



Towards an emotional electoral geography: The performativity of emotions in electoral campaigning in Ecuador



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 July 2012

Received in revised form 29 April 2013

Available online 13 July 2013

Keywords:

Electoral geography

Populism

Emotions

Performativity

Visual ethnography

Ecuador

ABSTRACT

Building on feminist geopolitics and emotional geography, this paper calls for an emotional electoral geography that understands electoral practices as grounded, embodied and intertwined with the time-spatial context in which electioneering takes 'place'. I argue that a performative understanding of emotions not only facilitates linking emotions to certain places, histories and (collective) bodies, but also helps to think of emotions as expressed both through body and speech acts. Empirically, the paper draws on visual ethnographic fieldwork of a local electoral campaign in an Amazon town in Ecuador. The observed emotional performances of female and indigenous local politicians are compared with the emotional performances of national populists who are mainly mestizo men and have dominated Ecuadorian politics throughout the past decades. The research identifies similar emotional patterns turning around a Manichean rhetoric of *rabia* (rage) and *amor* (love). The comparison shows, however, that the emotional performances of different candidates performatively generate the gendered, racialized and classed boundaries of *el pueblo* in different ways in particular times and places. The empirical case study illustrates the claim that electoral geographies need to be more attentive to the emotional dimension of electoral spaces to understand the affective dimension of contemporary populist politics.

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1. Bringing emotions into electoral geography

*'Que se vayan, que se vayan todos'*¹

[throw them all out] (protest chant, protest against the government of president Lucio Gutiérrez in Quito, 13 April 2005).

Participating with my fellow students in the protests against the Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutiérrez (President between 2003–2005) in April 2005, chanting *'que se vayan todos'* and raising my hand rhythmically with the other protesters, it was the first time that I experienced the emotions² of Ecuadorian politics with my own body. While I was moved by the emotions present in these protests, which resulted in the overthrow of the populist President Lucio Gutiérrez, it was not until conducting fieldwork in the 2009

electoral campaign that I started to think more systematically about the role of emotions in the constitution of political spaces. Accompanying female, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian candidates in their local campaign, I was interested in the extent to which the emotional campaign performances of these new political subjects³ reproduce or challenge populist campaign practices.

Populism has dominated the political scenario in Ecuador in its different guises as classic populism (1940s–1970s), neoliberal populism (1990s) and radical left-wing populism (since 2007) during the last decades (de la Torre, 2010a). Between 1997 and 2005, however, several populist presidents were forced to leave office before completing their terms through popular protests (de la Torre and Conaghan, 2009). During this decade of political instability, new political subjects emerged that had gained access to electoral politics as a consequence of social movement protests during the 1980s and 1990s (see Radcliffe, 2008; Van Cott, 2008; Walsh and

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¹ To problematize the political act of speaking for/with others (e.g. Alcoff, 1991), I make my agency as a translating geographer visible by using a 'translation which keeps words in the source language as a visual marker of indeterminacy' (Müller, 2007: 212).

² While recent discussions in human geography differentiate between affect and emotion (see Pile, 2010; Thien, 2005), I follow Ahmed's (2004b: 39) argument here that 'even seeming direct responses actually evoke past histories, and that this process bypasses consciousness, through bodily memories. So sensations may not be about conscious recognition, but this does not mean they are "direct" in the sense of immediate. Further, emotions clearly involve sensations: this analytic distinction between affect and emotion risks cutting emotions off from the lived experiences of being and having a body'.

³ I differentiate here between new and populist political subjects. The term 'new political subjects' refers to women, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people who have been excluded from formal citizenship since colonial times. While these social groups have a long history of political struggle in Ecuador, they have appeared in institutionalized politics only recently in more significant numbers. The term new political subjects results from their participation in 'new social movements' through which they have fought for their political rights. Populist politicians are considered those politicians who have dominated the political scene during the past decades. The distinction between new and populist political subjects is made by the different political subjects themselves and is taken up here for analytical purposes.

García, 2002). The (post-)colonial patriarchal, mono-ethnic and especially populist political system was a central target of protests by ethnic and women's movements. One outcome of these protests is the indigenous party Pachakutik, which was founded in 1996 (Sánchez-Parga, 2007). Another is the successful implementation of a gender quota law in 1997 (Cañete, 2004; Vega Ugalde, 2005). Emerging at a time of political crisis, these new political subjects distanced themselves clearly from former – mainly male and mestizo (a 'mixed' person from indigenous and European antecedents) – populist politicians, while emphasizing that they were the true representatives of *el pueblo*. The following empirical analysis asks to what extent the new political subjects reproduce the emotional patterns of populist campaigns. Focusing on the production of affective political communities, the paper investigates how the emotional performances of populist and new political subjects include or exclude certain bodies in their political community. How are political antagonisms constructed through the emotional campaign performances of these two groups of political subjects that align certain emotions with differently racialized, gendered and classed bodies?

The paper argues that electoral geographies have to take emotions seriously in order to understand electoral dynamics in general and the dominance of populist campaigns in Latin America in particular. So far, however, emotional geographies have been oriented 'more towards social, cultural and environmental dimensions, than mapping out the political geographies of emotion' (Pain et al., 2010: 973). The different subfields of political geography have engaged to different extents with issues of emotion. Recently, feminist geopolitics has made important inroads in studying the emotional dimension of geopolitical events and processes (Fluri, 2011; Koopman, 2011; Pain, 2009, 2010; Sharp, 2011; Smith, 2011). While feminist political geographers have long questioned prevalent dichotomies about formal/informal politics, public/private spaces and the characterization of these spaces as rational/emotional and masculine/feminine (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Staeheli, 1996; Staeheli et al., 2004; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2004), they have not yet paid attention to the emotional dimension of institutionalized politics. One reason for this can be found in feminist political geographers' endeavor to open up the narrow, masculinist, and state-centered perspective of mainstream political geography (see e.g. Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2004; Staeheli et al., 2004). In their attempt to refocus attention on diverse political settings beyond the state, such as social movement politics (Conway, 2008; Gruszczynska, 2009) or politics of care (England, 2003; Pratt, 2004), institutionalized politics and related issues such as elections and campaigning have remained on the margins of feminist political geography.

At the same time, in electoral geography 'atheoretical, quantitative and positivist approaches' (Cupples, 2009: 111) dominate and have increasingly become the subject of critique (Agnew, 1990; Johnston and Pattie, 2004; Warf and Leib, 2011). While there have been important contributions to electoral geography from a feminist perspective (e.g. Nelson, 2006; Secor, 2004; Staeheli, 2004), the role of emotions in the constitution of electoral spaces has not been taken into account in this field. Following a feminist political agenda that calls for the need to embody, locate and ground political action (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001, 2004), this paper aims to develop an emotional electoral geography that asks how emotions are expressed and evoked in electoral campaigns. It thus calls for refocusing attention on institutionalized politics as one of many sites of political struggles where political communities are generated through emotional performances.

Finally, my endeavor to develop what I call an emotional electoral geography also builds on work in political science which has shown that 'emotions play an explicit and central role in bonding citizens, party, party platform, and elected officials' (Marcus, 2002: 37). In his attempt to explain the Bush administration's coalition, political scientist Connolly (2005: 870) argues that 'in poli-

tics [...] loosely associated elements [such as affect, spirituality, and economic interests] fold, bend, blend, emulsify, and dissolve into each other, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation'. Taking Connolly's argument as a starting point, this paper engages with the emotional and spiritual dimensions of electoral campaigning. While political scientists have explored the emotional dimensions of campaign advertising (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995), campaign speeches (Hampton, 2009), campaign events (Van Zoonen, 2005), and canvassing (Goldstein and Holleque, 2010), their experimental or neuropsychological studies have been mainly concerned with the impact of candidates' emotional performances on electoral results (see e.g. Marcus et al., 2000, 2006; Marcus and Mackuen, 1993). This paper contributes to this body of literature by developing a methodological framework that combines (visual) ethnography with qualitative interviews to capture the emotional dimension of electoral spaces. Focusing on the way emotional campaign practices performatively generate political communities, the paper opens the black boxes still present in electoral studies that often treat political subjectivities and collectivities as pre-given entities.

2. The performativity of emotions in political speech

Electoral campaigns are grounded in antagonistic relations between different political candidates who claim to represent certain political communities. Emotions play a crucial role in building a relationship between a collective of constituents and electoral candidates as well as in generating a sense of community among supporters. Work in political geography and geopolitics has highlighted that the formation of political identities is based on often highly emotional Othering that create antagonistic relations between an 'us' and 'them' (Laketa, 2013; Müller, 2009; Reuber and Wolkersdorfer, 2002; Smith, 2012). Ahmed (2004b: 10) states that 'emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others'. In this vein, she turns emotions from being side effects of identity formation processes into the central element that produce political identities. Ahmed's notion of the performativity of emotion contributes to further conceptualizing these emotionalized Othering processes in political spaces. It helps to analyze how 'emotions work to secure [political] collectives' and how political antagonisms are constructed by aligning 'some subjects with some others and against some others' (Ahmed, 2004a: 25). Ahmed draws on Judith Butler's notion of performativity to make her claim that 'emotions do things, and work to align individuals with collectives' (Ahmed, 2004a: 26). For Butler (1993: xviii), performativity is about the 'power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration'. Hence, '[p]erformativity is not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm' (Butler, 1993: xxi). Butler (2010: 147) further points out that for a performative speech act to be felicitous in the sense that it brings about action, certain conditions need to be in place. A performative speech act can only 'succeed' if it repeats a coded or iterable utterance (Butler, 2010).

Butler's (2004: 198) argument that subjects (and collectives) are performatively constituted through iterative speech and body acts is crucial to understanding Ahmed's (2004b: 92) discussion about the stickiness of emotions. For Ahmed, it is the repetition of signs – the stickiness of the sign to an object – that allows others to be attributed with emotional value. To understand emotions as performative means then that emotions 'both repeat past associations as well as generate their object' (Ahmed, 2004a: 32). In the

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