the corporeal-emotional-affective should be/act/transmit.

All of this portrays the ways in which we apprehend, reproduce and also contest the social world. This would be what Bourdieu called *habitus*, which Roberta Priscila Cedillo Hernández revisits from a critical perspective, to show how domination can be established without necessarily being overtly coercive, as there are certain dispositions and regularities that guide the desires to be part of the game, the *illuso colectiva*—the socialization—where aspirations and hopes, the *libido*, are played out. Thus, emotions are positioned as an indispensable element of gender relations, which are fundamentally relations of power, as established by Joan Scott.<sup>2</sup>

This brings me to think about the National Front for the Family (FNF) in Mexico, a conservative organization rooted in Catholic tradition, anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-abortion, which has taken to the streets to shout "God created male and female," "biology vs. ideology." The FNF positions itself as a revolutionary and counter-cultural organization, defending social values against what they term "anti-natural unions" and "the gay evil," propagated by the gender ideology—a term concocted from the Catholic hierarchy as a political strategy aimed at "defeating" what they identify as "their enemy": feminism, LGBTQ+ diversities, and communism, since these are seen as threats to "the true family."

But enemies are also defined and constructed through scent. I found it particularly intriguing to read about this aspect from Olga Sabido. Her chapter included in this book allowed me to recognize another dimension of the phenomenon I study—the construction/definition of the "enemy" or "the gay plague," as some religious conservatives also label it. The author emphasizes that "the figure of the enemy is necessary because it fulfills a social function: if it does not exist, it is invented and cultivated as an object of hatred" (p. 82), whose purpose is the preservation of the group against perceived threats. Therefore, "the relevance of these types of social figures lies in their ability to unify the groups" (p. 59).

Sabido revisits the relational perspective of Simmel and Sara Ahmed's category of "affective economy," which analyzes emotions in circulation. Here we see the Marxist influence on Ahmed's thinking, an analogy to the circulation of money and material goods, which are consumed and exchanged for other goods, defining who belongs to one group or another, their status, and social identity.

Thus, there is an "exchange of affects" closely linked to the political realm, where, as the author states, bodies affect and are affected. This places Sabido's analysis at the intersection of the affective and the sensory turn. Hatred, she explains, is not the origin of conflicts but is nurtured by conflictive relationships that "require and cultivate" it. The "affective economies" of hatred, as forms of relation, "contribute to crafting a negative image of the other as an enemy," through which mechanisms of inculcation and learning of hatred range from songs, jokes, and propaganda to bodily techniques and the use of specific artifacts. All this fosters a certain type of relationship with "the others," influencing how their actions are evaluated and even determining the habitable spaces for certain people and the way these spaces can be inhabited. As Nussbaum (2006)<sup>3</sup> points out, disgust serves a moralizing role, reinforcing dichotomies such as good/evil, clean/dirty, fair/unfair, inside/outside, moral/immoral, normal/abnormal, legality/illegality, pure/impure, among other relationships whose dynamics are wrapped in conflict.

From the Simmelian perspective, conflict is not necessarily seen as something negative, it is a form of engagement with others, through which affects are exchanged (p.58). In conflict, norms and rules are established, even within a framework of confrontation. In this regard, the enemy is not a person but a form of relationship. It is not foreign to us—in fact, it can be someone who was once close or beloved. What happens when we ourselves become the enemy?—, but rather what we seek to differentiate ourselves from and defend against because it threatens our cultural and moral

frames of understanding. I find Olga Sabido's analysis of "olfactory prejudices," as she terms them, particularly compelling at this point, with the intention of capturing the emo-sensorial dimension of conflict through examples drawn from literature produced from socio-historical approaches to smells.

Olga Sabido shows us in her chapter how language is intertwined with emotions through speech acts; meaning it does not only remain on the abstract but is embodied, affecting bodies that affect. She refers to a 2018 New York Times article citing anonymous sources that claimed Donald Trump, during his presidency of the United States, had expressed in a cabinet meeting that entry should not be permitted to people from "shithole countries." Saying "shithole countries," Sabido notes, "implies affixing disgusting matter to certain bodies and thereby justifying a distance from the proximity of these bodies due to their stench and displeasure" (p.67). She also highlights how during the conquest, documents recorded the disgust felt by Spanish conquerors upon arriving in Mexico or the revulsion felt by indigenous people from the smell of "rotten" gunpowder. The author retrieves Werner's study on the representation of Osama Bin Laden's face printed on toilet paper, another scatological analogy to define the enemy-terrorist. In the same vein, she mentions the bodily techniques developed by soldiers to not interfere with the "natural" body odor using colognes, cigarettes, deodorants, or even avoiding defecation, to not be identified by "the enemy." Thus, odors play a part in the political dispute over governance as noted by the author.

Sabido also notes, following Simmel, that where there is domination, the dominated can turn the tables and exert power, often using the same means as the dominators, such as "puputov cocktails"—feces bombs—during protests against Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, which were accompanied by phrases of love towards children, the future, and political prisoners (p.75). Paraphrasing Begoña Aretxaga (2005)<sup>4</sup>, even when bodies-people seem stripped or reduced to "bare life"—Aretxaga challenges this Agambenian proposal by noting that there will always be mobilization—they are



not completely defenseless, and that is when the body, its fluids, and excretions serve as a defense. Thus, "affective states such as hatred and disgust intertwine in the form of protest" (Sabido, 2023, p.75). While some aim to confine communities to sewers where rights and life are stained, clogged, or obstructed, others transform these violences into fertilizer, reversing and transgressing them as a political form of existence, as seen in the feminist movement, the LGBTQ+ community, Muslim believers in Europe and the United States, and migrants among others.

To conclude, I return to the metaphor of the cloud. A cloud allows us to gauge the climate; for our purposes, a political and social climate. It alerts us when a clear day is ahead or a storm is approaching, though after the storm, it always clears up, as the song goes. I hope that the clouds that approach continue to be fuchsia-violet, accompanied by a rainbow; only then will power cease to be an exercise in control and oppression, and become a path to complete and radical liberation. This book points us towards these paths. I invite you to read it.

## References

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