CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Force of Emotions

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We write this introduction after almost three months of preventive isolation in Bogota, Colombia, with no end in sight. On March 23, 2020, the nation’s president, Iván Duque, announced that, like so many of the nations of the world, quarantine and lockdown measures requiring all citizens to remain at home and avoid physical contact were to be implemented by both the national and local governments to avoid the spread of Coronavirus. While he, understandably, used his speech to detail how our physical existences would have to change and adjust during these unprecedented times, Duque also emphasized that we had to learn to express our emotions in a different way than we usually did. And, with this, he officially enlisted the
Colombia’s population in a global *emotional regime* (Reddy, 2001) marked by social distancing as well as feelings of anxiety, distrust of others (because we do not know who is infected or not, who is following the rules or not, etc.), solidarity with health care practitioners and a sense of connection with the poorest sectors of the population. Mere days earlier, on March 19, 2020, the President of Chile, Sebastián Piñera, officially declared a Catastrophic State of Emergency (*Estado Excepcional de Catástrofe*), with which the country became officially part of this emotional climate of worldwide uncertainty and a member of the global emotional regime.

While various measures were implemented to varying degrees in different states at the same time as they were imposed in Colombia, the United States of America, and specifically President Donald Trump, continues to underestimate (or outright deny) the gravity of the situation. Despite very *emotionally forceful* (Rosaldo, 1984) arguments from epidemiologists, public health officials, health care workers, and members of the opposition party, he refuses to enact national measures against the pandemic, instead leaving each individual state to envisage and put in place the policies and strategies they consider adequate. These uneven measures combine with the hyper-partisan political climate and overall fatigue with the virus to generate other emotions, such as anger, indignation, fear, and sadness, and both sustain and expand the global emotional regime just outlined.

It is within this global context, that we, the authors and editors of this volume—all of whom are citizens of the three aforementioned countries—finished writing our contributions for this book. Put differently, we concluded our writings in the context of a shared global emotional regime that highlights the main theoretical assumption of this book, namely that emotions are unavoidable, socially constructed, and politically meaningful and, as such, they constitute a highly influential part of our social existence. Allow us to elaborate.

In order to make a lasting impression and affect their citizenry, the presidential declarations in these different countries must resonate with both the collective’s and everyday individuals’ emotional lives. This is because political appeals and socially binding laws are only successful when they are made in communities that share the same emotional repertoires (Reddy, 2001; Rosenwein, 2002); emotional repertoires that traverse common values, beliefs, and goals. For this reason, we (and all the authors

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1Because of its system of government, in the United States it is likely illegal and impractical to impose a *national* lockdown as they are doing in Latin American nations.
of the chapters that comprise this volume) insist that emotions do not live “inside” the subject—they are not private states of mind that only live or occur in the brain. To the contrary, they are enacted and acted-upon forces that convey and constitute social meanings; they are intersubjective in nature and should be understood as public phenomena rather than internal states of mind.

In addition to rejecting the common belief that emotions are private, internal, states of mind, we reject the idea that emotions are “irrational moments” that happen to people when they “lose their minds”—as if they constituted exceptions to a state of permanent and “normal” rationality. To the contrary, we note that, in addition to their social elements, emotions have cognitive aspects that inform and are informed by values embedded in social practices. In this way, the book builds on the theoretical legacy of approaches to emotion in both the social sciences and humanities, a legacy that recognizes their unavoidable social and historical character.

In light of the above, the chapters in this collection utilize a methodology that investigates emotions as they develop, embed, and express themselves in specific, concrete practices, valuations, and patterns of action in multiple contexts in the Americas, including Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and the United States. In particular, Incarnating Feelings, Constructing Communities: Experiencing Emotions in the Americas Through Education, Violence, and Public Policy in the Americas attempts to show the social life, development, expression, and consequences of emotions in different cultural practices throughout the continent. Its chapters explore how distinct subjects (children, migrants, indigenous peoples, soldiers, and victims of violence and displacement) feel, act, establish and alter communities, and take political stances within their specific social contexts. All of the chapters discuss research conducted in different countries of the Americas in ways that illuminate how emotions both necessarily motivate and challenge social inequality, violence, and political change throughout the region.

1 **Organization of the Book**

The philosophers and anthropologists who have contributed to this collection focus on achieving the above by understanding both how emotions are lived and how they produce meaning in contexts of violence, education, and enforcement of public policy. To that end, the volume is divided into three parts focusing on precisely these themes—emotions
related to violence, education, and public policy throughout South America and the United States. The first part, “Emotional Communities in Contexts of Violence,” consists of two chapters—one by anthropologist Myriam Jimeno and the second by anthropologist Ana María Forero Angel and philosopher Catalina González Quintero—examining emotions that arise out of different social practices in contexts of violence in Colombia. In the first chapter of this part (Chap. 2), “The Emotional Turn in Colombian Experiences of Violence,” Jimeno offers a state-of-the-art summary of different perspectives that promoted and centered the study of the emotions in the social and natural sciences. Specifically, after describing the main characteristics and consequences of the so-called emotional turn, she argues that recent work in both neuro-science and the social sciences questions the classical dichotomies between body and soul, reason and emotion, cognition and feeling, materiality and immateriality, and biological and social determinations, which has been enriched and supported by experimental research, observation, and analysis of collective practices, cultural meanings, historical processes, and social structures. After offering a general overview of the emotional turn, Jimeno turns to analyze three case studies from her own research to demonstrate that emotions are fundamentally social and relational. In the first case, she shows the political projection of emotions rooted in childhood experiences of domestic abuse and highlights how these emotions negatively shape the social performance of adults vis-à-vis public authority. In particular, she reveals how traumatic experiences of arbitrary and violent exercises of parental authority engender a deep mistrust of both political authority and peers and, consequently, hinders the adequate functioning of society. In the second case, Jimeno surveys the results of her comparative study of crimes of passion between romantic partners in Brazil and Colombia. Crucially, the author claims that crimes of passion are not pathological acts—they are not the product of “excessive love, as they tend to be depicted in Latin American societies—but rather, actions whose motivations involve a complex set of convictions and feelings about romantic couples, love, femininity, masculinity, honor, and loyalty. In other words, these crimes are only possible within a particular emotional configuration—the social tapestry of all these elements. In the last section of her chapter, Jimeno analyzes the emotional processes involved in the subjective and social reconstruction of a community in southwest Colombia (Cauca). In 2001, a paramilitary group perpetrated a horrific massacre against this community, forcing many to flee. The surviving, displaced, population
then engaged in a process of social reconstruction, building an emotional community through creatively expressing their experiences of pain and loss and re-signifying those experiences as social injustices requiring rectification. In particular, they achieved this by producing a series of dramatic performances of their experiences of violence, directed to different audiences—both governmental and international agencies—as means to reclaim the status of victim and the restoration of their rights and territory.

In the second chapter of this part (Chap. 3), “Understanding Emotions in Members of Societally Powerful Institutions: Emotional Events and Communities in the Narratives of Colombian Soldiers,” Ana María Forero Angel and Catalina González Quintero argue that analyzing emotions is essential to understanding powerful institutions, like the Colombian military. More specifically, they explore the emotional narratives of Colombian career soldiers in order to advance a topography of power (Lutz, 2006), or an anthropological study of the institutions that determine the fate of nations, while leaving behind the tradition of studying marginalized social groups. To develop this topography, the authors focus on two emotional events—experiences that transformed their identities—namely, “joining the institution” and “learning to kill.” The first event describes how Colombian soldiers make the decision to join the Army as opposed to other illegal, armed groups, such as guerrillas and paramilitary groups as well as the soldiers’ experiences during their first days in the Army, especially the bodily and character changes they undergo during this period to incorporate a military identity. The second event concerns a “change of mentality” the soldiers claim to have in the combat area, when they actually “learn to kill” the enemy. They argue that it is impossible to “learn to kill” during their training because for this to happen they need to undergo a psychological transformation that shifts their understanding of war to one that is a personal issue that affects them and their lives, rather than an abstract idea. But that only happens when the soldier feels that his life is actually threatened or when his best friend, his “lanza,” has been killed by the enemy. Based on their research, the authors uncover various findings. First, they note that the soldiers appeal to their emotions in their narratives to arouse empathy in their listeners and convince them of the significance and truthfulness of their stories. Second, they conclude that narrating and listening to these events, among others, the soldiers form an emotional community. This is a community of reciprocal listening, in which only soldiers, who have lived the transforming experiences of war, know
how to speak, listen, and sympathetically react to the emotional force of their peer’s narratives.

In the second part of the book, “Teaching Emotions: White Fragility and the Emotional Weight of Epistemic Resistance,” philosophers Sonya Charles and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. explore the different ways that emotions are taught, learned, and carried in the United States. In the first chapter of this part (Chap. 4), “Moral Development and Racial Education: How We Socialize White Children and Construct White Fragility,” Charles offers a sharp criticism of “color-blind” education among progressive parents and teachers in the United States. She explains that, despite the fact that many maintain (or have maintained) that color-blindness is a strategy to combat ethnic and racial discrimination by focusing on people’s shared humanity by overlooking racial differences, in reality the approach fails. In particular, it neither promotes empathy toward nor solidarity with minorities because it makes it impossible for children to voice their questions about race and ethnicity. This approach yields two seriously problematic responses: (1) it leads parents to become unreliable mentors by encouraging children to develop moral vices rather than virtues; and (2) it cultivates what Di Angelo calls, “white fragility,” as the default emotional response of white people to revelations of their participation and support (inadvertent or intentional) in institutionalized racism in the United States. For this reason, Charles emphasizes the importance of explicitly engaging issues of race to promote children’s awareness of social injustices. After showing the limitations of color-blind education, Charles employs Jennifer Harvey’s approach to anti-racist education to show how white parents can help their children to overcome their own feelings of guilt over the history of racism in the United States and develop virtuous character traits based on Aristotle’s virtue ethics, arguing that, “a key component of early moral development is to cultivate proper habits. This means a person should practice doing the right thing—so much so that it becomes a habit.” In this way, questions about race and ethnicity should be encouraged in children to create healthy emotional and moral habits and behaviors that resist racial discrimination.

In the next chapter of this part (Chap. 5), “Epistemic Pushback and Harm to Educators,” Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. explores the negative emotional and physical effects that the students’ epistemic resistance produces in university professors who teach courses related to feminism, racism, colonialism, and other marginalized philosophies and ontologies. In particular, Pohlhaus explores and analyzes an all-too-common occurrence in
university classrooms across the United States, namely students’ aggressive, critical, responses to both their professors and their peers who identify as members of marginalized groups when they feel that social position, ethical values, or worldviews around issues like race and gender are threatened. In addition to criticizing their professors’ intellectual abilities and epistemic authority, Pohlhaus argues that these answers usually involve sexist, racist, and even expressly violent comments intended to discredit and silence the professor and ensure that the challenging material is delegitimated. Having to endure this constantly takes a serious toll that we must recognize. Professors who teach this material and are, often, the targets of these practices suffer both emotional and physical effects—they may become ill, psychologically burned out, and prone to somatic reactions. For this reason, she argues that it is urgent for these faculty members (and the universities to which they belong) to introduce and encourage self-care practices. Now, Pohlhaus expressly recognizes that the emotional and somatic consequences of this epistemic resistance depend on the social status and position the particular professor occupies—white men teaching feminism or white women teaching about issues of race do not experience these issues to the same extent or in the same ways as professors of color do. And, this matters. But, this should encourage us to take the emotional and bodily effects of teaching this material even more seriously and address it through a variety of strategies. In this way, Pohlhaus, compels universities to pay attention to affective conditions in the classroom, to admit that interaction with students can sometimes be psychologically and physically harmful, and, with this, she reminds us that emotions are actually embodied, that they live and shape our bodily functions and reactions.

In the third part of the book, “Constructing Emotions in Public Policy and Discourse,” essays by Allison B. Wolf, Santiago Roa and Julieta Escobar, and Andrés Góngora and Francisca Márquez explore how emotions are essential to understanding public debates about immigration policies in the United States, processes of transitional justice with paramilitary groups in Colombia, and forceful displacement of urban populations in Santiago de Chile and Bogotá, Colombia. The section begins with Wolf’s piece, “‘Quit Trying to Make Us Feel Teary-Eyed for the Children!’ Constructions of Emotion, Anger, and Immigration Injustice” (Chap. 6), which critically assesses current immigration policies of the US government around forcefully separating and detaining Central American immigrant families who entered the country without documents. Wolf offers a profound criticism of these policies and an innovative analysis of the
emotions involved in the public debate about them, especially anger. After reviewing the policies in question, she explains how the policy’s defenders often accuse their opponents of being too emotional and susceptible to testimonies they claim are directed at making the public “cry for the children” separated from their parents. In other words, they criticize their opponents—mostly democrats and supporters of progressive policies—for making irrational, emotionally charged judgments. These discourses make use of the artificial division between emotion and reason, which in this case becomes a distinction between a rational policy and an emotional reaction that will threaten the sanctity and sovereignty of the United States. In labeling the positions of their political opponents “emotional,” the policy’s supporters deploy a strategy to undermine the efficacy of their critics by trying to represent them as weak and incapable of appropriately responding to the serious immigration crisis confronting the United States. But, Wolf warns, we should not be moved by these critiques as emotions are ubiquitous in public debates on this topic—on all sides—and so, while some political actors may proclaim themselves as rational, their discourses are, in fact, just as emotionally charged as those of their opponents. This is not, in itself, a problem, however. The question is not that the debate on the policies is emotionally charged, but rather the ways in which emotional responses on both sides of this debate—especially anger—are constructed, expressed, and regulated to validate and protect privilege of some, while discrediting and silencing the views of others. To show this, Wolf offers an analysis of anger based on the theoretical accounts of three feminist philosophers, Martha Nussbaum, Audre Lorde, and Marilyn Frye, that both establishes a suggestive contrast among their characterizations of this emotion and reveals the types of anger operating in the public debate about family separation policy in the United States. Based on this, she concludes that anger per se is not the issue but “rather how that anger has been constructed, manipulated, and regulated to protect privilege and further injustice both in and out of the United States.” Wolf closes the chapter by inviting political philosophers who engage with the problem of immigration to pay closer attention to the role of anger and other emotions in public debates. Emotions, she argues, must be incorporated in social and political analysis in order to avoid reinforcing the distinction between reason and emotion, which divests the debate of a richer and more nuanced analysis.

In the second chapter of the part (Chap. 7), “Staging Guilt and Forgiveness in Colombian Mass Media: Transactional Forgiveness and the
Effacement of Victims,” philosophers Julieta Escobar and Santiago Roa claim that the Colombian news media use a transactional paradigm of forgiveness in their representation of the transitional justice process with paramilitary groups. Starting with an exhaustive examination of the online and print coverage of the judicial process of paramilitary ex-commander, Jorge Iván Laverde—alias “El Iguano”—from 2004 and 2019, Escobar and Roa argue that these media stage forgiveness as a sort of hypocritical theater, to use Derrida’s expression, in which forgiveness is understood as an emotional exchange between aggressors and victims. Such media treatment marginalizes the testimonies of victims and trivializes their processes of forgiveness in ways that favor the image of the aggressors by centering their expressions of guilt and repentance over the experiences of the victims. As the authors illuminate, Colombian mass media has followed and reproduced this paradigm in melodramatic ways that require actors to follow performative rituals, such as weeping, lamenting, and hugging the victims. To accomplish the above, the authors begin by showing how the transactional conception of forgiveness by Charles Griswold (2007) is pervasive in the media coverage of Jorge Iván Laverde’s public demands of forgiveness. Then, they turn to the media coverage of some of these stories from the perspective of the victims, showing how their emotional approaches to forgiveness are much more diverse and cannot be limited to this transactional conception. They stress the need to further explore the effects of these media representations on the audience, since they have important consequences for peace and reconciliation processes like the one that is taking place in Colombia. Finally, they conclude by suggesting that alternative ways of conceptualizing and representing experiences of guilt and forgiveness may actually enrich and show the complexity of these emotionally charged situations, thus being more fruitful for the reconstruction of social ties in societies that have undergone armed conflicts.

In the final chapter of the part and the volume (Chap. 8), “Awkward Ruins: Topophilia and the Narratives of Stripping in Santiago and Bogotá,” anthropologists Andrés Góngora and Francisca Márquez, describe the demolition and eviction processes of two Latin American cities’ neighborhoods—“Villa San Luis” in Santiago de Chile and “Calle del Bronx” in Bogotá, Colombia. They argue that, while government officials and urban developers consider the ruins of the demolished buildings still standing in these locations to be hindrances to progress and hideous signs of blight of the urban landscape, the former inhabitants of the streets and homes of “Villa San Luis” and “el Bronx” see these vestiges as invested with
memories and emotions that should be preserved. The authors use the concept of *topophilia*—an organizing principle of the ways in which individuals and communities feel about their places and spaces—to offer an account of the emotional relationship between urban ruins and citizens. Through *topophilia*, they argue, these places have great existential and symbolic value. Thus, the authors claim that the evicted inhabitants of “Villa San Luis” and “el Bronx” perceive their neighborhood’s ruins as more than mere debris, trash, and empty material—they are bearers of memories that invite us to reimagine meanings and uses as well as to contest and resist an aesthetics of capitalistic progress imposed on the contrasting landscape of Latin American cities. And this is seen even more clearly through artistic projects in the neighborhoods with former residents. In particular, Góngora and Márquez describe how the inhabitants of these neighborhoods artistically re-appropriated these ruins in photography and museum pieces, to conclude that in *topophilia* resides a great creative and political potential. The long journey of eviction and demolition of these urban sectors, then, teaches us that ruins have a material agency (Gell, 1998) in which displacement, destabilization, and friction work to produce creative processes and political demands associated with memory.

Before concluding this introduction, we want to note that *Incarnating Feelings, Constructing Communities: Experiencing Emotions in the Americas Through Education, Violence, and Public Policy in the Americas* is meant to begin and engage in an extended interdisciplinary and international dialogue among researchers in the Americas for the purpose of better understanding how emotions circulate as historical and cultural constructions in the region. And we are confident that the chapters of this compilation—chapters that focus on violence, educational settings, public policy, urban contexts, and media discourses—provide a strong foundation for beginning such a conversation and investigation. All of the works in this collection invite the reader to recognize the unavoidability of emotions and the consequent need to include them in the research agendas throughout the social sciences and humanities. They also all clearly demonstrate that it is not possible to study emotions in isolation from particular social practices and contexts. The philosophers and anthropologists whose work comprise this book confirm that emotions are inserted in social tapestries, give meaning to both individuals and groups, are part of educational processes and political causes, and are best expressed in public
discourses that recognize their complexity and resist the tendency to reductionist models. Emotions, in other words, are embedded in communities of support and reconstruction after experiences of violence, in educational processes, public policies, media discourses, and material vestiges, all of which make possible new ways of envisaging social action. We invite the reader into the conversation to delineate the ways this is the case.

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