Role of Affects in Becoming a Political Subject Feminist Student Movements in the Chilean School and Digital Context.

Andrea Valdivia

University of Chile

The last decade has been marked by cycles of social movements around the world. Resistance and fighting against neoliberal capitalism and a patriarchal system have been at the centre of the political action. In Chile, in the last 15 years, young people have been protagonists of massive protests, promoting the major political and cultural transformation that is taking place today. The “Feminist May” of the Chilean student-feminist movement in 2018 was a turning point and showed the powerful and entangled relationship between students, feminism and digital platforms.

In this paper, I draw attention to the process of becoming a political-feminist subject in the initial trajectories of secondary students. I reflect through the experience of a Chilean feminist student organisation about the role of affects in digital and political engagement, the negotiations, tensions and resistances undertaken by young people in school contexts where they are becoming their political-feminist subject.

This proposal draws on a case study undertaken as part of an ethnographic research carried out in 2018 and 2019. It examined the ordinary routine of ten adolescents in their homes, school and digital spaces. The method included ethnographic observation in the school and houses of participants, besides digital observation of digital social networks, personal accounts and institutional and organisational profiles. In addition, the fieldwork included two or three in-depth interviews with each student and semi-structured interviews with their mothers, teachers and the school principal.

Young people gathered and positioned from the feminist organisation reported an activism in the school crossed by an active role of emotions, the body and lived experiences, all of them constitutive dimensions of their notion of ‘the political' and thus, their trajectories of ‘becoming a political subject’. The initial experiences in the trajectories also show the complex network of affective forces that mobilise and restrict, that push for change and, at the same time, lead to reproduction of conservative patrons.

These young people had no previous political engagement nor knowledge about feminism; therefore, as they shaped the organisation and confronted the conduct of the complaints, they formed themselves politically. Social media and the Internet were the main source of information, political action and formation. Moreover, fifteen years of the student movement is also a source of meaning and discourse for the configuration of a political subject. Occupations, strikes and marches have been part of lives for previous Chilean youth generations.