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A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE IN LATE MODERNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Emotions from a relational perspective

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Emotions from a relational perspective

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Emotions have become a key object of study in the social and human sciences, but also beyond these, for example in health sciences. It is true that the disciplines attempting to analyse emotions and the fundamental role they play in our lives have little in common. They share little more than an interest in the subject and the solid hypothesis of the central role which emotions play for understanding our society, our physical and mental health, the relationships we establish, our identities and our limited choices. To begin with, we look for emotions in different places: inside ourselves, in our genes, in our brain, in our identity, in our *habitus* or in the relationships we weave every day and which place us in a more or less stable position in the social structure and in our image of ourselves and those who surround us.

Without disregarding other views and firmly convinced of the crucial importance of dialogue between perspectives and disciplines, this issue of *Digithum* publishes contributions focusing on dealing with the emotions from a relational perspective, as we suggest in the last point of our brief list of possible “hiding places” for emotions. Working on emotions from a relational perspective means understanding emotions as something we experience and narrate individually but which we can construct, create and learn to feel and narrate as a group. Without denying our own particular individual features, the relational perspective on emotions invites us to focus our attention on our relationships with others, with our surroundings and with ourselves on the premise that they make it possible for us experience and narrate emotions in some specific ways and not others, while at the same time inviting us to give certain meanings and not others to our emotional experiences and the way we see the experiences of those who surround us.

In this way, “feeling rules” are created (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) showing us how to express certain emotions in certain social contexts in order to be understood. These are rules we learn during socialisation and with our active everyday “staging” we contribute to reproducing and/or modifying them. Feeling rules indicate to us the emotions it is not appropriate to have (or,

at least, show) in certain situations (and, therefore, they invite us to repress them, with all the consequences such repression may have). They also indicate the emotions we should provoke (or try to provoke) in order to fit in with the role and situation expectations about us generated by our surroundings (who has not noticed that not being in a festive mood on a holiday – expressed through cheerfulness and good humour – can end up being a real problem?). When we work with feeling rules, we notice that we “feel in relation” to others; we could not speak of emotions in the same way if we were not from the very beginning of our lives immersed in relational contexts that indicate to us, from birth, that a smile expresses joy, for instance. A baby needs six or seven weeks to internalise (in the most literal sense) this form of communication and, when he or she uses it, our connection is reinforced and extended, and, of course, we are filled with joy and smile back.

Emotions, which begin to take shape when we are born and take on nuances and meanings as we relate to others, have different sides, as we will see in the articles making up this monograph on the sociology of emotions from a relational perspective.

The article by Sylvia Terpe, “Epistemic feelings in moral experiences and moral dynamics of everyday life”, invites us to think about our moral positions from the perspective of emotions (particularly those which she, together with other authors, call “epistemic emotions”) and everyday life. In this way, moral positions and the changes in them with varying degrees of subtlety are anchored in our everyday relationships and show themselves as moments of doubt, guilt, fear, certainty, conviction or presentiment in which new moral positions are generated and the existing ones are reaffirmed or shaken. Based on the “dialogue” between our more conscious, thoughtful levels, the semi-conscious or unconscious ones and our everyday relationships, conversations and actions, Terpe attempts to sketch the way in which our moral positions crystallise in these force fields, becoming the beacons that guide our moral conscience or evaporating in the fog of doubt.

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Emotions from a relational perspective

The article by Seebach *et al.* invites us to consider the close and very important links existing and woven between the media, the emotions and collective myths. This field of analysis, so broad and so fundamental, is applied by the authors to the analysis of the construction of marginal positions in society, such as the position of the stranger/foreigner (taking a relational form suggested by Simmel). In this specific article this crystallises in the figure of the refugee/refugees who, in the last few months, have arrived in Germany above all from Syria, but also from other points in the Near and Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. The fears, anxieties, resentments and suspicions the authors have found in the interviews they have carried out and the comments on the Internet on articles in the printed press they have analysed are studied in relation to the most universal myths of the construction of the other and, above all, in relation to the myths of hygiene and hygienisation which, according to the authors, have become hegemonic in modern times. Closely following Foucault's thesis on biopolitics, Seebach *et al.* highlight the way in which the hygiene discourse can become a catalyst for relationships involving distancing, fear and suspicion towards others who are easily, and without empirical evidence, classed as "others" in the sense no longer of country of birth but in the sense "civilised/uncivilised", "Western/non-Western", "Christian/non-Christian" (and "Muslim", which in this case almost seems like a category in itself in these dual worlds) and "clean/dirty", "hygienic/unhygienic". This ends up deriving into "healthy/sick" and "inoffensive/dangerous" classifications which, while on one hand feeding off constructions of relationships involving differences, inequalities, fears and rejection cropping up in the study, on the other hand also contributes towards feeding them.

Continuing with the controversial issue of migration, we have the article by Yvonne Albrecht. The article offers a complete introduction to the sociological perspective of emotions in the sociology of migration, leaving behind pathologising or therapeutic perspectives in relation to dealing with emotions and fully incorporating them into the analysis of the migratory phenomenon as an essential linking element when it comes to understanding the phenomenon and the experience of migration from a sociological point of view. Albrecht suggests two key concepts to help us fully incorporate the emotions into the area of the sociology of migration in a productive way: "emotional work" and "emotional transnationality". Through the concept of "emotional work" suggested a few decades ago by Arlie Hochschild in direct connection with "feeling rules" by the same author (and Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* concept adapted to the experience of migration and the social position of being an "immigrant" or "emigrant", depending on the perspective), Albrecht shows us how some authors have already begun working along the lines she suggests, at the same time showing us how far there still is to go. Through the concept of "emotional transnationality", the author highlights the fact that we can approach the emotional experiences of migrants in their cultural space/context marked by transnationalism (getting

away from the idea of two nations – the country of origin and the receiving country – which are too often presented as sealed rather than porous compartments). This set of emotions and the patterns for understanding and making sense of them, Albrecht reminds us, must be free of a perspective that analyses and questions based only on pathology and negative emotions (although without neglecting these). At the same time, the author stresses, this perspective must continually uphold the migrants' position as *agents*.

Leaving behind the migration phenomenon, but still from a transnational space for constructing and making sense of emotions (and through these), in the last article of the dossier devoted to emotions from a relational perspective, Isaac González-Balletbò analyses the series of films of the *Twilight* saga. These films, based on best-selling books not analysed in the article, became a media product that marked a whole generation (the first film in the saga opened in 2008 and the last in 2012). González-Balletbò suggests two key hypotheses: firstly, he argues that, behind the mythical story presented by the *Twilight* saga, we find a non-explicit affirmation that people's emotions are not the same in all cases and that their variations are not random or strictly personal, but rather that they are differentiated depending on belonging to a particular social class. So, the *Twilight* story contributes to creating a discourse of class inequality while capturing young people with its story of a very peculiar love triangle between a vampire, a werewolf and a young human girl who is faced with the romantic choice between a refined, educated young man (vampire) able to contain his passions and capable of feelings and commitments going beyond the length of a human life and a loyal, passionate, fun-loving werewolf who, at the beginning of the story, has no idea of his supernatural potential. Along these lines, a story is structured narrating the "genuine" but well differentiated emotions of the three young people who are not only distinguished by belonging to different groups of supernatural characters (or simply humans, like the central figure of the girl) but also, on a non-explicit (although quite visible) level, by belonging to different social classes, with the attractions, dangers and dark points each of these involve (so, we clearly see the containment and emotional distance of the vampires contrasted with the passion, sometimes going as far as physical violence, of the werewolves). The emotionality of the human girl, anchored in love and capacity for self-sacrifice, ends up being the catalyst that brings the central characters of the saga together with links that overcome class differences, leading to the conclusion that love conquers all... Despite this, it is difficult to dissolve the impression created by the initial dualisms that run right through the saga until they are finally overcome in the fourth and last film.

We have here, then, four articles which, while focused from the same perspective, contain very different analyses and theses. We hope they will stimulate discussion and dialogue between us and our always relational co-creation of a relational sociology that allows us to move forward in the discipline and make solid and useful contributions.

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Emotions from a relational perspective

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