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Helena Flam and Jochen Kleres (eds):
Methods of Exploring Emotions

Abingdon and New York 2015: Routledge, 310 pp.

A Friday afternoon, April 2016. I was conducting a research interview with a well-known Belgian war correspondent. He was dispassionately but colourfully telling me the story of witnessing an armed mass rape in central Africa: after driving away from the scene that he had almost immediately, after a slight shock, evaluated as hopeless and unmanageable, he said he felt morally uncertain and was ruminating over the correctness of his behaviour. He had probably shared the narrative many times before with his students, colleagues, and readers; it seemed to come from his repertoire of illuminating anecdotes. I felt upset, agitated, and inappropriate even as a mere listener. He, on the contrary, seemed perfectly calm and concentrated. The story shows some of the levels at which emotions—in this case, detachment, hopelessness, shock, moral uncertainty, a sense of responsibility, unease, and compassion—may pervade sociological research. It also shows some of the levels at which, as this book tries to illustrate, human sociality and diversity can be studied through the specific prism of emotions, whether as the primary focus of sociological research or as an issue that shows its relevance only during fieldwork.

This volume emerged out of the growing interest that has been shown in working methods by the Sociology of Emotions

Research Network affiliated with the European Sociological Association. It posits human beings as being inherently social and interconnected by innumerable feelings and imagines societies as multiple intersections of emotion webs. It represents two clear genres and two (inter)related functions: a collection of stories and a manifesto.

First, concerning the collection of stories, the volume consists of short essays and research papers rich in examples and anecdotes illustrating how a sociologist can use emotions as data. In aggregate, they prove that, when it comes to methodological creativity, the sky is the limit. The levels of emotions that the researchers deal with range from emotions expressed in face-to-face bodily and verbal communication to elicitations of unacknowledged individual and collective emotions that play a role in various encounters, from emotions triggered during research interviews to responses to a questionnaire. Some of the chapters address the question of how unexpected emotions entered and transformed the research process. Most contributors try, more or less systematically and with varying degrees of success, to go beyond reporting fieldwork-related emotions and share their know-how about the ways of observing, interviewing, and even surveying emotion data. Second, as a manifesto, the volume seeks to explore how emotions are actually researchable. According to the authors, researching emotions means 'only' forcing the usual research instruments, such as observations, interviews, surveys, and text or visual analysis, to adapt to emotion data and different types of research questions.

Of the two purposes, the potential of the manifesto is less important. Diverse pieces of sociological and anthropological research and theory have long ago proved that emotions do not belong exclusively to the domain of psychology but are a relevant and researchable theme within sociol-

ogy and anthropology [e.g. Hochschild 1983], whether concerned with organisations and institutional power structures or the human body and biopower. In contrast, for a researcher with a vague idea of the importance of emotions emerging during her fieldwork but without a realistic conception of how to employ them, the collection of stories opens a rich palette of research approaches and possibilities for emotion-related research. All the more so as the volume is structured along research methods; a researcher digging into emotional data may find a helpful guide in the part devoted to eliciting emotions from written and oral narratives, be they novels, videotaped testimonies, entries from search engines, or projections and metaphors (Part I); interviews (Part II); observations and participation (Part III); spoken accounts of emotions (Part IV); emotionally charged visuals (Part V); documents (Part VI); or surveys (Part VII). At the same time, structuring the volume in accordance with methodologies creates some confusion given that some of the methods necessarily overlap—for example, when the research material is a fieldwork diary (Chapter 16), a novelist's edited journals (Chapter 25), or linguistically uttered affects (Chapter 18).

Several of the twenty-seven chapters attempt to systematise approaches to emotions and are thus particularly useful for novices in the sociology of emotions seeking to make sense of fieldwork-related feelings. In particular, the third chapter "'It's all in the plot": Narrative Explorations of Work-related Emotions', by Yiannis Gabriel and Eda Ulus, summarises diverse epistemological positions. It does so while illustrating three different ways of expressing emotions: a person declares that she feels a certain way, acts in a certain way, or tells a story which gives clues to how she may feel. This determines different ways of gathering emotions as data in the field. First, they may 'emerge' or 'surface' spon-

taneously as recurring patterns during interviews and observations. In such cases, the emotion is 'expressed in the collapse of the narrative itself—the narrative struggle that leaves the researcher in no doubt that an emotional crisis is unfolding in front of his/her eyes' (pp. 37–38). Second, a certain feeling can be declared and so elicited by asking direct questions within an interview or a focus group. Third, emotions can be elicited through metaphors and projective techniques.

Probably the most comprehensive and contextualised systematisation, however, is found in the introduction, 'Methods of Exploring Emotions'. Helena Flam positions research on emotions in relation to two contrasting approaches in ethnography that could have taken fieldwork emotions into account but did not: Burawoy's 'reflexive ethnography' [Burawoy 2003] and Taylor and Rupp's 'feminist-queer' version [Taylor and Rupp 2005]. Moreover, the editor regroups the chapters according to the epistemology and ontology of emotions they postulate. She distinguishes between the (unorthodox) positivist-expressionist dramaturgical (treating expressions as emotion data), attributionist dramaturgical (observing which emotions are attributed to an actor by others), and interactionist dramaturgical (observing circulating and shared emotions) approaches. Finally, referring to Arlie Hochschild, Flam states that it is neither possible nor necessary to make a clear distinction between 'authentic' and 'surface' emotions and positions current emotional research between the purely dramaturgical/ethnomethodological [e.g. Goffman 1967] and psychoanalytical/biologising/universalistic [e.g. Ekman 1999] approaches. As Flam notes, 'centuries-long emotions management made it impossible to posit any clear-cut difference between 'authentic', subjective feelings, and the prescribed' (p. 5). Apparently, the editor realises that studying this gap between feelings and displays—its widen-

ing as a result of a specific context and conditions, its intentional elaboration and narrowing, i.e. reductions in emotional dissonance, problematising emotional management and labour—can reveal much about such major sociological themes as power relations [see Hochschild 1983]. Yet, the basic assumption of almost all chapters remains that ‘for the most part the observed emotional expressions correspond to specific inner emotional states’ (p. 8). I believe that in this sense the majority of the research included in the volume could be less descriptive and confessional and more challenging and analytically sharp. After all, it is precisely the focus on the confrontation between self and society that makes emotions a *sociological* subject.

Obviously, one of the most important and general dilemmas in emotion-related research designs that the book can help to resolve is whether to approach emotions through interviews (i.e. as narratives and retrospective sense-making accounts) or through observations (i.e. as bodily practices). Although some researchers argue for the latter somewhat Bourdieuan perspective on emotions [Scheer 2012], in this volume the other viewpoint seems to dominate. For example, Barbara Czarniawska ‘plead[s] for studies of the ‘rhetoric of emotions’, because this is all there is and this is what needs to be known — i.e., how people speak about their own and others’ emotions in different times and places’ (p. 68).

Staying with the genre of the collection of stories and the usefulness of this for researchers for whom emotions are the primary research interest, several chapters explain and illustrate particularly well how to code and categorise emotions. The study of organic farmers by Denise Van Dam and Jean Nizet, Julien Bernard’s research on funerary emotions, and Julia Eksner’s study of German Turkish working-class youths in Berlin-Kreuzberg provide good examples of making sense of emotions by reflecting on such aspects as their categories, index-

es, and manifestations. Other chapters are unique in proposing concepts and tools that are analytically useful even for sociologists whose research focus lies elsewhere. Most importantly, in the chapter ‘Emotional Insights in the Field’ Stina Bergman-Blix introduces (and Åsa Wettergren in her chapter adopts) the concept of ‘emotional participation’. Emotional participation, i.e. critical emotional engagement in the field, enables the researcher’s own emotions to be used as both methodological and analytical tools. First, becoming engaged in the emotions that the observed people feel enables the researcher to blend in with the site. Second, the discrepancy between the field participants’ habitual emotions and the visiting researcher’s non-habitual emotions serves as an analytical clue. Making use of our own research-related emotions, after all, may appear to be the most open, decent, and ethical way of dealing with them. As Benno Gammerl states in his chapter, ‘Can you feel your “research results?”’: ‘If emotion is inseparable from cognition, then the researcher’s feelings cannot be disconnected from the analytical process.’ (p. 153)

Despite its qualitative profile, the volume may be inspiring also for more quantitatively oriented researchers. The chapters ‘Triangulation as Data Integration in Emotion Research’ by Sylvia Terpe and ‘Missing Values: Surveying Protest Emotions’ by Dunya van Troost discuss the possibility of quantifying qualitative data and ‘qualitising’ quantitative data on emotional phenomena (matching unique narratives with information from standardised instruments) and how to construct a questionnaire that directly addresses feelings. Here, the main limitation is not only that, say, shame may be expressed or may manifest in far more complex ways than by the person with the emotion stating/admitting ‘I feel ashamed’. The problem is also that in the case of surveying emotions a much larger part of the burden of (self-)interpret-

ing and categorising emotions is borne by the respondents themselves. For example, in her research on protesters, Terpe expects that 'respondents ... at least know how they themselves feel about the issue they are protesting about' (p. 297). This means that within surveys, there is no room for emerging, released, elicited, unveiled, authentic and taboo emotions, the importance of which is emphasised by some of the contributors, in particular Yannis Gabriel, Eda Ulus, and Ishan Jalan, who, in viewing emotions from a Freudian perspective, assume that emotions are something to be discovered or revealed.

This internal inconsistency of the book, where each author adopts a slightly different viewpoint on how to define and study emotions, could be something that warrants criticise. Indeed, the only shared idea—and the position of departure—is nothing less general than that a researcher should treat emotional expressions as data. However, as the ambition of the volume is to become an exploratory reservoir of approaches, the diversity and contradictions are fruitful and accurately reflect the major traditions of emotion research. Although it would be very difficult to categorise the

approaches, even more so given that the methodologies used to address emotions do not fully overlap with their epistemology and ontology, a systematic guide through diverse methods of emotion-related sociological research could be the next step.

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