

The Social Life of Teen Attention

Navigating Citizenship, Schooling, and the World Wide Web in
Cochabamba, Bolivia and Warsaw, Poland



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Declaration:

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted, for any degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

This thesis is an anthropological treatise on teenage attention based on ethnographic fieldwork at two urban schools in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and Warsaw, Poland. It proposes a socio-cognitive framework for an analysis of attention as a nexus comprised of ideological, bureaucratic, somatic, and affective elements as well as a form of practice that acts upon the world. I argue that youth are attentional agents capable of modifying their environment through attentional practice, which is, nevertheless structured by factors within the attentional nexus. I further argue that attentional practice has an intrinsically political character.

The first section of this thesis considers the historical and institutional setting of my fieldsites and the import of combining psychological and anthropological perspectives on cognition towards an understanding of social phenomena at the collective level. In Chapter 1, I introduce the concept of the social attentionscape to speak of elements within a delineated society that come to the centre of collective attention and are likely to become part of political agendas, including educational policies. The social attentionscape is grounded in historically shaped value systems and world imaginaries endorsed by governments and civil society. In Bolivia, imaginaries of Western modernity and development have a strained coexistence with ideologies of decolonisation. In Poland, a nationalist and Catholic ideal of Polishness clashes with the urban ideal of liberal European citizenship. In Chapter 2, I consider how those imaginaries relate to quotidian practices at the school, guiding pedagogic orientations through the (re)production of teachers' normative attention and interacting with on-the-stop attentional needs of exam bureaucracy in Warsaw and the local community in Cochabamba.

The second section of the thesis examines three areas of alleged youth 'disconnection': political participation (Chapter 3), social media (Chapter 4), and the classroom (Chapter 5). Social media and digital marketing technologies are often considered root causes of bottomless distraction and youth disinterest. Without negating their attention-grabbing qualities, I flip the focus to the broader ecology of youth's attention. I show how youth disenchantment in electoral politics is not tantamount to political disinterest. Political participation is contingent on attention-grabbing moral sentiments such as "the right to decide" (for Warsaw youth) or "the right to work" (for my interlocutors in Cochabamba). I analyse the sphere of teenage digital sociality in terms of the phatic attention mechanisms it engages but also recognise social media as an integral constituent of other spheres of attentional practice, influencing political decision-making and youth's attention at school. Attention in the classroom is shaped by a nexus of institutional and social factors. Those

affect the development of joint attention and mutual correspondence between students and teachers.

The thesis contributes to long-established anthropological debates on the relationship between agency and structure and between global and local influences, considering their interaction in attentional management. It also speaks to the rather novel concern in anthropology of the politics of cognition by exploring how directions in collective and individual attention work to assemble, strengthen, and reshape local cultural landscapes and power relations, contributing to the reproduction and contestation of the discursive and institutional status quo.

Table of Contents

Declaration:	2
Abstract	3
Image Index.....	7
Acknowledgements	9
Note on Names and Translations:.....	11
Introduction	12
I. Why should anthropologists pay attention to attention?	12
II. Ethnographic Attentional Moments	14
III. The Politics of Attention.....	15
IV. Attentional Agents in Anthropology.....	18
V. Attention: A Socio-Cognitive Perspective.....	22
VI. Fieldsites & Fieldwork.....	27
VII. Ethical and Methodological Concerns.....	34
VIII. Chapter Outline	37
SECTION I: Understanding Collective Attention	41
Chapter One: The Social Attentionscape: History & Selective State Attention.....	42
1.1. The Social Attentionscape	42
1.2. Historical National Attentionscapes.....	45
1.3. Collective Schemas and Selective Attention	54
1.4. Selective State Attention	63
1.5. The National School Attentionscape	68
1.6. Conclusion.....	72
Chapter Two: Normative Attention: Pedagogic Orientations at School.....	74
2.1. Pedagogic Orientations	74
2.2. Teacher's Schemas & School Ethnography	77
2.3. Neo-Colonial Pedagogics: "Western Professionalism"	81
2.4. Bureaucratic Pedagogics: "Matura"	87
2.5. European Cosmopolitan Liberalism	91

2.6.	Community Pedagogics.....	94
2.7.	Two Religion Teachers.....	100
2.8.	Conclusion.....	106
SECTION II: “Disenchanted” & “Disinterested” Youth.....		107
Chapter Three: Moral Attention: Emotions & Political Participation		108
3.1.	Moral Emotional Attention	108
3.2.	Emotional Heuristics and Affective Politics	111
3.3.	Historically Accumulated Affect and Affective Spillage.....	119
3.4.	“Moral Cognitive Conflict” & Youth Political Disenchantment.....	127
3.5.	Political (Mis)information	131
3.6.	Conclusion.....	136
Chapter Four: Phatic Attention: Affordances & Digital Sociality on Social Media		137
4.1.	Phatic Attention.....	137
4.2.	The Affordances of Social Media	140
4.3.	Phatic Relationship Building.....	143
4.4.	Cultural Indexicality and Group ‘Communion’ in Phatic Image Sharing	153
4.5.	Intimate Information Sharing & Shopping.....	161
4.6.	Conclusion.....	171
Chapter Five: Attentional Success: Joint Attention and Teacher Authority in the Classroom...		173
5.1.	Attentional Success	173
5.2.	Attentional Failures.....	177
5.3.	Teaching the Human Way	185
5.4.	Sociality and Structural Conditions of Schooling.....	192
5.5.	Conclusion.....	200
Conclusion.....		202
6.1.	Attentional Nexus and Practice	202
6.2.	Final Remarks & Further Investigations	207
Bibliography		212

Image Index

Im. I. Map of Bolivia	28
Im. II. Map of Cochabamba's Districts	28
Im. III. Map of Poland	32
Im. IV. Map of Warsaw's Boroughs.....	32
Im. 1.1. <i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i> 's campaign poster.....	53
Im. 2.1. Lesson slide from CONAPREMC teaching materials.....	103
Im. 2.2. Lesson slide from CONAPREMC teaching materials	104
Im. 3.1. Diana's (Liceum Gawiecki student) Instagram status	114
Im. 3.2. A post re-shared on Abigail's Facebook wall	126
Im. 3.3. An original post on Ines's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall.	130
Im. 3.4. A post re-shared on Abigail's Facebook wall	130
Im. 3.5. A post re-shared on Abigail's Facebook wall	132
Im. 3.6. A post re-shared on Abigail's Facebook wall	135
Im. 3.7. A post re-shared on Abigail's Facebook wall	135
Im. 4.1. A screenshot from Olek's viideosnap	146
Im. 4.2. A selfie sent by Mirka to Olek on snapchat.....	147
Im. 4.3. Jimena's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status.....	149
Im. 4.4. Letizia's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status	149
Im. 4.5 A post re-shared on Noelia's Facebook wall.....	152
Im. 4.6. Valentina's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status.....	155
Im. 4.7. A post re-shared on Betty's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall.....	155
Im. 4.8. A post re-shared on Rodrigo's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall.....	156
Im. 4.9. A post re-shared on Ivan's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall.....	156
Im. 4.10. A post re-shared on Jorge's Facebook wall	156
Im. 4.11. A post re-shared on Rodrigo's Facebook wall	156
Im. 4.12. A post on Diana's public Instagram	158
Im. 4.13. A post on Iga's public Instagram	159
Im. 4.14. A post on Diana's public Instagram	159
Im. 4.15. Ola's (Liceum Gawiecki student) Instagram status	159
Im. 4.16. A post re-shared on Ivan's Facebook wall.....	162
Im. 4.17. A post re-shared on Ivan's Facebook wall.....	162
Im. 4.18. Jimena's WhatsApp status	165
Im. 4.19. Jimena's WhatsApp status	165

Im. 4.20. Omar's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status	166
Im. 4.21. Rommel's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status	166
Im. 4.22. Letizia's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status.....	166
Im. 4.23. A post on Liceum Gawiecki's Spotted Instagram page.....	169
Im. 4.24. A post on Liceum Gawiecki's Spotted Instagram page.....	169

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Note on Names and Translations:

All the names and online usernames used in this thesis, except for public figures and organisations, are pseudonyms. Teacher names are prefixed with Pani (Mrs) for Polish names and Profe (short for teacher) for Bolivian names in accordance with norms for addressing teachers. Teachers are referred to by surname or first name depending on the way in which students referred to them among themselves and by surname if such data was missing. Foreign words, aside from names, are written in italics with a translation and a corresponding acronym of the original language (Sp. = Spanish, Pl. = Polish, Q. = Quechua, Ay. = Aymara) in brackets. Translations of cited text from references published in Spanish and Polish are all personal. Emphasis is marked by underlined text and original when made use of in direct quotations.

Introduction

“[Attention] may be said to underlie every other mental faculty. It is the bringing of the consciousness to a focus in some special direction...without it meaningless reverie will take the place of coherent thought.”
James Cappie (1886: 201)

I. Why should anthropologists pay attention to attention?

This thesis is an anthropological treatise on attention based on ethnographic fieldwork at two urban high schools (Colegio Alalay in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and Liceum Gawiecki in Warsaw, Poland). Attention works at the intersections of the self and others, the mind and environment, past experiences, and future imaginings. Attention is a cognitive mediator of experience relevant to the lives of all ethnographic subjects. Still, a concern with attention is not easily traceable in anthropological literature. When pondering the difficulties of finding course materials for an undergraduate anthropology seminar on attention, Nick Seaver (2018) noted that as anthropologists, we often think about our own and our interlocutors’ attention but rarely write about the concept as such. The lack of explicit disciplinary attention to attention seemed to have recently come to a halt as anthropologists joined both interdisciplinary and disciplinary endeavours to theorise attention in seminar rooms and on the pages of academic journals, edited volumes, and blog posts.¹

Such an abrupt response largely resulted from the growing public angst around the influence of new technologies and ubiquitous marketing on the attentional autonomy, capacity, and capability of humans, especially children and teenagers. Scholars, journalists, and the public raise frequent concerns over the state of our attentional sovereignty. They worry that the use of attention-capturing technologies has led us to enter a state of “deep distraction” (Williams 2018: 7), which not only distracts us from our tasks at hand but also prevents us from successfully channelling our attention towards the achievement of long-term goals. This thesis moderately responds to such

¹ Examples include Joanna Cook’s (2018) online article “Paying Attention to Attention”; Nick Seaver’s blog entry (2018) <https://somatosphere.com/2018/how-to-pay-attention.html/> (accessed 20/03/2024); An interdisciplinary workshop on attention held at the London School of Economics in 2022 <https://www.lse.ac.uk/anthropology/Research/Our-research/attention-workshop> (accessed 20/03/2024); a conference panel called “Towards an Anthropology of Attention” during the annual UK Association of Social Anthropologists Conference in 2023 <https://theasa.org/conferences/asa2023/> (accessed 20/03/2024); the interdisciplinary edited volume *Scenes of Attention* (2023) with various contributions from anthropologists.

fears by arguing that rather than mindless slaves of mobile technologies, modern teenagers can be better described as agents who employ attentional strategies in adjustment to their social milieu, personal goals, and attentional capabilities.

As a social anthropologist, my concern with individual attention lies mostly in understanding the role of the individual as a part and parcel of social relations and collective attention. Attention is both a cultural and cognitive concept, which can act as a subject of ethnographic scrutiny and a tool for anthropological analysis. The incipient anthropology of attention was so far interested in cultural conceptualisations of attention as, for example, an aspect of mindfulness practice (Pagis & Tal 2022) or value within the ‘attention economy’ (Pedersen et al. 2021). This thesis, on the other hand, mainly concerns itself with the role of attention in the constitution of everyday lived experience and the creation of cultural meaning.

In contrast to early psychological ‘spotlight’ metaphors of attention (e.g. Norman 1968; Posner et al 1980), I consider attention to be a form of nexus and practice. Attention is a nexus because it connects and mediates between an array of aspects of lived experience, embedded in a person’s past as memories, beliefs, and feelings, as well as in their environment, which constantly remakes it. Arvidson’s (1996) phenomenological account of distributed attention considers problematic the lack of regard for the continuity and interconnectedness between attention’s focal point and what surrounds it in ‘spotlight’ oriented attentional research. Seeing attention as a nexus allows to recognise the interconnectivity of attentional distribution. Instead of a ‘spotlight’, it bears a closer resemblance to a sunbeam, simultaneously considering a spectrum of elements with varying degrees of focality. Attention is a practice because it is a form of action and involves a degree of choice, which constitutes my adolescent interlocutors as attentional agents. The attentional nexus can be thought of as the elements of a distributed cognitive system that engage human attentional resources. Attentional practice as its execution in action. Together they form cognitive configurations that work at several scales. This thesis considers attentional practice at configurations as disparate as the nation, social media networks, the school, and individual classroom events.

My research seeks to demonstrate the value of an interest in attention as part of anthropological comprehension of social processes. It addresses concerns of political anthropology through a discussion of national imaginaries (Ch. 1), citizen formation (Ch. 2), and moral discrepancies in political conflict (Ch. 3) and the anthropology of schooling, analysing educational policies (Ch.1),

pedagogic orientations (Ch.2) and attention in the classroom (Ch. 5). It also speaks to digital anthropology by looking at attentional patterns of teenage social media sociality (Ch. 4) but also by considering virtual landscapes an important part of the attentional nexus of teenage life, connected to their perception of politics (Ch.3) and the school (Ch.5).

In the remaining parts of this introduction, I will present an ethnographic vignette as a springboard for describing attention as a matter of anthropological concern, discuss the politics and agency of attention and present the analytical opportunities to be gained from a productive engagement between social anthropology and psychology in the study of attention. Subsequently, I will describe the two geographical contexts I am basing my research claims on and the intricacies of my fieldwork, including methodological concerns. Finally, I will provide an outline of the five chapters in this thesis, which are divided into two sections: “Understanding Collective Attention” and “Youth ‘Disenchantment’ and ‘Disinterest’”.

II. Ethnographic Attentional Moments

In March 2020, the social sciences teacher Profe Eugenia took the 2020 promo² students from Colegio Alalay on a trip to the North of the city to visit the Portales palace, a mansion formerly belonging to the “tin king” Simon Patiño, now serving as a museum and cultural centre. The class boarded a bus owned by one of the parents on the school premises and drove far past the bus’s usual end route into the wealthy neighbourhoods of the North, where the students rarely, if ever, found themselves. As we drove through the neighbourhood high street, Av. America, their eyes were glued to the windows, looking at the tall apartment buildings, shopping centres, and cafes, making comments and pointing in order to draw their friends’ attention to the things that caught theirs: “Look at those cars! One day I’ll have one like that”, one boy remarked when we passed the Mercedes-Benz car dealer.

Only a few seconds later, a red billboard promoting a newly launched mobile application from Uruguay caught the attention of Eliza, a student sitting on the opposite side of the bus, who confusingly read out loud “*Pedidos ya* (Sp. Orders now)?”. Jaime, more familiar with the particularities of the exotic North than the majority of students, explained, “it is this app; you can order food from restaurants, and they bring it to your home”. “Really?” she replied with disbelief.

² Promo is a name typically assigned to a graduating high school class and is short for *promoción* (Sp. promotion).

Eliza's friend listening seemed excited about the idea and chipped in a comment: "So cool! I would like to be able to do that!" Just two weeks later, when the city went into full lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the just nascent "PedidosYa" app soared in popularity, delivering food from establishments with special permits to work to grounded at home *cochabambinos* (Sp. people from Cochabamba). Zona Sur, however, was not included in the delivery range, and students from Colegio Alalay, regardless of their financial capacities, were not able to get food delivered to their doorsteps.

The day of marvels continued with a tour of the Portales palace itself. Patiño was once one of the richest individuals in the world. He held deep affection for his country and built the palace with the intention of moving back from abroad. The building itself was, however, designed by a French architect, the gardens were composed by Japanese landscape experts, and all the furniture and ornaments within it were imported from Europe, including marble from Carrara and an Arab styled room inspired by the Alhambra of Granada. As we walked around the Palace some students were fully engrossed by the tour but most, including the teacher, were more concerned with managing to concealingly take, officially forbidden by the tour guide, photos with their phones and comment to me and each other on aspects of the environment: "I like this painting; I think I saw a photo of a vase like that somewhere; Kasia, have you been to a place with nice things like that beforehand?" The sequence of events during the school trip can be described as a series of 'attentional moments' in which youth looked at and pointed each other towards images and material things.

III. The Politics of Attention

My claim in this dissertation is that an analytical focus on attention can take us beyond the ethnographic 'attentional moment' towards its embeddedness in social institutions and power relations. Attention is political as a cognitive process in and of itself as well as a social issue. Stafford highlights that all research in cognitive anthropology is "at least implicitly political, bearing as it does on the core issues of how humans come to know, understand, and act on the world" (2020: 120). This thesis embraces Deleuze & Guattari's claim that "every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics" (1987: 213) and the "agentic-affective dimension to political subjectivity" (Gilliam 2017: 3) present in their work but seeks to additionally lodge the "rhizomatic" (Deleuze & Guattari *ibid*: 212) or micro and its relation to the macro or "molar" (*ibid*: 213) in cognitive science and social interaction. Attention is political because it moulds people's expectations, views, and inclinations. The Patiño palace was a monument to neo-colonial

desirability. The snippets of global modernity urban youth see in the media and experience during rare events as the described schooltrip create, to use Appadurai's expressions, "imagined worlds," which are "aesthetic" and "chimerical" creating "proto-narratives of possible lives" and constituting narratives of oneself and 'the other' (1996: 35-36).

An 'other' does not necessarily need to be geographically far, but can live uptown within the range of PedidosYa delivery. In the case of the urban Bolivian lower and aspiring middle classes I have worked with in Cochabamba, this 'other' is often perceived as better and thus more desirable like the Mercedes-Benz the boy from Colegio Alalay one day hopes to have. This is because images of the West blend with what Tsing refers to as "universals" (2005: 1) of globalisation – the kind of dreams and aspirations brought about by global connection and "sticky engagements" (ibid: 5) with the discursive forces of capitalism, political advocacy, and social movements. The experience and meaning of such universals are moulded by our attention, which in postcolonial and postsocialist contexts often turns itself towards and formulates a cognitive association with the more 'developed' others.

The lack of substantial ethnographic or theoretical engagement with attention in anthropology may be a result of its seemingly momentary nature, which makes it appear fleeting. Such would be a misleading view of attention, for attentional moments are embedded within larger societal structures and 'build up'. Firstly, they build up to constitute an individual's experience. Attention uses neural feedback mechanisms to increase the strength of selected neural signals over others, allowing us to focus on selected stimuli. Frequently repeated feedback increases efficacy, automating attentional performance. In lay terms, our attention learns to act in particular ways. Secondly, attention selectively builds up to formulate normative attentional habits and the social attentionscape, i.e. issues that catch societal attention and are thus most likely to become part of public discussion and political agendas. If individual attention is always already political because it shapes our perspective of the world, then collective attention is even more explicitly so. Furthermore, folk theories of human attention have economic and political ramifications.

The concept of the "attention economy" considers attention as the primary exchange medium of the contemporary market, which makes it a factor of interest, competition, and social hierarchisation (see Atchley & Lane eds. 2021; Franck 2019; Marshall 2021; Mears 2023; Pedersen et al. 2021). Developments in digital and portable technologies that took place over the last two decades drastically expanded the possibilities of information outreach, providing unprecedented

opportunities for marketing, education, and networking. The ease of data access and distribution has, nevertheless, made it impossible to digest even a small portion of the available information, leading to struggles of attentional choice and pull. The monetisation of attention adds an additional layer of stakes and relations of power to the information replete landscape, making it both more difficult and more desirable to control our attentional habits.

Bernard Stiegler (2010) considers youth in the process of attentional habit formation as most markedly at risk of “attention capture” by the market. A capture that arguably pulls them away from traditional sources of authority and further risks the demise of cultural traditions and norms – the very cultural fabric of much anthropological research. Tim Wu (2016) opens his book “The Attention Merchants: An Epic Scramble To Get Inside Our Heads”, whose title succinctly summarises the profile of the attention economy, with the story of a strapped for funds California school district opening its doors to advertisement. Wu considers the appearance of advertising at the school particularly telling because it constitutes a break from the vision of the school as a commerce-free sanctuary. The emergence of similar opportunities allegedly gives businesses direct access to the “impressionable and easier to influence” youth and the possibility to “mould the consumers of the future” (ibid: 11-12).

Preoccupation with attention is not new. Jonathan Crary (2001) sees the roots of our attentional concerns in the development of capitalism and modern spectatorship beginning in the 19th century. Scientific developments rendered human perception measurable and susceptible to the “disciplinary regime of attentiveness” (ibid: 13) of the industry. While I agree with Crary on the historical character of human perception, I dispute his insistence on an intrinsic link between modernisation, the subjectification of attention, and the experience of attentional instability and fragmentation. Attentional subjects have likely existed since the evolution of conscious attention; what differs throughout time is the kind of social landscape they were placed in.³ Urban youth in late modernity are faced with the attentional choices and pulls that come with living in times of global capitalism and the ubiquity of digital information technologies. In the next section, I will describe the anthropological background that led me to consider youth at my fieldsites as limited-scope agents that guide and reflect on the directionality of their attention but are subject to institutional and dispositional constraints.

³ See Krainer (2023) for an account of medieval monks’ battles with distractions in their quest to connect with God and Wellmon (2015) on fears of superficial information overload after the invention of the Gutenberg printing press.

IV. Attentional Agents in Anthropology

Attentional processes manage the length and intensity of engagements with the material and conceptual reality that surrounds us. In the Husserlian phenomenological tradition, attention handles the flux of experience, allowing for both its endurance and change. A phenomenological perspective considers experience as an “active engagement” of the subject with the world involving “numerous sensory, imaginal, emotional, existential, and embodied processes” (Throop 2012: 157). Those processes are connected by the attentional nexus and moulded by our previous experiences and social relationships. On the bus en route to Palacio Portales, the students’ attentional engagements guided the attention of their fellow classmates, underscoring the intersubjective nature of attention. During the trip, the novelty and sensorial intensity of the images in the wealthy neighbourhood acted as an attentional pull. Attention as a practice involves both attentional choice and attentional pulls. Attentional choice represents the limited-scope agency we have in how we direct and manage our attention. Attentional pulls refer to the more structured and habituated aspects of attentional practice. Throop and Duranti (2015) identify five varieties of attentional pulls, which can be summarised as ‘ready-to-be-used’, ‘breakdown’, ‘absence’, ‘breakthrough’, and ‘mood-oriented attention’.

The first is an embodied form of attention that pulls you towards specific actions and objects out of habit, e.g. making coffee in the morning. My exploration extends this category of pull to include narrowly focused conceptual attention or “range of activation of mental representations in long-term memory” (Liu 2016: 190). Conceptual attention is a requisite to “activate and generate a target thought” (ibid: 191) and, when aimed more fixedly, is closely guided by culturally moulded schemas that inform my analysis of normative attentional patterns throughout the thesis chapters. The second pull, ‘breakdown’, acts when things malfunction and bring to light previously unnoticed elements, e.g. a wobbly chair, making us inspect its construction and possibilities of repair. Again, this category does not limit itself to material things but includes social relations and institutions, such as democracy, which in my research emerged as a moral highlight in light of political malpractice in Bolivia (Ch. 3).

The third, ‘absence’, relates to the attentional pull evoked by the absence of something previously present that may have been barely noticed on a habitual basis, e.g. the disappearance of an item of furniture from your workplace. I don’t explicitly engage with this pull in the thesis, but I did take notice of it at my research sites. Most explicitly, during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the thoughts of Colegio Alalay students I talked to kept returning to the space of the school,

their peers, and teachers whom they ceased to see daily. The fourth, ‘breakthrough’, refers to things standing out because of their conspicuousness. The landscape of Zona Norte and Palacio Portales drew the students’ attention because of their unfamiliarity with it. So did elements I discuss as entering the national social attentionscape and inciting public debate because of their novelty, e.g. the entrance of Indigenous culture into parliament and places associated with wealth and Western culture in Bolivia. The last variety, ‘mood-oriented attention’ happens when feelings direct us towards aspects of a situation. Emotion is an important component both in directing our immediate attention and building more ingrained attentional pathways. I will be explicitly discussing its place in attentional nexus and practice in relation to morality and politics in Chapter 3, but its presence can be felt in many of the everyday attentional interactions that fill the pages of this thesis, beginning with the feelings of desire and awe that accompanied student attention on the trip to Palacio Portales. My research on this last category of attentional magnet identifies it as an inherent element of reasoning and decision making, challenging a clear-cut distinction between attentional choice and pull.

Throop and Duranti identify the potential of attention as an extensive interpretative lens for anthropological analysis. They consider attention to be “a powerful instrument for understanding how people respond to, interpret, and engage with their surrounding world” (ibid: 1057). I concur with their approach to viewing attention from “the standpoint of a phenomenologically informed anthropology” (ibid: 1055). In line with phenomenological accounts of cognition, I understand attention to be intersubjective, environmentally embedded, and affect-laden. Where I differ with Throop and Duranti is in their conceptualisation of embodied aspects of attentional organisation as “pre-cognitive” (2015: 1056). My understanding of attention is more coherent with the view of cognition itself as embodied, a perspective that grew largely out of a synthesis of cognitive science and phenomenological influences (see V). In comparison to Throop and Duranti, my theorisation of attention also gives more weight to the workings of the political economy and social systems beyond the immediate dynamics of interpersonal encounters. As Lave pointed out, phenomenological accounts of cognition limit their focus to the “time-space locus in which it occurs” and are hence “unable to account for macro-social, political-economic structures” (1988: 150) which provide frameworks for the environmental settings in which cognition takes place.

Attention brings a new perspective to the structure-agency debate in anthropology, exemplified by works in the anthropological tradition of “practice theory” (Ortner 1984: 148) to which this thesis contributes directly by arguing for limited-scope individual agency in attentional choice.

Practice theorists seek to describe the dialectical relationship between social structure and individual agents, which would avoid falling into the traps of either full on structural objectivism or subjectivism. An example of such an extensive attempt can be found in Pierre Bourdieu's work on the habitus. Bourdieu defined the habitus as a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions" (1977: 82), which guides our perceptions, thoughts, preferences, and actions. He sought to pull together individual and collective perspectives and action patterns, which he understood to be homologous, not homogenous, among people of a similar socio-economic status and conditioned upon material social reality. Bourdieu's work is relevant to this thesis for its explicit political ramifications and contribution to the anthropology of schooling, and it informs aspects of my analysis of world imaginaries (Ch.1) and pedagogic orientations (Ch.2).

Bourdieu's work leaves little room for everyday human reflexivity and emotion as catalysts of social change. The habitus is so closely attuned to the structural order that it reproduces it through practice in "worlds of already realised ends, procedures to follow, paths to take" (1990: 53). Individual strategies and emotions are predefined in terms of "objective potentialities" (ibid) permitted by the unquestioned taken-for-grantedness Bourdieu encapsulated by the term "doxa" (1977: 164). Sherry Ortner's (1990) discussion of cultural schemas seeks to step away from the agentive fallacy of Bourdieu's sociology. She suggests there is "a kind of elastic distance between actors' selves and cultural schemas" (ibid: 90) in which schemas can be internalised and mechanically enacted, strategically manipulated, or exist as an abstract cultural idea disassociated from the individual. Further on, I will elaborate on the concept of schema and its utility for this thesis.

Ortner's recognition of cognitive agency opens up space for metacognition and reflexivity as drivers for individual and collective attention, which can both stem from and contribute to wider social change. Anthony Giddens considered late modern identity and social institutions to be "reflexively made" (1991: 3).⁴ Globalisation and digitalisation introduce people to a variety of experiences and sources of information, which provide fertile ground for reflective behaviour. In their consideration of young people's choices with regards to drinking alcohol, Caluzzi et al. use the term "reflexive habitus" to argue that late modernity's "plurality of options" requires a "continuous reflexive engagement" from the youth, without negating the presence of an "unconscious embodiment of social structures" and "constraints to their autonomy" (2021: 887-

⁴ Giddens used the term reflexivity as a synonym of reflectivity; not to be confused with reflexivity meaning automatic reflex.

888). My account of attentional practice, whether individual or collective, equally seeks to devote more space to the plurality of influences and human reflexivity on youth cognition in late modernity. It also considers the role of a variety of cognitive attentional mechanisms as emotionally constituted and embedded in everyday sociality and how they contribute to social continuity and changes at my fieldsites without losing ‘the bigger picture’ of larger scale social institutions and systems.

In her analysis of social relationships as ‘vectors’, Caroline Gatt proposed the notion of “direction of attention” (2013: 350) as a potential solution to the structure-agency debate. Based on an ethnography with environmental activists, Gatt emphasises that by focusing their attention in one direction, people become distracted from other potential affordances or aspects of the environment but can change or scatter their focus through social interaction. Familiarity with macro-social institutions, as the European Union in Gatt’s data, can direct one’s attention towards the variety of more manageable smaller relationships they are composed that can be acted upon by individual agents and contribute to social change. Gatt’s research also explains how ideological focus can change according to circumstance and power relations. For example, despite an explicit discourse of horizontality between local activist groups, her interlocutors in Malta did not question the advice they received from a larger UK based division, ignoring the ways in which the advice negatively impacted their projects. Thus, divergent and potentially conflicting directions gain attentional prominence depending on the particularity and novelty of situation. The context-dependency of attentional directions and resolutions is traceable throughout the argumentation of this thesis, for instance in the clashes between pedagogic orientations at school (Ch.2) or political conflict driven decision-making (Ch.3).

Gatt developed her theory of vectors and directionality of attention from an ethnographic, rather than strictly cognitive, perspective, but it provides a particularly insightful anthropological analysis of “forms of culture at the juncture of the intersubjective or institutional and the cognitive-individual levels” (Frodin 2017: 94). My work on attention is directly inspired by Gatt’s but turns more closely towards the mind. It does so with an aim to cognitively ground practice and discourse-based analyses of cultural schemas and attentional patterns. According to the ecological view on the evolution of attention, attention evolved not because of limited brain capacity to deal with external information but to help us orient towards specific goals and actions (Lev-Ari et al. 2022). Hence, human agency is built upon attentional processes, but does not occur in a vacuum. When societal expectations change, so do personal objectives and goal-oriented attention. The next

section will consider the possibility of a theoretical alliance between anthropology and psychology to provide a socio-cognitive perspective towards attentional processes.

V. Attention: A Socio-Cognitive Perspective

The relationship between social anthropology and psychology can be best described as a strained one characterised by contention and co-dependency. Psychology has set out to study the universals of the human mind. Social anthropology concerns itself with the cultural and social aspects of the human. The two diverge in their principal goals and methodologies but rely on each other's disciplinarily designated spheres. The human mind is constitutionally embedded in cultural meaning and social relations. The formation of social-symbolic systems is built upon the operations of cognitively active humans. The psychological and social spheres of human life exist in a dialogical relationship that this thesis aims to capture through the study of attentional practice. My attempt at a psychological grounding of ethnographic data draws mostly from work in cognitive psychology.

Early anthropological research did not draw a strict disciplinary divide between the study of the mind and the study of culture. Frazer's anthropology was a "mental" one with the "view to trace the general evolution of mental thought" (1921: 584-585). A linear course of evolution required some form of communal basis in the composition and predispositions of the mind. Hence, despite adherence to different evolutionary stages that put Western societies at the pinnacle, humans were held to possess "a general likeness in the structure of their bodies and the working of their minds" (Tylor 1896: 4). Franz Boas challenged the racism and universality of social evolutionary theories, leaving a strong legacy of cultural relativism in social anthropology. This legacy, however, was not always anti-psychological. Boas's disciples, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead became pioneers of psychological anthropology. Theirs and other works of the culture and personality tradition were "mainly anthropology linked with dynamic psychiatry and behaviouristic psychology" (LeVine 1963: 111). Culture and personality studies in anthropology fell out of fashion before they began to seriously romance with the cognitive revolution, following a series of flimsy-based claims and military involvement, which threatened their public image and credibility.⁵

Social and cultural anthropologists distanced themselves from psychology, expressing either negligence of its disciplinary contributions or outright anti-psychologism. Richard Shweder (2012)

⁵ For more details on the decline of Culture and Personality studies see LeVine (2001: 813-816).

highlights the predictability of anthropology's disenchantment with the cognitive revolution and the discipline's disassociation from psychology and the cognitive sciences because of methodological incommensurability. The search for universal laws and relationships of causality requires experimental control, which nevertheless comes at the cost of abstracting the human subject from its cultural and social setting. Still, there are valuable lessons to be learned from psychologists' methodological rigour (Greenfield 2000). Experimental findings can bring novel insights and perspectives on the possible interpretation of ethnographic data (see Astuti et al. 2005; Astuti & Harris 2008; Cole 1971; Dasen & Wassman 1994). Crucially, anthropologists should pay attention to psychology because cognition is a "constitutive and reactive part of" (Astuti 2016: 451) society. Such co-constitution is apparent in theories that trace the origin of uniquely human higher level mental functions to the formation of more complex forms of social organisation and cultural transmission (see Hutchins 2008; Tomasello 1999; Vygotsky 1997 [1931]). Furthermore, merging psychological and anthropological insights provides a potential to synthesise attentional analysis at the individual and collective level, elucidating the linkages between them.

De Munck & Bennardo (2019) proposed a socio-cognitive approach to explain how culture as a collective phenomenon is mutually entangled with yet distinct from the individual minds of a cultural group's members. Participation in 'cultural groups' does not imply adherence to a unified set of collective assumptions. In any case, the fluid and non-coherent character of culture make it impossible. Munck and Bernando utilise many cross-disciplinary inspirations to conceptualise culture, including Kronenfeld's idea of the 'as if' reality of culture, according to which people interpret and understand the norms within their social circles "as if they are also shared by the other members" and as "appropriate for the specific context" (ibid: 175). The 'as if' reality of culture means that its principles need not be deeply internalised as beliefs to function as norms for collective identity and interaction.

I suggest that to understand significant modifications within the 'as if' imagined realities that make up much of this fragmented cultural structure, there is a need to zoom in on the mechanisms of belief constitution and change at the level of the self, on the one hand, and consider the work of socio-economic and institutional change, on the other. This thesis attempts to do so through the prism of attention because it is a cognitive process that engages in a continuous dialectic between the mind and environment. The acquisition of new knowledge and reflection require a certain directionality of attention that can be broad or narrow in scope and is intertwined with cognitive predispositions and biases. For example, the confirmation bias directs our attention so

to obstruct changes in beliefs and assumptions despite the availability of information challenging them.⁶ Attention is also shaped by habit and normalisation, which further hinder modifications in the connections of the attentional nexus. Finally, it is embedded in institutional and discursive relations of power.

A socially embedded view of attentional nexus and practice requires a perspective on cognition that stretches its boundaries beyond the individual mind; a project attempted by work falling under the categories of distributed, situated, and embodied cognition research. The three have distinct yet overlapping research agendas with assertions of relevance for the theoretical assumptions of this thesis. Specifically, they underscore the situatedness of cognition in environmental context, its enacted and corporeal nature, and its distribution across material objects and social arrangements. An approach to cognition that has been summarised as 4E cognition – embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended (see Carney 2020). Embodied cognition ignites much contention among scientists for assuming tight interconnectedness between bodily experience and higher-level cognitive functions.⁷ For example, research on embodiment convincingly demonstrated that cognitive tasks that do not require motor activity, sometimes referred to as offline tasks, involve activity in the sensorimotor regions of the brain (e.g. Mottonen & Watkins 2009; Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia 2010). A courtesy of its phenomenological roots, embodied cognition also gives centrality to the “intercorporeal” and “interaffective” aspects of human experience. Broadly speaking, “intercorporeality” refers to role of other human and animate bodies beyond the self in the constitution of human experience and “interaffectivity” to the circulation of emotions between those bodies.⁸ Shared emotion and mutual focus of attention coexist in a reciprocal relationship feeding the development and maintenance of each other (see Metiu & Rothband 2013).

Jean Lave’s (1988) “Cognition in Practice” and Edwin Hutchins’s (1995) “Cognition in the Wild” are landmark works and rarities in cognitive anthropology in their ethnographic consideration of everyday cognition that led to a theorisation of cognition as distributed (see also Hutchins 2014). Their innovation comes from spatially extending cognition to speak of a cognitive architecture, which includes other people and external technologies acting as “cognitive artefacts” (Hutchins 1999: 126), that form complex mediation systems for the execution of cognitive tasks. Other

⁶ For an overview of the notion of confirmation bias see Nickerson (1998).

⁷ Embodied cognition research comes in many shapes and sizes. For an overview see Farina (2020).

⁸ The notion of intercorporeality has been first introduced and discussed in the work of Merleu Ponty (1964). Interaffectivity as a theoretical term first explicitly appeared in the work of Thomas Fuchs (2013) inspired by Merleu Ponty.

people facilitate human understanding of group membership and skill acquisition, as evidenced by cognitive ethnographic accounts of teaching and learning such as Lave & Wenger's (1998) work on 'legitimate peripheral participation' or Goodwin's (1994) account of 'professional vision'. Furthermore, people can off-load cognitive tasks or their elements to others, as I discuss in Chapter 5 in relation to the avoidance of schoolwork.

Cognition is distributed in time at both the individual and collective levels. I follow Edwin Hutchins' approach and "take the individual to be a very plastic kind of adaptive system" (1995: 288); one guarded by a flimsy fence, rather than a brick wall. Hutchins' model of distributed cognition does not do away with the concept of internalised mental representations and much of his work concerns itself with internal structure formation (see 1995: 287-316; 2005; 2012).⁹ While cognition is environmentally situated, individual humans bring their previous life experiences and representations of the world into the situation at hand. A diachronically "evolving cognitive ecosystem" includes "a shared world of objects and events as well as adaptive resources internal to each member of the community" (Hutchins 2014: 37).

Those objects and events include ones whose complexity and importance were constituted across generations of people working on material innovations and adding new symbolic meanings to past happenings. Back in 1964, Marshall McLuhan claimed that the electric age has "extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace" (2001 [1964]: 3), highlighting that present-day cognitive distributions are not confined to immediate environments or community-bound cognitive heritage but consist of globally dispersed resources. The omnipresence of mobile internet technologies at my fieldsites makes such global cognitive connectivity particularly pervasive, begetting questions about the kind of information and tools that reach adolescents through digital media and how they connect to cognitive processes of attention and knowledge internalisation or schema formation.

A schema is a unit of conceptual or procedural knowledge. It is an umbrella term for a variety of mental representations and patterns that range from basic assumptions about the world and object prototypes to complex abstract concepts, like 'justice' or 'democracy', and multi-step action

⁹ C.f. work in radical embodied cognition by Chemero (2009) and Tanaka (2009), which suggests that all cognition can be explained through environment-body coupling without the need to resort to mental representation. Such a stance, in my understanding, risks a point of full collapse between the individual and the environment and loss of feasible units of analysis in research on cognitive processing.

scripts.¹⁰ The term schema was first introduced by the psychologist Jean Piaget (1926; 1936), who considered experience-based schema acquisition a key factor in children's cognitive development. Children develop schemas through interactions with the environment and use them to interpret subsequent experiences. They can either assimilate novel stimuli into the pre-existing schema set or revise it if the information is sufficiently novel or impactful through accommodation. Schemas are dynamic and susceptible to modification, but as 'glued' patterns of thought and action within the attentional dialectic, they remain conceptually identifiable and palpable to ethnographic inquiry.

I consider the connectionist model of schema theory, endorsed by Strauss & Quinn (1997), as a suitable cognitive explanation of cultural meaning. In this model, schemas are not separate modules or dispositions but collections of elements that work together to process information at a given time, just like the working of the neurons in our brain. Meanings generated by schemas are shaped by the learner's specific life experiences and are revisable. They are highly context-dependent and subject to introspection. A connectionist account helps us explain the ability to hold potentially contradicting beliefs and action scripts, as well as the possibility to employ them separately or modify them according to context and novel experiences.

I wish to argue that schemas cannot be properly understood without a resource to attention. If schemas help us cognitively ground cultural actions and motivations, then attention sheds light on their mental constitution, reproduction, and elasticity. Attention is responsible for the interconnection of various kinds of sensory and cognitive stimuli from our brain networks into unified representations and states, providing an "attentional basis for the creation of meaning and intentions" (Frodin 2017: 97). Attentional awareness allows us to direct it towards specific internal (thoughts, feelings) or external (environmental) stimuli, according to social and personal circumstances shaping brain processing and behaviour (Graziano 2013; Webb & Graziano 2015). Since societies and individuals are 'open systems,' attentional paths are never predetermined, but as anthropologists, we can describe what appear to be "nodes of dense interconnectivity" (Hutchins 2014: 45) in what guides collective and individual attention in particular geographical settings.

Hence, with regards to attentional nexus and practice at my fieldsites, I ask: How does attention feature in various cognitive configurations, such as the nation, social media, and the classroom?

¹⁰ For an overview of different kinds of schemas see Casson (1983).

What social factors influence attentional practice and under what conditions can they “force attention into less habitual tracks” (Douglas 1966: 67)? Which cultural, material, and cognitive resources do adolescents and teachers make use of when negotiating everyday attentional practice? What can an ethnographic focus on teenage attention tell us about changing societies and global interconnectedness in specific geographical settings? In what follows, I will more closely describe the places and course of my fieldwork, including methodological issues and considerations of the research process. I will finish this introduction with a chapter outline, which illustrates how will I proceed to shed light on the above-listed issues and ethnographically illuminate the enactive and political nature of attention.

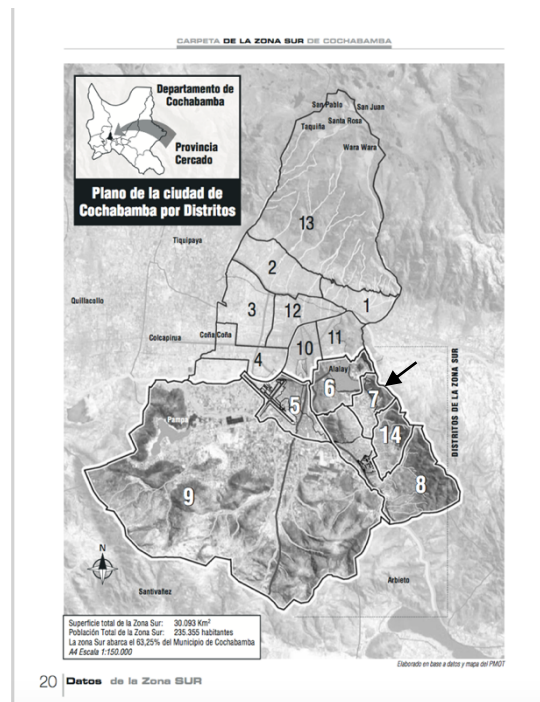
VI. Fieldsites & Fieldwork

This thesis is based on research in two cities located over 10,000 km apart across the Atlantic Ocean: Cochabamba in Bolivia and Warsaw in Poland. Bolivia is commonly divided into three separate geographical zones: the high plateau, the valleys, and the lowlands. The valleys, where the city of my fieldwork research is located (see im. I.), are characterised by high land fertility and have been a major grain production site supplying the Inca empire and workers of the mines during the early colonial period. The city of Cochabamba was first founded in 1571 as an export and market town under the name of Villa de Oropesa. Its current name derives from the compound of two Quechua-origin words, *qocha* (Q. lake) and *pampa* (Q. open plain).

Cochabamba has experienced exponential growth in the second half of the 20th century, rising from a mere 50,000 at the start of the 50s to 630,000 in 2012. The city was designed according to the colonial urban aesthetic of a grid whose idealised image was disrupted by the growth of unplanned informal settlements south of the city that continue to be seen as a threat to public order by more wealthy urbanites (Goldstein 2009: 7-12). Rodriguez Ostria et al. (2008) describe the boundaries of the city for the urban middle class as ending at the border between the historic city centre and the South. They explain this in terms of urban segregation and fear spurred by the public imaginary of the South as the centre for crime, filth, and disorder; home to the poor, gangs, and *cleferos* (Sp. glue sniffers). I spent 6 months carrying out participant observation at a small public neighbourhood school located in District 7 of Cochabamba’s Southern zone (see im. II.). Throughout the thesis, I will refer to this school as Colegio Alalay.



Im. I. Map of Bolivia. Cochabamba indicated by an arrow.
Source: Google Maps (accessed 14/04/2024).



Im. II. Map of Cochabamba's Districts.
(CEDIB 2007: 20) Darker shades districts
present the circumference of the "Zona Sur".
District 7 indicated by an arrow.

The great majority of students at Colegio Alalay were either first- or second-generation descendants of migrants from the valley countryside or the high plateau regions. Their parents mostly devoted themselves to low-scale commercial activity and manual work, although there were exceptions, and each class had a few students with parents in agriculture or in more prestigious lawyer, teacher, doctor, nurse, or office employee jobs. About half of the students spoke an Andean Indigenous language (Quechua or Aymara in the case of family migration from the highlands), although with various levels of fluidity, and never used it at school, besides one-off words included as part of jokes or of common use in Bolivian Spanish. Most had parents who spoke an Indigenous tongue, but very few admitted to communicating in them at home, unless speaking with monolingual grandparents. I did, nevertheless, see instances of bilingual communication during parent reunions in which a mother would address their child in Quechua and receive a response in Spanish.

As the above demographics suggest, the students, with very few exceptions, are of Indigenous origins. Their Indigeneity, nevertheless, is not straightforward and should be seen with a consideration of the contested nature of Indigeneity in Bolivia. Many students seemed confused about their identity, sometimes referring to themselves as *indios* (Sp. Indians) but "not real ones" since they did not work the land and did not speak Quechua. Others, especially second-generation

descendants whose parents were born in the city, considered themselves *mestizos* (Sp. mixed race). In Bolivia, the *mestizo* identity stands at a continuum between Indigeneity and whiteness. Hence, there are different forms of *mestizaje*, not necessarily dependent on genetics and skin colour.¹¹ Javier Sanjines wrote of the “bipolar divide [among the mixed-race population] between the *mestizo-criollos* and *cholo-indios*” (2005: 47-48). The culturally Western *mestizo-criollo* was socially designated as superior and the closer to Indigenous culture *cholo-indio* as subaltern. The *cholo* is you may say a “*mestizo aindiado*” (Quijano 2003: 53) – an ethnically “Indianised” person of mixed-race. Culturally and physiognomically close to their Indigenous roots, *cholos* represent the crux of Indigeneity in Bolivia’s urban centres.

This societal division of symbolic capital largely followed in liberal capitalist times as the *mestizo criollos* became the new economic elite and middle classes. Cochabamba holds an extra layer of complexity on top of those national divisions because of the historically high rates of inter-ethnic intermingling and migration, which made the regional campesino the model for the 1952 national project of *mestizaje* (see Torrez 2012). Cochabamba’s recent history (The 2000 Water War¹² and 2007 political clash¹³) disturbed the image of idyllic *mestizaje* by bringing to fore new Indigenous political actors (ibid). Recent decades, nevertheless, saw the emergence of a new middle class with a distinct *cholo* culture, often despised by the more established traditional middle classes (see Kollnig 2020) and the substantial increase in the significance of Indigeneity on the national political scene with the election of Evo Morales as Bolivia’s first Indigenous president in 2006.

Scholars from a variety of fields in Bolivian studies, including anthropologists, have extensively described the contradictory nature of the politics exemplified by Morales’s government (e.g. Kohl & Farthing 2014; Postero 2006; Schneider 2020; Webber 2011). An ethnographic account of teenagers’ everyday concerns, including but not limited to political ones, can shed light on the extents and mechanisms of influence that socio-economic changes and power relations have on young Bolivian populations. Bolivian adolescents grew up in an era of substantial, yet not ubiquitous, increases in the symbolic, economic, and political power of Indigenous and working-class populations. An ethnographic scrutiny of the school and values endorsed by young

¹¹ See e.g. Canessa 2012; Rodriguez Garcia 2010.

¹² Protests in response to the privatisation of the municipal water supply, which lasted between January 2000 and April 2000.

¹³ On January 11th 2007 coca-growers from the Chapare requesting the resignation of Cochabamba’s prefect Manfred Reys Villa clashed with the prefect’s urban supporters resulting in 2 deaths and around 200 injuries. For more on the conflict see Villazón Solís (2008).

populations can provide a sketch of possible attentional paths Bolivian society can take amid changing circumstances.

Risking simplification, we can look at students at Colegio Alalay as largely coming from new *cholo* middle-class families, although, mostly, within a lower position on the socio-economic ladder. Colegio Alalay was founded in 2009 on the premise of a need for a public school free from the neighbourhood's 'bad influence' nearby schools were supposedly under. The school was located in an exceptionally well-off Organización Territorial de Base (OTB, Sp. Grassroots Territorial Organisation)¹⁴ for Zona Sur's standards (see CEDIB 2007), but I met only one student who actually lived there. Most students enrolled from nearby Zona Sur OTB's. The teachers and parents were convinced that if guided towards the right path, students could become successful regardless of their financial circumstances.

Between September 2019 and March 2020, I followed the activities of two classes – promo 2019 and promo 2020, the latter sometimes referred to as pre-promo in relation to events taking place in 2019. I hence got a good grasp of happenings during lessons, break-time, and extra-curricular activities at the school. I also interviewed most of the students about the school and their personal lives at least once. In each class, there were a few students whom I got to know well enough to sometimes join them in their after-school work, church, and leisure activities. In March 2020, the school closed its doors due to governmental concerns over the spread of coronavirus cases in Bolivia. Initially, the closure was considered a two-week long precautionary measure, but instead of re-opening schools, the government soon saw it necessary to impose a nation-wide lockdown. During the first months of the pandemic teaching at Colegio Alalay was limited to sending activities via WhatsApp, which most students simply chose to ignore. Health concerns and police surveillance on the streets made face-to-face interactions with students unattainable, and my fieldwork practices turned to social media analysis and WhatsApp conversations with students. Those practices brought a novel perspective on the lives of my interlocutors yet strayed from my research objectives, which, at that point, evolved around the student response to and on the ground implementation of educational policies.

The circumstances pushed me towards a return to my hometown of Warsaw, Poland (im. III.) and the selection of a new fieldsite for a comparative project. Warsaw became Poland's unofficial

¹⁴ OTB are bottom-up community run organisations that represent the interests of residents of a designated territory. Its boundaries constitute informal neighbourhood demarcations.

capital in 1596 under the rule of King Zygmunt III Waza but only officially so in 1918 after Poland re-gained independence (see Ch.1). Warsaw and its immediate surroundings grew to become Poland's cultural, economic, and political centre. Like Cochabamba in Bolivia, Warsaw embodies national cultural complexities, in this case Poland's identity as between Europe's East and West.¹⁵ My choice to carry out research at a Warsaw school was not merely pragmatic but also analytically strategic. Bolivia and Poland are both countries with histories of lengthy foreign occupations, which continue to shape national culture and pedagogic orientations at school. I was also aware that, at the time of my fieldwork, government-imposed educational reforms were opposed by the urban magistrate in both Cochabamba and Warsaw. Hence, despite their geographical separation, my two fieldsites held common ground, which acted as fertile starting points for ethnographic comparison.

A focus on youth brings novel anthropological insights on urban Polish society by engaging with a population that did not substantially inherit the “culture of dependency” (Kuisz 2018: 31) of Poles living under foreign nations' control or occupation. 21st century born Poles grew up in an ambience of full national independence and past the shock of post-communist political and economic system transition. Youth embody the nation's changing attitudes to schooling, work, and religion, which sometimes appear inapprehensible to their teachers. During my online fieldwork at Liceum Gawiecki, I attended a teachers' workshop on Zoom in which the leader referred to contemporary high school students as ‘lost’ – as a generation particularly challenging to teach because they have no determinate purpose. Throughout the pages of this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that youth are far from purposeless but face different concerns from previous generations and scatter their attention accordingly. Youth are also important agents of political change. Young people aged 18–29 were much more likely to vote for the opposition in the 2023 parliamentary elections (TVN24 2023)¹⁶, contributing to a change of government and radical shifts in the directions of symbolic state attention away from what I described to be the state status quo in Chapter 1.

In September 2020, I began fieldwork at a large public high school located in the Targówek borough of Warsaw, Poland (im. IV.). I will refer to the school by the name Liceum Gawiecki.

¹⁵ For accounts of influences of Poland's geopolitical location on national identity see Galbraith (2004) and Janion (2003).

¹⁶ Data from exit polls carried out by an international market and public opinion research analytics company IPSOS.

Targówek is one of the poorest boroughs of Warsaw as determined by the average price and size of real estate. Targówek was part of Warsaw in 1916 but became a significantly built-up area with the construction of residential estates in the 1960s. The exact location of the school within the city is, however, less ethnographically telling than in the case of Colegio Alalay because of Poland's competition-based school admissions system and a resultant student body of highly dispersed residence. The students at Liceum Gawiecki mostly came from middle class families of white-collar workers or small business owners and were considerably financially better off than the average student at Colegio Alalay. In 2020, when I began fieldwork at the school, Liceum Gawiecki was near the end of the list of the 100 best ranked secondary schools in the city¹⁷, situating it as a relatively low prestige school. I had thought it would be either the initial third preference (last) or supplementary admissions school choice for most of my interlocutors, but in fact, I found out that the majority had selected the school as their first choice of preference.



Im. III. Map of Poland. Warsaw marked by an arrow.
Source: Google Maps (Accessed 14/04/2024).



Im. IV. Map of Boroughs of Warsaw. Targówek marked by an arrow. Source <http://wciit.waw.pl/o-warszawie/dzielnice-warszawy/> (accessed 5/03/2024).

There were four main reasons for the students' choice, sometimes interacting in their influence. Firstly, proximity to home was a factor of interest in the school for some of the students, although considerably less influential than I had predicted. Secondly, students were attracted to the school's thematic or bilingual class profiles: journalism and cultural studies, management, psychology and pedagogy, theatre and art, Spanish, or German. Such specialisations were highly unconventional

¹⁷ According to the influential "Perspektywy" journal school ranking see <https://licea.perspektywy.pl/2020/rankings/ranking-liceow-warszawskich> (accessed 28/02/2024).

within the Warsaw high-school landscape. Thirdly, students purposely restrained from applying to a highly ranked school. They either wanted to avoid the likelihood of large amounts of schoolwork, admission failure, or held a critical stance towards school competitiveness and wished to distance themselves from the ‘rat race’. Hence, they chose Gawiecki because of the relatively low point threshold for admission. It is also worth mentioning that my interlocutors were influenced by soaring admissions thresholds and a decrease in school space following the elimination of middle schools as part of educational reforms in 2017.¹⁸ Finally, acquaintances at the school played a crucial role in attracting new students, who chose the school because of friends or older family members. This was a particularly common influence factor for students who commuted to the school from outside of Warsaw.

I spent a month in September 2020, two weeks in June 2021, and a month in September 2021 attending Liceum Gawiecki daily in-person. The resurgence of the coronavirus in October 2020 and the resulting lockdown led to an intermittent nature of in-person fieldwork at the school. I spent the remaining time virtually carrying out online class and social media profile observations and conducting interviews. Access conditions at Liceum Gawiecki and the kinds of activities I could engage in differed considerably from my time at Colegio Alalay. The headmaster at Liceum Gawiecki had similarly granted me ‘free rein’ over research activities at the school, as long as I complied with teacher and student wills. While at Colegio Alalay all teachers welcomed my presence during their lessons, at Liceum Gawiecki, some were reluctant to allow me to observe and otherwise participate in their classes. Others gave me permission to sit in during their in-person lessons but decided to withdraw this permission for lessons taking place online. I attribute this difference to what I perceived to be an overall lowered self-esteem of teachers at Liceum Gawiecki and possible embarrassment at the lack of control over students, which only deepened in the virtual classroom environment (see Ch.5).

I initially planned to follow two classes, as I did at Colegio Alalay, but it soon became apparent that switching between classes would provide me with a better ethnographic overview of the school. This is because same-grade classes followed diverse sets of subjects. Furthermore, a subject I wished to observe was sometimes taught by a teacher who resisted my presence in one class but was taught by a more cooperative teacher in another. I did, nevertheless, spend a considerable amount of time with one of the classes, a bilingual Spanish class and befriended individual students

¹⁸ This included a year of ‘double’ recruitment when the last year to complete middle school and the first to begin the new 4-year high school programme enrolled simultaneously.

in other classes enough to occasionally meet them outside of school hours. Any opportunities I had for face-to-face interaction outside the school space were, nevertheless, largely limited by the COVID-19 pandemic and conditions of lockdown.

VII. Ethical and Methodological Concerns

The problematic positionality of adult anthropologists carrying out ethnographic research with children and youth at schools has been widely documented (e.g. Beynon 1983; Hemmings 2009; Johnston 2016; Nespor 1997). The age gap between the ethnographer and participants brings up specific ethical and theoretical concerns. Young research participants are considered more vulnerable because of continuing psychological development as well as legal and institutional constraints on social participation. My interlocutors were aged between 16 and 19¹⁹, which placed them at a level of high maturity in the spectrum of adolescence. At no point did I identify any cognitive or communicative constraints that would hinder their understanding of the purpose and scope of my presence. I introduced myself, and explained the objectives of my research during my first and second visit to each class and sought to identify and inquire about any new faces I should additionally introduce myself to thereafter. I also received written consent from legal guardians of underage students at Liceum Gawiecki and verbal consent from guardians of students at Colegio Alalay.²⁰

I did not directly cite or describe students who did not provide me with their explicit consent to do so. Topics of a sensitive nature did form part of my interviews and everyday conversations with teenagers, but none made their way into the final draft of this thesis without an additional confirmation of permission. In ethnographic research, consent should not be considered a given but should be continuously confirmed and re-negotiated as new research topics emerge and the line between interlocutor and friend becomes increasingly blurry. I found the repeated re-affirmation of consent and clarification of any student doubts regarding my research particularly paramount because of the obligatory nature of school attendance, which complicated a straightforward backing out of students from the panorama of my observations.

¹⁹ A few male students at Colegio Alalay were in their early twenties.

²⁰ I opted for verbal consent at Colegio Alalay because I did not want there to be any misunderstandings or feelings of marginalisation amid possibly illiterate parents and for written consent at Liceum Gawiecki because I did not know the parents personally and required many more research permissions.

In my research, I took on a stance of detachment from typical roles of adult authority popular stance among ethnographers who study youth (see Eder & Corsaro 1999: 527). I did not take on any hierarchical teaching or pedagogic responsibilities, which would put me in an explicit relationship of power or assume paternalistic attitudes towards the students. When building rapport with students, I thought of myself as an older colleague or friend they could trust and confide in. This included responding to student curiosities around my person and sharing other information about myself. Sharing attenuates the hierarchy involved in participating in the school space as an adult and researcher and the one-sidedness of information provision in research, as noted and practiced by other researchers in education (see Nespor 1997; Roberts 2016). I became good friends with selected students and still maintain contact with them, but my position with regards to all adolescent interlocutors should be best described as “a certain space outside the constraints of the teachers (...) in which [adolescents] had relatively free rein to talk and interact” (Nespor 1997: 226). Detachment from authority can, nevertheless, generate additional ethical issues for researchers who come to observe peer abuse or other instances of youth involvement in violence or illegal activity (Eder & Corsaro *ibid.*; Hemmings 2009). Personally, I was not forced to face such dilemmas since I did not come to witness or hear about circumstances that would invite intervention in the present tense.²¹

Just as people worldwide were grappling with the idea of a global pandemic, Gutel, Varma, and Watanabe (2020) published their manifesto for ‘patchwork ethnography’ on the website of the Society for Cultural Anthropology. They called for a reconsideration of the status quo procedures of ethnographic research to include more fragmentary fieldwork forms, such as short-term visits and remote fieldwork, in adjustment to the personal and institutional circumstances of the fieldworker and the practical possibilities of the fieldsite. As the authors underscore, patchwork ethnography is not equivalent to a loss of rigour and should retain “long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking” but expand on what anthropologists consider to be “acceptable materials, tools, and objects” of analysis (*ibid.*: para.4).

Traditional forms of ethnographic investigation can already be considered ‘patchwork’ research forms – constellations of different forms of data that provide insight on the community or social phenomena in question: observations, artefacts, interviews, photography, and all kinds of written materials, including scholarly, journalistic, biographical, and fictional. Hence, the non-

²¹ I did hear about resolved past tense cases and witness mild drug and alcohol use that I did not judge as warranting concern.

conventionality of my research data lies largely in the circumstance-based disjuncture between the amount of offline versus online data I gathered in each of my fieldsites; my insights on Liceum Gawiecki were much more reliant on the latter. Patchwork ethnography should embrace rather than work against the “gaps, constraints, partial knowledge, and diverse commitments that characterise all knowledge production” and re-consider limitations and constraints as “openings for new insights” (ibid: para.5). While the pandemic did limit the degree of insight I could gain into the lives of Bolivian and, subsequently, Polish teenagers, it opened up a new opportunity for ethnographic comparison.

Comparison has been an intrinsic part of anthropological inquiry since the discipline’s inception. Social anthropology was arguably born out of 19th and early 20th century interest in the evolution of culture, exemplified by grandiose works of cultural juxtaposition and classification (see Frazer 1890; Tylor 1870). Nowadays, however, few socio-cultural anthropologists engage in explicit horizontal comparative analysis. The Boasian legacy of cultural relativism in anthropology successfully discredited the ethnocentric comparative accounts of early evolutionists, which posited Western culture as the pinnacle of human civilization. The anthropological ethos of cultural particularity had, nevertheless, led to concerns over comparative incommensurability and suspicions towards generalisation that halted efforts at direct cultural comparison. Instead, mainstream anthropology turned to the study of cultural particularities, in which the implicit presence of ‘the other’ serves “mainly to attest to the particularity of the case in question” (Miller et al. 2019: 284).

Peter van der Veer sees anthropology’s comparative advantage in the “close study of a fragment” (2016: 25), which can highlight “something specific without any pretence to general truth, but definitely of broader significance” (ibid: 26). For van der Veer, the thrust of this significance lies in the possibility of critiquing the assumed universality of Western derived models and concepts of society. Such a critique is indeed one of anthropology’s most worthy comparative contributions. Still, it does not preclude direct comparative juxtaposition. Nor is it the only kind of worthwhile anthropological comparison. For example, Miller et al. (2019) carried out a collaborative project on social media across nine geographically distinct fieldsites to highlight both particularities and similarities, allowing for some extent of theoretical generalisation about social media use.

My two fieldsite contexts are distinct enough to constitute a “disjunctive” (Lazar 2012: 351) kind of comparison. Lazar argues that it is possible for anthropologists to methodologically compare

“the unlike with the unlike” and “get the data thus placed to talk to each other” (ibid). Indeed, it seems implausible to carry out an ethnographic comparison of any other kind. Participant observation rarely, if ever, involves the study of people of an ‘ideal type’ nor can it control variables to scientifically pick out specific commonalities and differences. Furthermore, the course of ethnographic research is susceptible to fluidity and change, which in my research scenario resulted in significant differences in the kind of data I gathered at each fieldsite. The disjuncture in my ethnographic comparison is thus twofold: in the kinds of people or social phenomena placed next to each other as well as in the character of the research data gathered.

Thus, this thesis strays far from a straightforward contrast between two separate teenage cultures or adolescence in two nations. As an ethnographic study, it bears no claims of scientific objectivity or causality. It is, ultimately, interpretative in nature. I do, nevertheless, consider the basic individual cognitive categories I make interpretative use of, such as schemas, cognitive biases, or indeed attention, to be epistemically valid in the positivist sense. I argue that social anthropologists, should not eschew the idea of a universal human nature and that it is hence possible to use cognitive processes and predispositions as plausible units of comparative analysis. With such an assumption in mind, this thesis seeks to compare selected spheres of social influence on individual and collective attentional processes in two distinct national, regional, and institutional contexts.

VIII. Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into two sections. The first section, “Understanding Collective Attention”, considers the historical and institutional setting of my fieldsites and how theories of everyday cognition and the psychology of attention can help us understand social phenomena at the collective level. Chapter 1 focuses on conceptual cultural schemas comprising the national social attentionscape. It explores the grounding of the social attentionscape in historically shaped value systems and ‘world imaginaries’ endorsed by governments and civil society in my fieldsites. In Bolivia, those consisted of a historically novel intermingling of the imaginaries of modernity, civilisation, and development, with the imaginaries of decolonisation and Indigeneity, which co-existed alongside more categorical and stereotypical world imaginaries juxtaposing them. I argue that selective attention patterns and cognitive biases substantially contribute to the persistence of collective schemas and ideologies through time, despite contact with conflictive information. Changing historical circumstances, nevertheless, cause significant alterations in schemas and patterns of normative attention. The chapter also demonstrates the state’s symbolic deployment

of national symbolism and history, including school curricula formation, as directed by collective schemas and world imaginaries.

Chapter 2 turns to the overall pedagogic orientations at school and teachers' action scripts. It argues that pedagogic orientations are concurrently embedded in epistemic and institutional power dynamics and practices of everyday sociality. This can lead to the rise of not entirely compatible orientations competing for students' and teachers' attention, as I witnessed happen at both my fieldsites. The most palpable goal at Colegio Alalay was for the students to enter university and become *profesionales* (Sp. professionals). This future-oriented pedagogic orientation towards 'Western professionalism' was cultivated by an aspiration for a place in the developed world, considered in terms of Western modernity and Christian civilisation. Academic endeavours, nevertheless, went in tandem with communal preparations and an emphasis on cooperation during non-academic events, which constituted an alternative pedagogic orientation towards community life. At Liceum Gawiecki, attention was mostly present-oriented, governed by a 'bureaucratic orientation' of the *matura* high school leaving exam. Outside the classroom, when windows of opportunity came up, attention was, nevertheless, guided by liberal and cosmopolitan ideas that emphasised freedom of self-expression and tolerance.

The second section "'Disenchanted' and 'Disinterested' Youth" explores three areas of alleged youth 'disconnection': politics, social media, and the classroom. Chapter 3 considers the affective and reflexive aspects of moral attentional control and how they influenced youth participation in anti-government protests, which took place in 2019 in Bolivia, after suspicion of electoral fraud, and in 2020 in Poland, after the passing of an anti-abortion bill. It argues that morally channelled attention highlights aspects of our environment and mental repertoire. Adolescents at both my fieldsites were not so much politically disinterested as disenchanted in state level electoral politics and engaged in issues that caught their emotional moral attention.

Moral highlights differed between my two fieldsites because of the distinctive moral sentiments and particularities of political scenarios. The protesting youth in Warsaw held a liberal moral stance with an emphasis on personal choice, which stood in antagonistic relation to the conservative moral values of the governing party and its supporters. Zona Sur youth held a more ambivalent moral stance in the political crisis. They agreed with the opposition in their criticism of the president's undemocratic tendencies but highly condemned racist behaviours on the opposition's part. They also held positive sentiment for Evo Morales's symbolic position as the first Indigenous

president and his previous social actions. I further argue that historically accumulated affect influences moral emotional attention. This accumulation can also spill over to new moral emotional highlights, prompting discrimination and adding fuel to political antagonism.

Chapter 4 explores the ways in which teenagers engage in practices of online social bonding by adopting a variety of portable digital interactional spaces for social purposes and capitalising on their affordances. More particularly, it focuses on how the technical affordances of social media, such as portability, ephemerality, shareability, anonymity, or decorporalisation, bolster people's attentional affordances for phatic (relationship building) and for extimate (outwardly intimate) interactions. I demonstrate how those same affordances of social media that many criticise for leading to the lack of control and social alienation of adolescents can re-structure attention to facilitate phatic communication beyond time and place constraints and promote intimacy. Much of this process is a result of the distancing and fragmenting of surveillance caused by the affordances of asynchronous interaction and decorporalisation.

The chapter further considers the attentional affordances of social media as intertwined with the cultural, material, and emotional conditions of teen life. Cultural norms and institutional conditions at school determined the kind of content that travelled through phatic social media channels and the usefulness of specific affordances. Posts with 'inspirational' and emotional content were common genres in semi-public phatic social media networks at Colegio Alalay but rarely appeared on the profiles of Liceum Gawiecki students. The Warsaw students' profiles were much more tailored to fit the norms of showing one's 'best self,' and anonymity served as a crucial affordance for navigating the social schoolscape and leverage for phatic interaction.

Chapter 5 scrutinises online and offline teaching scenarios to determine the conditions of attentional failure and success in the classroom. Attentional success is defined as the establishment of mutual attention between students and teachers, upon which they can build conditions for productive learning. I argue that the ability to achieve attentional success in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability to capitalise on joint attention as the basis for fostering more prolonged mutual correspondence. At both Colegio Alalay and Liceum Gawiecki, mutual correspondence was intrinsically related to teaching "the human way" i.e. presenting material in an accessible and relatable manner and, most importantly, treating students like fellow humans rather than objectifying them.

The chapter further situates teachers' authority and attentional pull within the broader attentional ecology of the school that includes a variety of social, economic, and bureaucratic factors. At Liceum Gawiecki, the too information replete and exam-centred curricula limited student ability to pay attention in class, who frequently chose to divert their attention and retain focus only for selected classes and other personal interests. On the teacher's side work conditions, including low base pay and multiple classes further limited their ability to teach the 'human way' and achieve attentional success in class. Those structural factors and the low value of public schooling in the students' eyes fuelled the circle of demotivation between teachers and students. At Colegio Alalay teachers benefitted from more freedom in the choice of their lesson plan and space for establishment of mutual correspondence with students. Furthermore, students retained the belief in the value of schooling and maintained sociality practices around it. Those factors made attentional success at Colegio Alalay substantially easier. Students were nevertheless also drawn to attentional pulling triggers such their phones in class, just like their Polish contemporaries.

SECTION I: Understanding Collective Attention

Chapter One: The Social Attentionscape: History & Selective State Attention

“We cannot rerun the history with some cues altered as we can the experiments with some cues altered. But the passage of time does something like that for us.”

Howard Margolis (1987: 4)

1.1. The Social Attentionscape

This chapter begins with an event that took place 400 km away from my Bolivian field site in the city of La Paz yet was widely discussed throughout the country. In 2014, a new cable car line was inaugurated, linking the neighbouring Indigenous city of El Alto with the wealthy and “white” neighbourhood of La Paz and facilitating movement between them. In early 2015, a photo of El Alto residents sitting on the floor and snacking in front of the bowling arena of the Megacentre shopping mall located in the wealthy neighbourhood circulated the internet. It incited a heated public debate on social media around the desirability of their presence and behaviour, followed by press releases and academic publications inspired by the events. The women could be identified as *cholas* of Indigenous descent because of their braided hair and use of *pollera* skirts²², shawls, and bowler hats. Some of the commentators considered sitting on the floor to be inappropriate, signaling a lack of manners. Others, including the vice-minister of decolonisation, accused the commentators of racist attitudes and defended the floor occupiers, citing customs and the lack of sufficient infrastructure at the mall. The discussions²³ raised a conglomerate of issues around desirable mall aesthetics, the appropriate use of public space, and racialised concerns about hygiene, including disapproval of eating food while sitting on the mall’s floor.

²² A voluminous skirt with folds of colonial Spanish origins that serves as a fundamental garment of female *cholo* self-identification. So much so that, given the historically pejorative connotations of the category *cholo*, *cholas* are sometimes referred to as woman *de pollera* (Sp. of the skirt).

²³ The summary of discussions is based on a) blog posts recapitulating facebook comments and the comments underneath them: <https://www.cochabandido.com/2015/01/ahora-hay-mas-movimiento-economico-gracias-a-mi-teleferico-bolivia.html> (accessed 23.05.2023); <https://a4000.blogspot.com/2015/01/megacenter-ni-los-altenos-son-lo-que.html> (accessed 23.05.2023) b) press publications: <https://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/2015/01/07/descolonizacion-critica-rechazo-a-altenos-en-cines-de-irpavi-2/> (accessed 23.05.2023); <https://www.paginasiete.bo/sociedad/el-mega-apthapi-por-la-paz-abrio-un-espacio-para-el-debate-XIPS44536> accessed 23.05.2023) and the academic article on the topic by León Salinas (2019)

A similarly prominent amount of social attention in Poland gathers yearly around The Independence march: an event organised by the far-right civic society on November 11th, the Polish Independence Day. The march attracts tens of thousands of participants²⁴ from across Poland to take on the streets of Warsaw, gathering under slogans of explicit militant, ethnocentric, and Catholic character (e.g. “Let’s Reclaim Poland” in 2012; “Poland for Poles, Poles for Poland” in 2015; “We Want God” in 2017). The march first took place in 2010, and since then has become the centre stage of Independence Day celebrations. The rise of the far-right march represents a change in the balance of symbolic messages of Independence Day. Till recently, the day was dominated by carnivalesque state-organised celebrations around the cult of the independence leader Józef Piłsudski, who gained de facto leadership of the country on November 11th, 1918. The far-right civil society march, on the other hand, is more closely associated with the persona of another independence leader, Roman Dmowski, who championed a much more ethnically homogenous vision for the new Polish nation.²⁵

The rise of the march meant that many urban liberals in Warsaw, including my teenage interlocutors, ceased to think of November 11th as a day of public celebration but rather one in which to avoid the streets in fear of clashes with the marchers. This negative perception of “Independence Day” amongst urban liberals is reinforced by the international media attention the march gained for the presence of fascist sentiment and the continuous occurrence of riots and other violent events.²⁶ In 2020, at the height of political tensions and protests against the government (see Ch.3), one of the Independence Day marchers threw a flaming torch at an apartment with an LGBTQ flag and logo of the “Woman’s Strike”²⁷ on its window causing a fire. Similar happenings are selectively attended to by the media, dimming out the always present, yet set aside in visibility, official state celebrations.

Such ‘hot topics’ as the Independence march in Poland or the appearance of *altenños* (Sp. El Alto residents) at the Megacentre in Bolivia are worth paying attention to because they attract enough collective attention to spur public discussion at the national level and become included in the

²⁴ In 2010, two right wing organisations, the Radical National Camp and All-Polish Youth, took on the organisation of the march the first of which was estimated at a few thousand participants, reaching around sixty thousand in 2017.

²⁵ For more on the historical significance of the two camps see Kotwas & Kubik (2019).

²⁶ For example see The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/white-europe-60000-nationalists-march-on-polands-independence-day> (accessed 23/05/2023).

²⁷ The organisers behind protests against the introduction of strict anti-abortion legislations (see Ch.3).

political arena. In other words, they are a window onto the constituents of what I call the social attentionscape. I define the social attentionscape as the elements within a delineated society that come to the centre of collective attention. The term was previously used by media scholars Paimre & Harro-Loit to speak of “an intensive and attention-attracting coverage of a certain topic or event (at the expense of other topics or events) in news media” (2017: 2). My idea of the term is more expansive, influenced by Appadurai’s theorisation of -scapes, as “fluid” and “irregular” landscapes that “are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision” but are “deeply perspectival constructs” (1990: 33). I propose that the notion of the social attentionscape allows us to consider the juncture of elements of global and local flows of information in the creation of “imagined worlds” (Appadurai 1990: 296).

The social attentionscape at my fieldsites is dominated by ingrained social ideas that influence the everyday social context adolescents are embedded in, including the focus of schooling. This chapter introduces the dominant ideas that inform the social attentionscape and discusses their relationship to selective state attention, with an emphasis on educational legislation. In Bolivia, postcolonial imaginaries juxtapose modernity and development with the Indigenous. The recent emergence of a rhetoric of decolonisation at the level of the state had, nevertheless, substantially increased the symbolic and political power of Native populations openly contesting such straightforward antagonistic associations. I purposely speak of imaginaries in the plural to underscore their multifarious nature and embedding in the minds of actual people.²⁸ The divergent opinions with regards to the presence of Indigenous customs and aesthetics at the Megacentre mall in La Paz are attention-grabbing materialisations of conflicts within national world imaginaries and changes in historically prevalent cultural schemas.

In Poland, attention-guiding social imaginaries are constructed around contrastive sets of ideologies of ‘Catholic nationalism’ on the one hand and ‘European or cosmopolitan liberalism’ on the other. Hence, the urban public’s association of patriotism and Independence Day celebrations with the conservative far-right. Tensions between world imaginaries are particularly visible in debates around the desirable focus of schooling because they set out conflictive views of what schools should pay attention to in the formation of young citizens. The relationship between collective attention and national politics is a manifestation of attention’s political and enactive character, as analysed at the cognitive configuration of the nation-state.

²⁸ For a critique of an abstracted and decentred use of the term imaginary in anthropological and social thought see Strauss (2006).

This chapter will focus on the analysis of societal imagination at the national level through the consideration of collective attention. The sociologist of attention, Eviatar Zerubavel speaks of collective attention in terms of a “group level analogue of the mental process through which attention is selectively allocated” (2015: 70), spotlighting certain issues, while downplaying or outright ignoring others. Collective attention is closely related to the most likely topics to be discussed in the media, public policy agendas, or social gatherings. The analytical move from individual to collective attention, as well as any other social abstraction of an inherently cognitive process, is not a straightforward aggregate but needs to consider the complex bidirectional filter of social processes and power relations, including politics, the economy, and mass media.

Those are crucial elements of the attentional nexus, which inform attentional practice and help us understand how normative attention is guided by dominant ideologies and altered by historical circumstances. As such, the chapter contributes to my objective of investigating the relationship between cognition and social processes in (re)producing collective attention. Past experiences form the basis of cognitive schemas people use to interpret their surroundings (see e.g. Boutyline & Soter 2021). Those schemas guide the direction and intensity of attention and reproduce themselves through cognitive biases such as the confirmation bias. We are cognitively predisposed to seek at least enough stability to allow us to guide our daily decisions. Caroline Gatt’s (2013) theorization of social attention as vectorial illuminates the mechanisms of persistence and change in social imagined worlds at my fieldsites. As individuals and social collectives, we are incapable of equally attending to all surrounding stimuli and environmental changes and require some directionality of attention to carry on with our everyday lives and social interactions. In what follows, I will describe the historical development of the two national ideological social attentionscapes and their relation to changing societal schemas, consider the selective focus of the state and its supporters in the symbolic deployment of national memory, and highlight its influence on school curricula.

1.2. Historical National Attentionscapes

Appadurai describes imagined worlds as “worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (1990: 296). The elements I will focus on in describing the Bolivian and Polish social attentionscape most clearly belong to the realm of the ideoscape fitting the description of “concatenations of images” that are “often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and counter ideologies of

movements” (ibid). Both Bolivia and Poland share a history of ethnic and religious subjugation that guides national imaginaries and the government’s political objectives²⁹. Those imaginaries amplify selected elements and take on different positions within the social attentionscape, depending on historical circumstances.

The territories now belonging to the Bolivian plurination endured centuries of Spanish colonialism. Under colonial rule, Native populations were subject to 300 years of explicit exploitation, extermination, and evangelisation. After establishing its independence from the Spanish crown in 1825, the country continued to be governed by Spanish-descent elites. They extracted tribute and work from the Indigenous populations, who were only formally recognised as equal-in-status citizens after the 1952 National Revolution led by the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR, Sp. National Revolutionary Movement). Indigenous people’s inclusion was, nevertheless, understood in terms of their assimilation to the dominant power-wielding Spanish culture based on the principle of “one culture, one language, one nation”(Irvine & Gal 2000). An important political figure in the revolution, Walter Guevara Arce³⁰, considered the revolution incomplete without “the integration of the great peasant mass into Western civilization” (1960: 106). The Indigenous were re-baptised as *campesinos* (Sp. peasants) and universal schooling was established with the objective of their ‘de-ethnification’ through the instruction of Spanish language and customs (see Cusicanqui 1986; Drange 2011: 31; Kohl 2020).

Their inclusion as legitimate state subjects in the modernisation project of the twentieth century was thus dependent on them eschewing their Indigenous roots and as well as the continuation of the “intimately associated with Spanish hegemony (...) Christianisation” (Canessa 1998: 27). Indigenous populations in Bolivia are, however, far from orthodox in their religious practice, which is characterised by high levels of syncretism and incorporation of pre-Hispanic beliefs and rituals (see Harris 2006; Van Vleet 2011). Olivia Harris noted that in Northern Potosi at the turn of the twenty-first century Catholic European missionary priests reluctantly tolerated religious synthesis but not without a “modernising ethos” and hopes to “save the peasants from their ignorance” (2006: 69). Educated urban elites saw pre-Hispanic elements of Indigenous religiosity, associated with ritual fights (Ay. *tinku*), animal sacrifice, and festive inebriation, as “a continuing

²⁹ For an account of the two countries’ contemporary histories see Klein (2011) for Bolivia and Davies (2005) for Poland.

³⁰ He was one of the co-founders of the MNR. He served as an interim president in 1979 and was taken down in a military coup before the end of his temporary tenure.

source of embarrassment and outrage” (ibid). Despite the hybridity of their religious practice, Harris’s Indigenous interlocutors had no doubts in characterising present time as “the time of the Christians” (ibid: 5).

Spanish elite dominance did not occur without Indigenous resistance. At the beginning of the conquest, the Incas formed a government in exile, which lasted almost 40 years. Subsequent resistance was local and small-scale until the abolishment of the *encomienda* system³¹ centralised Indigenous labour in the hands of the government, favouring large-scale rebellions in the eighteenth century led by Tupac Amaru in contemporary Peruvian territory and Tupac Katari in Bolivia. The rebellions failed, but projects of decolonization continued, for example in the activist and intellectual work of the Indigenous network Alcaldes Mayores Particulares (AMP), operating in the first half of the twentieth century (see Ari 2014). The 1970s saw a new resurgence of Indigenous resistance in the form of the *katarista* movement that emerged from the Indigenous university circle in La Paz. The movement was made possible by the universalisation of access to education after 1952 but opposed the MNR’s dominant politics of hispanisation. The *kataristas* were greatly influenced by Fausto Reinaga’s work “Indian Revolution” (1969) in which he puts forth a critique of Occidental thought and arguments for the necessity of an Indian-led revolution.

Reinaga also founded the first Indigenous political party in the country Partido de Indios Aymara y Kichwa (PIAK, Sp. Party of Aymara and Quechua Indians). In subsequent years, more Indigenous parties entered the political scene, the appearance of which paved way for the emergence of an Indigenous government. While previous Indigenous parties did not manage to foster significant electoral support, Evo Morales’s MAS joined an amalgam of socio-economic and symbolic concerns in their political programme, gathering support from a variety of social sectors and winning the 2005 presidential election with an absolute majority vote.

The accession of Indigeneity into official politics did not signify an immediate rupture in world imaginaries and the assumption of an Indigenous hegemony. The work of Anibal Quijano reminds us of the myriad ways the colonality of power continues to permeate social life through a “colonisation of the imagination” (2007: 169). This happens through a process of seduction in which cultural Europeanisation is transformed into an aspiration for its perceived ties to material and power benefits. It foment a desire to get hold of this potentially accessible, yet distant enough

³¹ The *encomienda* was a system that granted colonisers a legal right to extract labour and tribute from Native populations.

to be mystified, world of Western modernity. This desire binds attention to the allure of Western aesthetic material prosperity, neglecting the potentiality of alternative means to achieve societal wellbeing. The anthropologist Mark Goodale recounts how he was faced with a “discursive disjuncture” (2008: 16) at his fieldsite in rural Northern Bolivia. He arrived at the turn of the twenty-first century with an Escobarian narrative of development as economic, political, and legal exploitation. Yet for his *campesino* interlocutors development “meant potable water, solar showers, genetically modified potato seeds (...) agricultural product marketable outside the area (ibid)”.

This disjuncture can be read via a socio-cognitive attentional framework in which attention is attuned towards particular aspects of a social phenomenon or situation, directing our focus and action and neglecting other interpretations. Thus, in this case, *campesinos* directed their collective attention towards the tangible material benefits their village could gain from developmental initiatives, while Goodale directed his, socialised by academic texts, attention towards the structural power imbalances of those initiatives. Such “discursive disjunctures” in which judgements and valorisation of shared basic meanings come into conflict are prevalent within the post-colonial Bolivian attentionscape, as elaborated on below in relation to selective state attention and in subsequent chapters (see Ch.2, Ch.3).

Ideas of modernity and progress are not only economic and political but also aesthetic. Ethnographies of the Andean region abound with examples of such aesthetic-ideological convictions. An illustrative example in relation to education can be found in Andrew Canessa’s ethnography, in which he encapsulates a rural teacher’s ideas of progress and civilization in his adamant desire for a metal flagpole for the school in replacement of the wooden one, despite seemingly more urgent needs (2012: 184-185). In Mark Goodale’s fieldsite, much of the material effects of development projects his interlocutors so eagerly campaigned for stand unused, serving mostly as “visual means through which people can project a different universe” (2008: 160). His ethnography depicts an image of *campesino* attention that is not only drawn towards tangible material improvements of their everyday lives but also the globalised images of modernity that impregnated it – mostly via television screens but also foreign-origin items.³² This is not surprising for the draw towards “a new, intense, or unexpected phenomenon” is a clear “attentional pull” (Duranti & Throop 2015: 1062).

³² Examples in Goodale’s ethnographic account include American wrestling matches, Japanese Dragon Ball X series or calendars with Western erotic models.

In another work, Goodale spoke of the emergence of a discursive revolution in Bolivia, which projects “the moral imagination beyond the boundaries of the Bolivian nation-state” and is “saturated with a sense of global belonging [and] the ability to harness culture for aesthetic as well as political purposes” (2006: 635). Goodale puts forward the example of young Indigenous rappers in El Alto whose music brings them together with members of other “disaffected and marginalised” races worldwide (ibid: 634). Students at Colegio Alalay in Cochabamba’s Zona Sur also partook in cosmopolitan practices marked by the digital revolution. Their engagement with international media was much higher than with comparable national production. Most students had trouble naming a single Bolivian film or TV show but streamed and read content as diverse as Bollywood movies, Japanese manga, and Mexican teen novels. The most prominent example of youth Bolivian cosmopolitanism at Colegio Alalay was likely K-pop fandom. Fangirls of the Korean boyband BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan) at my field were active members of the international fandom group called Army, whose membership demographic is mostly under the age of eighteen (BTS Army Census 2022). As they explained to me, they not only found their music emotionally touching and related to their songs, but the band and fandom community inspired them and helped them face the everyday pressures of being young. Zona Sur adolescents live at the crossroads of “world imaginaries” searching for their own meanings within the national social attentionscape, marked by both local and global flows.

In comparison to Bolivia, Polish historical memory is shaped by a shorter, yet more fractured and multitudinous, history of foreign occupations. For almost two centuries the Kingdom of Poland was part of the voluntarily established Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795). During the rule of King Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764–1795) internal conflicts and the Commonwealth’s weak position amongst European powers led to a gradual repatriation of the kingdom. The neighbouring Prussian, Russian, and Austrian empires divided the land amongst themselves in three partitions that culminated in the Commonwealth’s dissolution in 1795. Poland re-established its independence only 123 years later in the aftermath of World War I, only to be invaded by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, twenty years later, becoming World War II’s main battleground. The end of WWII in 1945 marked the end of the German occupation and the beginning of years of Soviet control. The latter only became seriously challenged in the 1980s with the rise of the “Solidarity movement” and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the imminent dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The key to understanding the influence of past foreign occupations for present-day Polish social attentionscape lies in the way in which they resulted in a conflation of Polishness with martyrdom and the Christian-Catholic religion. The Catholic Church carried out an important integrative role for the Poles under the partition period and later throughout the twentieth century. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was characterised by religious pluralism and a latitudinarian approach to creed (Pease 2009: 5). Under foreign partitions, the Catholic Church served as a rallying point for the Poles and differentiated them from their foreign sovereign. It provided an “indelible consciousness of nationhood” that “gave rise to the doctrine of *polak-katolik* – a conviction that to be Polish was to be Catholic” (ibid: 7).

The persecution of Catholicism by the Protestant and Orthodox Churches under the occupations³³ further helped paint the *polak-katolik* in martyrdom. Such an image became prominent in the work of Polish literary Romantics of the mid-nineteenth century. They distinguished themselves from their European contemporaries by glorifying sacrifice, battle, and resistance over tranquility. One of the three national bards of the Romantic epoch, Adam Mickiewicz, first coined the expression “Poland as the Christ of Nations” in part III (1832) of his magnum opus “Dziady” (Pl. Forefathers Eve), bringing together the country’s religiosity, suffering, and hope for re-birth. Under partition, Poland became a quintessential “imagined community”, relying on common spirituality and consciousness within a lack of set geographical boundary (Bill 2019: 50). After two failed uprisings in 1830 and 1863, the arrival of World War I (1914–1918) and rivalry between the occupiers brought a realistic hope for independence. Crosses began to be planted to mark the borders of a newly imagined Poland, especially in contested areas, as well as after the war to symbolically demarcate the territories of the newly established Republic (Waligórska 2022: 65). The convocation of the New Republic and its parliament took place in Warsaw’s St John’s Cathedral, along with an inaugural Catholic Mass, marking the Catholic identity of the newly founded nation of the Poles (Pease 2009: 1).

Independent Poland did not last long enough to forget the “imagined community” dressed in martyrdom. Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, commencing World War II (1939–1945) the few dark years of which were followed by decades of a Soviet-controlled communist state. Norman Davies wrote concerning the atrocities committed in Poland by the Nazis during WWII: “In the nineteenth century, the Poles had been faced with a life of deprivation. In the twentieth century,

³³ For accounts of such persecution see Davies (2005); Frasiak (2023).

they were faced with extinction. If, somewhat fancifully, Poland had once been compared to Calvary, it later became, in reality, Golgotha” (2005: 59). State secularisation imposed by the authorities of the communist era once again made space for the Church to become the bastion of resistance, demarcating the line between “good” Polish patriots against the “bad” communist authorities (Borowik 2017: 315).³⁴ The “Solidarity” movement was, in Kotwas and Kubik’s words, “to a large degree a massive performance of Catholic patriotism imbued with Romantic imagery” (2019: 439). Thus, happenings between the late eighteenth and twentieth century led to a development, crystallisation, and re-deployment of the idea of Poland as “the Christ of Nations” and Polishness, at least in rhetoric, as synonymous with Catholicism and martyrdom.

If nationalism and Catholicism present one pole of the Polish ideological attentionscape, then liberalism and cosmopolitanism present the other. Galent and Kubicki (2012) identify the surge of new urban middle classes as the biggest challenge to traditional Polish nationalism founded on an ethnic and moral identity model. The nation's turbulent history of foreign occupation and lack of an urban bourgeois culture that characterised Western countries following the development of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century resulted in Poland’s “structural alienation of the city and everything that represented urban culture” (ibid: 389). This continued throughout the twentieth century with the destruction of Polish cities during WWII and their centrally planned industrialisation thereafter, which based itself on an in-migration of peasant workers from nearby villages (ibid: 390). It was only after 1989 that economic integration, growing globalisation, and an influx of European values, the last particularly relevant after Poland’s accession to the European Union (EU) in 2005, elevated the importance of urban identity and cosmopolitanism in Polish culture.

The post-1989 Polish political scene has been characterised by a continuous dialectic and power play between liberal and conservative streams, marked by their relation to the past and national identity politics (see Śpiewak 2005). The liberal stream boosts politics of collective amnesia towards the past and encourages a socially and economically liberal integration of Poland into European democratic politics. The conservative stream pushes for retributive policies against communist and foreign perpetrators and draws on an image of the Catholic martyr nation still at the core of the politics of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PIS, Pl. Law and Justice) (see 1.4). In a way, a crucial difference

³⁴ Naturally, the relationship between the state and civil society was much more complicated and people put on a variety of faces depending on the circumstances. Elements of those complexities can be found in Wedel’s (1986) ethnography of “private” vs “public” life in communist era Poland.

between the two streams can be described in terms of a past-oriented (the conservative stream) versus a future-oriented (liberal stream) direction of attention.

These opposite directions in collective attention do not appear in a vacuum. The orientation towards the past of the conservative stream is upheld by an ethnic identity model rooted in continuous foreign persecution. The literary critic and cultural theorist Maria Janion argues that establishing full independence post-1989 was a form of symbolic calamity attacking the very idea of Polishness: “How would Poles define themselves when they had nothing to fight bravely against?” (as paraphrased by Bill 2019: 48). In the early years of post-1989 most of the population was under the influence of the “post-communist myth of the West” (Kuisz 2018: 19), which enthusiastically looked up to Western Europe and the United States as an institutional and moral inspiration for the construction of a new independent Poland. Kuisz argues this myth began to wear off along with disillusionment in the realities of the economic transition that fared far from the counted upon prosperity. PIS’s attentional turn to scepticism towards Europe and its cosmopolitan-liberal ideals has to be considered in the context of the affective void left behind by the erosion of hope and the formation of new economic inequalities, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Simultaneously, the newly emerged urban middle class became included in and began taking advantage of the network of global exchanges and flows. Hence, urban citizens’ reluctance to distance themselves from the newly secured European identity. Kuisz (2018) points to the novelty of the post-1989 born generation of Poles as the first in twenty decades to grow up at times of independence. This posits a radical difference in generational experience that entails discrepancies in the sensibilities and interpretations of social reality. It does not make much sense for the new generation to define Polishness through the lens of a “culture of dependency” (ibid: 31). Still, this culture remains very much alive in both conscious and autogenetic practices of enculturation given its presence in cultural heritage (ibid: 30-31) and pedagogic practice (see 1.5, also Ch.2). Instead of entering into a productive discussion with the national past, the newly emerged culture of independence was gobbled up by what Lepkowski describes as a historically prevalent “alternative-dichotomic perception of social and national reality” (1989: 45). Such dichotomic thinking is well alive in the national imaginaries of the twenty-first century, which ideologically divides Poland’s geographical Western and urban areas, from the East and the countryside, leading to political antagonism analysed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

The conflation of urban Polishness with a liberal Western European and international mindset is made tangible by materially inserting itself within the city's landscape. A recent campaign of the liberal opposition's newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* captures this well. The campaign took the form of billboards and posters with captions "I reside in [insert city name], I live in Europe". Its aim, according to the newspaper's deputy editor in chief, was to mark the "simple yet important dependence that for us and our readers the global and local, and concurrently European values and interest in one's closest environment penetrate and complement each other" (virtualnemedi.pl 2020). According to im 1.1., showing one of the campaign posters in Warsaw, a Warsaw citizen is a European citizen embodied in its young, non-traditional (girl with a short haircut), and virtually connected (smartphone-holding) residents.



Im. 1.1. *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s campaign poster.
Caption: "I reside in Warsaw. I live in Europe."

The Warsaw public transport has television screens, which, aside from promoting cultural events and broadcasting news, teach European languages³⁵ and international fun facts. It is also common to spot the European flag hanging on balconies of apartments as a reactionary move against the government's anti-EU policies. This is the environment my Polish interlocutors grew up in and which influences their attentional patterns, as I hope to demonstrate in more detail in subsequent

³⁵ English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, and Russian (replaced by Ukrainian with the onset of the war between Russia and Ukraine, marking the country's alliance with the latter).

chapters. The next section will supplant this historical description with a discussion of collective schemas. I will briefly elaborate on the embeddedness of collective schemas in international relations and their connection to individual cognition and then turn to a discussion of the changing schemas of “Indigeneity” (Bolivia) and “the Church” (Poland) that emerged at the crossroads of global and local historical flows and stood out in the social attentionscapes of my fieldsites.

1.3. Collective Schemas and Selective Attention

Appadurai’s notion of -scapes has been highly influential beyond the discipline of anthropology and remains frequently employed in the educational sciences as a means to understand the relationship between the global and local at schools and universities (Jokila 2015; Higgins 2015; Miglani & Burch 2021; Woo & Wang 2023). His work has been nevertheless criticised for putting too much emphasis on the disjunctive and fragmented nature of -scapes and lack of precision in theorising the processes behind global flows (Heyman & Campbell 2009). Heyman & Campbell (2009) propose a more precise anthropological theory of flows, which gives greater weight to the flow of capital in determining the possibilities of other flows. Without negating the importance of financial flows in shaping structural possibilities of global and local interaction, I would like to take on Heyman’s and Campbell’s broader call to “specify relationships amongst processes in grounded places and times” (ibid: 135) from the perspective of collective cognition.

A socio-cognitive approach to globalization can aid in the search for a middle-ground that accounts for both durability and change amid rapid social transformation. Appadurai sees the contemporary globality initiated by colonial expansionism and the Industrial Revolution as intrinsically fluid and unstable (1996: 28). When embarking on a theorisation of global flows, we should, however, be wary of taking a too fragmentary turn. I concur with Strauss and Quinn who describe cultural meaning as the result of interaction between “relatively stable” world structures and mental schemas (1997: 6). The idea of “relative stability” should not be dispensed with since our minds create an illusion of stability amid multiple exposures, allowing for the persistence of cultural schemas throughout time. As a collection of elements associated together through direct or indirect experience, schemas are neither rigid nor bound representations but are malleable and context-dependent. Still, common experiences increase the likelihood of similarity in associations and shape the possibility for the formation of collective schemas of reference.

Schemas are intimately tied to what psychologists call the ‘perceptual set’ or our predisposition to perceive things in a particular way and notice some things more than others depending on our

prior experiences and the immediate context.³⁶ Collective attention delves deep into our individual attentional psyche. Citton demonstrates the “principle of transindividual attentionality” (2017: 31) with reference to the inescapability with which one takes notice of veiled women on the streets of France or the nurturing feeling of fear when passing a group of African Americans on the street at night in a large American metropole. His examples are, of course, not attributable beyond white-Western middle- and upper-class normative attentional patterns, nor should they be taken at face value. Furthermore, familiarity and identification assuage the visibility of elements conspicuous within the public social attentionscape. Still, those examples tell us something about how social debates and the media can influence individual attention, regardless of more thought through opinions on veiling or street violence.

They also tell us something about the politics of attention and cognition more broadly. Ahmed (2004) pointedly describes how politically fostered emotions circulate between objects and bodies and ‘stick’ affective signs onto them – signs of danger, love, hate, compassion, etc. Our attention picks them out, differentiates between them, and marks particular bodies and things as political. I first consciously grasped an event of such political marking during a pre-fieldwork visit to Bolivia. I was making fieldwork arrangements with a school and happened to observe a civic hour assembly. A designated teacher was explaining the meaning of the anti-discrimination law and brought up dressing *de pollera* as an example of something not to discriminate against. Only one of the students in the assembly was dressed *de pollera*. I watched her face turn red as rows of student eyes turned towards her. She was politically marked in both her own and others’ eyes, formulating a sense of the social positionality of the self.

Schemas shape the directionality of our attention and are themselves guided by our self-awareness and attentiveness to the surrounding social landscape and the opinions of others. Mary Douglas (1966) made a direct application of schema theory in her analysis of symbolic systems of dirt classification. Douglas underscored the “schematically determined” (ibid: 66) nature of perception, remembering and what comes to be considered “matter out of place” (ibid: 65) in society. Schema theory and vectorial attention provide a framework for understanding the ways in which ideas of civilization and nationalism present within the social attentionscapes of my fieldsites took on ethnic and religious qualities. To demonstrate the conjunction of history, politics, and

³⁶ For a good psychological overviews of the influence of the perceptual set on our spatial and object attention see Vecera and Behrmann (2001).

cognition behind collective schema formation and change, I will refer to the schemas of Indigeneity in Bolivia and the Catholic Church in Poland.

With the abolishment of a fiscal category of the Indian in mid-nineteenth century Bolivia, *mestizo* (Sp. mixed-race) identity became more explicitly associated with mercantile mobility, paving the way for the association of all Indigeneity with rural poverty (Harris 1995). Since then, and till present days, class and the non-genetic characteristic associated with it, such as one's occupation, attire, or customs have become much more direct factors in racial and ethnic (self-)categorization fostering schemas of what a person of should do and look like according to their social status (see Canessa 2012). Such socially fostered semantic schemas are the cognitive equivalent of what semioticians refer to as indexes. Indexes are signifiers that imply a contiguity of presence e.g. dark clouds index rain. Work in linguistic anthropology analysed relations of social appropriateness in language use and behaviour in terms of indexicality (Babel 2018; Duranti 1997; Silverstein 2003). In the context of her research at the frontier between the Bolivian Andes and Amazon, Anna Babel (2018) explains that such indexical associations about people can become ingrained enough to become indistinguishable from icons and thus appear as if they were innate attributes. Hence, they attract attention if not adhered to.

This explains why self-identified *mestizos* at Andrew Canessa's fieldwork in the Bolivian highlands were bewildered at his choice of sturdy rubber sandals over shiny shoes they themselves were wearing (ibid: 45-46). Some of the teachers at my fieldsite were also surprised and found it amusing that I went to shop at the *campesino* market³⁷ or did the ritual *q'owa*³⁸ on the first Friday of the month; "Why would you do that?" they asked. My landlord in Cochabamba, a lawyer from Peru, also did not understand my preference to do groceries at the *campesino* market, despite it being much closer, and cheaper, than any supermarket. In the schematic "pattern-making tendency" novel stimuli are fitted in to harmonise with the rest of the pattern and "discordant ones tend to be rejected" (Douglas 1966: 66).

³⁷ A street market in the Zona Sur where farmers come to sell their products directly. Vendors come here in the early morning hours to buy produce in bulk for re-sell at other markets or their stores. The students did not find surprising that I shopped there, likely because the market was a regular place for their families to shop and for many also work at.

³⁸ A ritual offering for the Pachamama carried out on first Friday of the month and during festivities. Prevalent practice amongst Andean Indigenous origin population but also amongst the more 'artsy' urban middle class *mestizo* sectors.

Schema-guided attention contributes to schema reproduction by means of the confirmation bias and particularly in the case of stereotypes also the so-called fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error is a cognitive bias that makes us more likely to make judgements using dispositional rather than situational factors (see Ross 2018). My landlord further commented about the Indigenous farmers at the market that: “It is not that I am racist, but they are dirty. Just look at how dirty the market is! And the food is on the ground.” Rather than an unavoidable aspect of working with fresh produce and doing commerce at a crowded open-air space, my landlord considered ‘dirt’ to be a fundamental attribute of the Indigenous peasants that filled the market space.

Recent psychological research on the confirmation bias suggests that mechanisms of selective attention are guided by our previous decision making and experience, making us pay more attention and give more weight to stimuli confirming them (Talluri et al. 2018). Thus, we are cognitively inclined to attend to information that confirms our previous experiences and beliefs. My landlord selectively attended to aspects of the market that would confirm the schema he held of it and its Indigenous peasants as “unhygienic” such as food lying on the ground rather than being washed and presented to him on a shelf in a ‘modern step’ away from proximity with earth (also see *apthapi* below).

Among my interlocutors at Colegio Alalay, only two students regularly shopped at the supermarket instead of the market. Their mothers both dressed in ‘Western’-style clothing, rather than *de pollera*, making them more likely to be socially indexed as *mestizo* rather than *cholo* or Indigenous (see Introduction). One of them, Jaime, told me that he prefers to shop at the supermarket because he finds it “less chaotic” and more “aesthetically pleasing”, demonstrating what Bourdieu would call an “aesthetic disposition” (2010 [1984]: 46) towards quotidian choices of everyday life and distinguishing himself as a particular social subject; in this case a ‘modern’ one.

Cognitive mechanisms of selective attention help us understand the automaticity of bias in schema maintenance. While, as noted above, schema-discordant stimuli tend to be rejected, in the event of acceptance they modify the structure of assumptions (Douglas 1966: 66). Some social stereotypes and world imaginaries biases help upkeep are more strictly held onto than others. For example, in Bolivia, recent years have seen a rupture of the mental connection between Indigeneity and poverty due to the growth of an economically prosperous Indigenous mercantile class. The new Indigenous elites started manifesting their wealth – e.g. through the construction of

extravagant chalets in the city of El Alto (often referred to as cholets from *cholo*) – becoming publicly recognized as well off.³⁹ Cholets are colourful and flamboyant displays of economic power that became indexes of the collective schema for new Indigenous wealth in Bolivia.

Still, for many the appearance of Indigeneity at the Megacentre mall, brought up at the start of this chapter, remained schema-discordant and constituted a form of ‘intrusion’ into traditional middle- and upper-class territory. Neither did commerce, the most prominent source of new Indigenous wealth, become a coveted career for urban youth in Cochabamba, who aspired to become professionals with a university degree. None of the teachers at my fieldsite encouraged the students to become entrepreneurial merchants, and instead focused their civic pedagogics on the need for a university education. This is because teachers continue to follow a schema of schooling, which places the university and specific jobs on top in the hierarchisation of cultural capital (see Ch.2). Schemas are context-sensitive mental connections. When the context changes, our schemas modify themselves accordingly, but not without tensions from affective attachments and cognitive biases. The network form of context-dependent connections means we can store apparently contradictory beliefs.⁴⁰

Proximity to the ground is one of the elements within the historical schema of Indigeneity that proves highly incompatible with neo-colonial imaginaries of civilisation. Hence the stir caused by the *alteños* sitting on the floor of the Megacentre mall. This schematic incompatibility visibly comes through in the opinions of Profe Eugenia, one of the social sciences teachers at Colegio Alalay, whom I will introduce in more detail in Chapter 2. Profe Eugenia found the recent popularisation of *apthapi* particularly unappealing. *Apthapi* is the Aymara practice akin to a communal picnic in which food is brought, placed on the ground, typically on an *aguayo* (Q./Ay. multicolored woollen cloth), and shared. As she recounted to me during one of our interviews:

“What do they do now? They do the famous *ajitapi ajitapi* [attempt to pronounce the Aymara word *apthapi*] which is eating on the ground, they put an *aguayo* on the ground, put the food

³⁹ This public recognition is well-expressed in a scene from the film “Zona Sur” (Valdivia 2009) in which an Indigenous Aymara *madrina* (Sp. Godmother) offers to buy the house of a financially struggling bourgeoisie family of European descent with a suitcase of cash.

⁴⁰ Strauss illustrates this well with the example of contradictory schemas on *laissez faire* capitalism held by some of her working class American interlocutors in the 1980s and 90s, which simultaneously saw it as exploitative of workers like themselves (“can’t fight the system schema”) and opportunity-yielding (“achieving anything you want” (see Strauss & Quinn 1997: 216-223).

on it and there you have to sit and eat. It does not seem right to me because it cost so much to educate people to eat at a table and use cutlery.”

Profe Eugenia’s uneasiness towards *apthapi* stems from an idea of superiority of European heritage and its congruity with contemporary practices of the “developed” nations. Eating at a table and using cutlery creates a distance between the human and the earth and its produce, upholding the idea of human epistemic and economic dominance over nature challenged by Andean cosmovisions (see de la Cadena 2010; Allen 2002; Harris 2000). Sitting and eating on the ground in *apthapi* brings the human down to the earth’s level – a position historically reserved for the “authentic” thus rural and menial Indigenous incompatible with advancement towards living in a “modern” nation. Hence *apthapi*’s centrality in the disjuncture of world imaginaries within the national social attentionscape.

Many of the elements that come to the fore in the national attentionscape are testimony to changing notions of acceptability and collective schemas of interpretation that, nevertheless, come with friction and social dissonance. The case of *alteños* at the Megacentre became conspicuous because it went against normative associations about the mall space, but the scope and duration of public attention it harnessed simultaneously highlights social changes in the taken-for-granted. In response to the debate around the use of space at the Megacentere, a mega-*apthapi* was organised in front of the shopping mall acting as a symbolic act contesting discrimination, bringing together Indigenous and white-mestizo residents, and familiarising the latter with the practice (Pagina Siete 2019; Salinas 2019). *Apthapi* also formed part of Evo Morales’s symbolic state politics. He participated in many *apthapis* while visiting Indigenous villages and even organised *apthapi* picnics in the presidential palace to welcome important guests. Sarah Kollnig (2020a) speaks of a process of sanitisation of local food and the *apthapi* tradition to fit the taste buds and aesthetic appeal of middle-class *cochabambinos*. She compared one event she attended under the name of *apthapi* as closer in resemblance to a fair with an entrance fee and neat presentation of food. Similarly, an *apthapi* I attended at the University of San Simon provided participants with cutlery and desks to sit at. Such a schematic accommodation allowed for an easy incorporation of Indigenous heritage into the corpus of national symbolism while keeping its undesirable elements, such as sitting on the ground, as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966: 66).

National schemas of Indigeneity and civilization are important for understanding debates around schooling and pedagogic orientations at Colegio Alalay (see Ch.2). Profe Eugenia began her rant against *apthapi* when I inquired about her opinion on the state’s educational reforms ultimately

linking the two: “What they want is for us to go back to what was before, to eating on the ground, those practices it is what they are doing with this new law” (in reference to the educational law n. 070, see 1.5). Yet, even if she could not help but feel disdain for the practice of *apthapi*, Profe Eugenia considered Indigeneity a vital part of Bolivian identity and culture. She admired national folkloric practices, praising their practice at the school, and defended Indigenous rights. The difference between *apthapi* and folklore or Indigenous rights is that the latter more easily accommodated themselves into prevalent schemas of civilisation given their widespread international visibility and endorsement.

A common characteristic in the development of collective schemas of Indigeneity in Bolivia is a particular form of imagining Indian national participation befitting of the “*indio permitido*” (Sp. authorised or permitted Indian) (Hale 2004: 17). For example, Indigenous folklore after the 1952 reforms was ‘permitted’ because it served as a basis for the creation of “pan-regional and pan-ethnic emblems of national identity shared by all Bolivians” (Rios 2010: 284). The contemporary permitted Indian conforms to the global multiculturalist framework prevalent since the late 1980s (see Hale 2004; Hale & Millamán 2006). In this framework, Indigenous rights and cultural recognition are important as long as they do not upset the economic and political status quo. Bolivian reforms of the 1990s increased Indigenous participation in state organisations as a response to globalisation pressures and the social consequences of neoliberalism. The symbolic importance of Indigeneity for national identity and international notions of equality and tolerance means that it can never be fully suppressed and will always form part of national world imaginaries, with varying degrees of influence depending on the dominant ideologies of the government. Collective schemas form at the intersection of international and regional affairs and can thus help make more precise the interaction between global and local flows within Appaduraian-scapes.

The changing schemas of the Church in Poland should also be understood in relation to global ideological flows. In the eleventh century, the adoption of Christianity and disintegration of Slavic paganism ensured Poland’s symbolic inclusion as part of the European ‘West’ (see Janion 2003). Olivier Roy (2020) argues that globalisation of Christianity through religious colonialism altered its relationship with Europe. The continent ceased to be its only, or even necessarily strongest, centre of influence. Today secularisation and de-christianisation of values in European societies further question the unbreakable bond between Europe and Christianity. The legal secularisation of the state did not initially pose a big threat to the traditional Christian moral order, which was mirrored by the state in their legal codes and ethics education. Roy identifies the 1960s as a turning

point during which “a new anthropological paradigm” (ibid: 72-73) shattered the continuance between religious and secular norms, bringing about increases in the valorisation of freedom, individualism, and desire.

The new secular vision of Europe and modern morality did not immediately take hold in Poland, given the Church’s historical association with nationalism and political circumstances. In the post-1989 transformation years in Poland, the Church re-established its power and status. There was a perceived need for recompensing the Church for its marginalisation under secular communism and honouring its contribution to the pro-democracy struggles that set in motion legal acts privileging the Church’s position. Those included the re-introduction of religion lessons in public schools, an anti-abortion law, restitution of Church property, and sanctions for offending religious feelings (Waligórska 2022: 212). The sudden lack of legal constraints and newly found freedom led to an increased influence of the Church in political issues and a consequent loss of popularity and public support from societal fractions who came to see the institution as the new hegemony. Meanwhile, the Church and its religious allies focused on sharpening their moral and social messages by aligning themselves with a set of conservative moral principles within a perceived God-given “natural order” that posits a traditional division of gender roles, heterosexuality, and a lack of interference in procreation. Those principles set the ground for the discrimination of imagined “evil” others that disrupt this order (see Ch.3) and the formation of a new negative schema of the Church amid the liberal population.

The Polish Church, which previously served as “the main guardian of tradition”, and relied on its documented authority, must face a new generation of “individuals who are much more willing to forget than to remember” (Mandes & Rogaczewski 2013: 261). Instead of adapting to the process of de-institutionalisation and individualisation of religion, as Mandes and Rogaczewski argue happened in other Western nations, the Polish Church persisted in its aim to continue to fulfil an integrative moral societal function. It is in this lack of adjustment to contemporary needs that Mandes & Rogaczewski see the lack of appeal of the Church to Polish youth, whose world imaginary is closer aligned to a secular vision of modernity and personal faith.

Around the time of the 2020 protests (see Ch.3), I encountered a graffiti painted on the sidewalk instructive of the new ideological climate of individual freedom and righteousness over religious doctrine; *‘Jeżu ufam sobie’* (Pl. Jesus, I trust myself) – a twist on a prominent in Polish Catholic culture phrase from the chaplet of the Divine Mercy “Jesus, I trust you”. The phrase “Jesus, I trust

you” appeared on billboards around the country as part of pro-Catholic propaganda from the “Our Children” Foundation. The NGO was also responsible for controversial pro-life billboards with embryos in heart-shaped wombs or baby-feet with captions such as “Life” or “I am 11 weeks old”. Such campaigns make moral Catholic conservatism evident within the national attentionscape, even in highly liberal cities like Warsaw. The most common reason students at Liceum Gawiecki gave for opting out of religion lessons at school was not lack of faith but the perception of catechists as morally conservative, based on previous personal or vicarious experiences.⁴¹ Their decisions were thus guided by a particular schema of the Polish Church that associates it with a morally conservative stance rather than with Catholic faith.

People pay attention to dominant ideas both in their valorisation and aversion to their ideological premises and social aesthetics. Citton reminds us that attentional processes are inextricably linked to our processes of valorisation rooted in a circular dynamic – “I valorise what I pay attention to, and I pay attention to what I valorise” (2017: 21). However, both ordinary life and more openly politically charged events at my fieldsites suggest that we attend not only to what we value but even more so to a perceived threat to those values and the potential of their de-valorisation. That is why *alteños* appeared ‘out-of-place’ in image and demeanour within what fits in the schema of ‘mallscape’ and came to the fore of the Bolivian social attentionscape as contesting the historical incompatibility between Indigeneity and modern civilization.

Accordingly, the clash between the two dominant world imaginaries in Poland is fuelled by the increased attention they give to each other in attempts to undermine one another and preserve the value of one’s own views within collective schemas. That is why Catholic organisations need billboards to promote views that, until recently, were ingrained deeply enough not to require any publicity. Earlier, I referred to our awareness of social positionality as an attention-guiding mechanism. Politicians are in a unique social position that requires them to represent social interests. This interest is heuristically understood based on prevalent schemas within the social attentionscape and selected strategically according to their target electorate. In the following section, I will focus on how the state selectively channels its attention towards elements of national history befitting of their programme in constitution of political legitimacy.

⁴¹ Even though catechists need not necessarily adhere to a very morally conservative camp of the Church (see Ch.2).

1.4. Selective State Attention

The political parties governing Bolivia and Poland at the time of my fieldwork – Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS, Sp. Movement Towards Socialism) and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PIS., Pl. Law and Justice) – have more in common than one would intuitively assume. MAS is progressive, secular, and left-wing, and PIS is conservative, Catholic, and right-wing, but both parties' political discourses are based on a premise of continuity between themselves and a historical resistance. Such an ethos of resistance goes hand in hand with antagonistic populism aimed at uniting their supporters against a common enemy. In this chapter, I will limit myself to describing the historically inspired state symbolism because of its direct relation to school curricula. Chapter 3 will delve more into antagonistic populism and its role in fostering emotionally charged attention and political division.

The MAS party's discursive strategies rest on a symbolic temporal linkage between the new plurinational state and its first leader, Evo Morales, and the former Inca state and Indigenous resistance struggle. Evo Morales's 2005 absolute majority presidential victory was a result of the culmination of popular dissatisfaction with the historical rule of *mestizo* elites and end-of-century neoliberal policies that crystallised in the 2000 Cochabamba Water War and the 2003 and 2005 Gas Conflicts. Morales mobilised the coca growers trade union in the Chapare on behalf of other social sectors, uniting the regionally dispersed and ethnically diverse opposition of Indigenous and labour movements in his support (see Brewer-Osorio 2020). Indigenous politics formed only a part of Evo's electoral strategy. Yet the significance of Evo's distinction as the first Indigenous president in the Bolivian Republic's history cannot be underestimated. Much of his success and its longevity lie in Evo's status as the symbol of historically marginalised Indigenous and rural peoples (see e.g. Postero 2017; Harten 2011). Morales adapted his humble origins and upbringing into a political advantage and equated himself with the majority population, becoming their voice and institutional embodiment. Morales's rise to power became interpreted as the fulfillment of Tupac Katari's prophecy he pronounced on his deathbed "*Volveré y sere millones*" (Sp. I will return, and I will be millions); for example, in the documentary on Evo by the Cuban filmmaker Jorge Fuentes (2008) of the same title as Katari's last words or Morales's own speeches. In 2017, after 12 years in power, Morales tweeted: "As Tupac Katari said I will return and be millions. Now we are millions governing Bolivia."⁴² "*Hermano Evo*" (Sp. brother Evo), as he is colloquially known,

⁴² Original in Spanish "*Como dijo Tupac Katari, volveré y sere millones. Ahora somos millones gobernando Bolivia*". Tweet at <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1459940516959719428?lang=en> (accessed 3/11/23).

became recognised internationally as a renowned symbol of Indigenous power and the fight against (neo)coloniality.

This symbolic position has been articulated and legitimised through the adoption of Indigenous Andean aesthetics and performativity by the MAS government. Morales introduced Indigenous rituals into state events, and added Indigenous celebrations, such as the Aymara New Year (21 June), to the national holiday calendar. The day before his official inauguration Evo Morales's ascent to the presidency was pronounced in a ceremony at the archeological site of the Indigenous city of Tiwanaku where he took part in a ritual cleansing carried out by an *amauta* (Sp. spiritual healer) and was declared *Apumallku* (the leader of the Andean world). Evo swapped the suit (modern presidential attire) for colourful ponchos and vests with typical Andean patterns. He did not simply introduce Indigeneity into state politics but made it its front face. The crux of MAS's political programme is not, however, based on Indigenous aesthetics only but a more comprehensive project of "decolonisation". This project aims to re-think society from the perspective of the Andean Indigenous cosmovision encapsulated in the concept of *vivir bien* (Sp. living well).

Vivir bien is a set of ideas evolving around life in harmony with oneself, others, the spiritual world, and nature with vague roots in Andean Indigenous thought. According to the current Bolivian constitution, *vivir bien* entails living "in equality and solidarity eliminating inequalities and mechanisms of domination" (Law 300 Article 7). In Morales's own words it is about "ending privilege so we can live well and not better than others" (Agencia Boliviana de Información 2009: 4). As emphasised by Viola Recansens, the problem with such all-embracing accounts is that they understand the Indigenous Andean population as abstract, ahistorical, rural communities, rather than the empirical Indigenous "of flesh and bone" (2014: 65). They are what Flores Galindo (1994) calls *utopias andinas* (Sp. Andean utopias), romanticising and fictionalising Andean life. In practice, most Quechua and Aymara communities were not aware of *sumaq kawsay* or *sumaq qamaña* (the accepted translations of *vivir bien* into Quechua and Aymara) before its popularisation within the public sphere (see Arnold et al. 2019).

Neither was the Inca empire the kind of egalitarian society without mechanisms of dominations the constitutional *vivir bien* theoretically entails. The Inca political organisation was explicitly hierarchal with Sapa Inca, his family and ancestors at the top and peasant communities, at the bottom, "feed[ding] the appetites of the Cuzco elite" (Postero 2007: 9). Furthermore, an intensive

extraction of natural resources was necessary for the empire's survival and fulfillment of expansionist ambitions (Pease 2007). As an idea, *vivir bien* has nevertheless been internationally heralded as a viable alternative for progressive and economic conceptions of development (Esbarras 2016; Escobar 2016; Gudynas 2011; Walsh 2010). In the construction of its symbolic image, the MAS government attended to the Indigenous past and presence in a selective manner. As I will elaborate further on, the PIS government was similarly selectively channelling its focus within the history of Christianity emphasising its peace-building elements and omitting any atrocities committed by the Church.

Developmentalist ideas of progress and historically ingrained Western influences had not, however, miraculously disappeared off the boundaries of the Bolivian plurination but persisted both in state policies and public imaginaries. The MAS government is best characterised by continuity and change (Farthing & Kohl 2014). The state's reliance on Indigenous symbolism and cosmovision presented a continuity in the long history of Indigenous people's adaptation of their cultural repertoire in accordance with present needs (Postero 2007). Tórrez and Arce had rightly described actual plurinational state symbolism as an "amalgam of meanings" (2014: 6) in which republican symbols (e.g. three-coloured flag, Simón Bolívar) co-exist side by side with Indigenous ones (e.g. the *wiphala* flag, Tupac Katari). The new 2009 constitution proclaimed Bolivia a secular state, but Christian holidays remained within the national holiday calendar in recognition of the country's religious pluralism and syncretism between the cult of the Christian God and the Pachamama.

The macro-economic policy put in place by MAS did not involve a great rupture with narratives of economic progress and has been described as "neo-developmental" (Wolff 2019: 114). Vice-president Alvaro García Linera even coined the country's economic plan as "Andean-Amazonian capitalism" (2006: para.3) hinting that the state did not wish to do away with a focus on the accumulation of capital. Instead, the government focused on regaining state control of the country's resources and their distribution. MAS was most notably criticised for the continuing economic reliance on environmentally destructive natural resource extractivism (see Bebbington & Bebbington 2011; Gudynas 2011; Webber 2015). In Bolivia imaginaries of decolonisation, modernisation, Catholicism, capitalism, and Indigeneity co-exist and blend into each other – a phenomenon the government is seeking to juggle by combining them in structural and aesthetic arrangements. Yet by acting as an attentional pull for their novelty and intensity to the senses, it is the rise in prominence of the Indigenous and discourses of decolonisation that most attracted

social attention, including opposition from urban teachers to the changes in the educational curriculum (see Ch.2).

Just like the MAS government, PIS relied on national memory to legitimise their ideological position. PIS officials often referred to the pro-democratic and peace-calling actions of Catholic figures like John Paul II and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in a similar vein as MAS invoked Indigenous heroes such as Tupac Katari and his wife Bartolina Sisa. Yet if we compared the Polish social attentionscape under PIS-rule to a game of chess the PIS state would be the board upholding the game, its officials the pawns, and Catholic and far-right organisations the queens and bishops making the most significant symbolic moves. While the MAS government put on a theatrical performance comparable to the spectacle of the nineteenth century theatre-state in Bali analysed by Geertz (1980), the Polish PIS state, as aptly noted by Kotwas and Kubik (2019), can be better described as having set a theatre stage for the enactment of a drama by various non-state actors, favouring the governing party. The foundations for this stage have been set by the growing frustration at the dissolution of the European myth of post-transformation prosperity, while the main theatre platform was arguably placed in the aftermath of the 2010 Smoleńsk plane crash. Waligórska writes in her book “Cross Purposes” (a historical account of the political symbolism of the cross in Poland):

“As Poland was recovering from the shock of the 2010 plane crash in Smoleńsk, which killed the country’s president Lech Kaczyński⁴³ and ninety-five other members of an official delegation en route to the memorial at Katyn, the nation’s attention was once again captured by a story involving a cross – one that very much embodied the tensions the catastrophe triggered” (2022: 243).

Almost overnight, the victims of the crash, with the former president at front rank, became embodiments of this most recent evocation of the cross in the imaginaries of Polish martyrdom. A wooden cross placed by boy scouts in front of the presidential palace in commemoration of the victims soon became a meeting point for pro-PIS political gatherings and the pronouncement of conspiracy theories around the crash.

The anthropologist Paweł Sendyka discusses the creation of the “Smoleńsk myth” (2013: 126), or the sacralisation of Kaczyński’s death, in light of the nation’s need to reinvigorate itself as God’s chosen nation. Catholic and pro-PIS media have focused on aspects of the catastrophe that could

⁴³ The co-founder of the Law and Justice (PIS) political party with his twin brother Jarosław.

have been interpreted as signs from God transforming the tragedy from an accident to a part of some sort of Greater [God's] plan" (ibid: 127). In this sense, the fact that the accident coincided with the anniversary of the death of John Paul II, which also happened on the eve of the Divine Mercy Sunday, or that the plane was on its way to Russia to commemorate the massacre of Polish soldiers by Soviet forces, could not have been interpreted otherwise but as a call for conversion. According to Waligórska, this most recent political invocation of the cross and its symbolic baggage in the Smoleńsk aftermath are historically peculiar since they arose under conditions of state sovereignty and liberal democracy (2022: 251). The previous invocations were set within fights for independence from foreign control and occupations, gathering people of various political, ethnic, and even religious backgrounds (ibid).

Kotwas and Kubik (2019) owe the possibility of such mingling to what they call "thin" i.e., loosely defined and broad symbolism. In reference to the "Solidarity" movement, they argue that the presence of the Christian Cross "did not seem to have been interpreted by the audience as a single, exclusionary symbol of Polish-Catholic identity" because it formed part of a canon of diverse, not exclusively religious, symbols (2019: 444). They contrast this with "thick" cultural symbolism that by making a narrower, yet more coherent and interlinked system of symbolic references appeals to a more limited public but "creates conditions conducive to the ideological thickening of populism" (ibid: 445). Kotwas and Kubik consider the rise of the Independence march as an example of such cultural thickening. Although most PIS members distanced themselves from the more extreme participants of the march who showcased fascist sentiments, the party supported the march itself. In 2021 it even gained official state patronage amid the Warsaw city mayor's decision to prohibit it.

PIS's populism was backed by a web of more openly conservative Catholic organisations, the two most prominent of which are arguably Fray Rydzyk's Radio Maryja and the Catholic foundation and legal think-tank Ordo Luris. Rydzyk founded Radio Maryja in 1991 and since then expanded his activity to include a journal, tv station, and not-for-profit organisation. His media promote an exclusionary nationalism based on Polish ethnicity and God's "natural order" and avidly support the PIS party. If Radio Maryja maintains a community of conservative Catholic voters, Ordo Luris⁴⁴ works towards the implementation of the "natural order" into the legal

⁴⁴ Part of international organisations of the Agenda Europa.

system. They were, minimally, responsible for the “Stop Adoption” 2016 citizen bill⁴⁵, popularisation of the “conscience clause” amongst medical practitioners and pharmacists⁴⁷, and anti-LGBTQ lobbying⁴⁸ legitimised by pro-family legislation (Januszevska 2020). Thus, selective attention of the state contributed to changes within the collective schema of “the Church” within the contemporary Polish social attentionscape. The Church in PIS-governed Poland differed from its historical invocations because of the ultra-nationalism and conservative Catholic moralism it glued itself onto, becoming associated with a political party affiliation and conservative views. I will now turn to the discussion of national educational policies to demonstrate how the selective state attention of MAS and PiS, respectively, pervades the sphere of education.

1.5. The National School Attentionscape

Education can be thought of as an Appaduraiian -scape of its own. An edu-scape, if you like. World culture theorists argue that schools around the world are converging into a single global model.⁴⁹ Anthropologists and comparative educationists have effectively discredited such grand claims, emphasising national and regional differences in schooling.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, some convergence in ideals and forms of public schooling around the world cannot be overlooked. The anthropologist Kathryn Anderson-Levitt calls them the “frame around ordinarily thinkable ways of doing schooling” (2003: 18). In our terms – a global schooling schema. Elements of the “global schooling schema” include the perception of schooling as a universal right that is mandatory, classroom-based, and aimed at personal and national development. One universal element is the existence of national educational laws and curricula drawn up with the objective to underpin formal educational practice in a country. In determining what collectively stands out as important, the social attentionscape serves as an inspiration for the contents of those laws and curricula aimed at educating the nation’s youth. In what follows, I will briefly describe the national educational agendas in place at the time of my fieldwork.

⁴⁵ In Poland, citizens are allowed to propose legislative changes by submitting a draft act signed by a minimum of 100,000 people.

⁴⁶ The bill was rejected by court likely due to the strong civic opposition manifested in the 2016 “Black Protests” but opened up the discussion of furthering anti-abortion legislation, which ultimately took place in 2020 via the Constitutional Tribunal (see Ch.3).

⁴⁷ A legal clause that can be interpreted to allow a refusal to perform a surgery or give a prescription if it goes against one’s moral conviction.

⁴⁸ Epitomized in the creation of LGBT free zones throughout Poland (see Ch.3).

⁴⁹ The work of John Meyer and his colleagues is most exemplary in this regard (see e.g. Meyer et al. 1992; Meyer & Ramirez 2000).

⁵⁰ See, for example, the 2003 and 2012 volumes edited by Kathryn Anderson-Levitt.

In Bolivia, the 2010 educational law, “Law 070: Avelino-Sinañi~Elizardo-Pérez (ASEP)”,⁵¹ aims at revolutionising the schooling system by placing the “decolonial, intercultural, intracultural, and plurilingual” (Article 1.6) at the very core of education. In the government’s understanding, decolonial education aids societal transformation through the recovery, revaluation, and enrichment of Indigenous knowledge and cultural self-reaffirmation (the “intracultural”) to reconstruct relations and common dialogue between the country’s nations or cultures (the “intercultural”). An important aspect differentiating it from the 1994 Intercultural Education Bill is the direct assumption that true interculturality is based on interactions between strong cultural identities. Thus, retrieving Indigenous knowledge and strengthening Indigenous roots and identity appear as prerequisites for the construction of a non-colonial and non-hierarchical “intercultural” society. The law also puts more emphasis on practical knowledge and includes the so-called “socio-communitarian productive project” through which students are meant to learn about and interfere in social issue within their community. A by-the-book example of such a project, as provided by the Ministry during a 2019 curriculum workshop, could be a 3-year programme to engage the local community in the production of organic vegetable, including diagnostic, training, implementation, and project evaluation.⁵² A further, historically important, aspect of the educational reforms is the secularisation of religion and creation of the subject “Values, Spiritualities, and Religions”, which replaced Catholic religion lessons at schools.

The emphasis on the promotion and affirmation of the Indigenous comes as a response to the neo-colonial pedagogics that explicitly permeated the education system till the second half of the twentieth century. The former educational law, ratified in 1994, institutionalized intercultural and bilingual education (EIB). The reforms emerged from a variety of international and grassroots projects active since the 1970s. They were, nevertheless, rejected by the MAS state for their elitist and neoliberal origins. The 1994 reform’s practical implementation of the “intercultural” focused on bridging the linguistic gap in rural areas by providing instruction in Indigenous languages, rather than cultivating intercultural sensibilities and Indigenous identities in the population as a whole (Drange 2011). Neither did the 1994 reform manage to significantly alter the thoughts and activities of its teacher destinatories, who, largely, continued to (re)produce the same postcolonial customs and prejudices in workaday class conduct (Canessa & Howard 1995; Luykx 1999).

⁵¹ The law was named after the founders of the Warisata School (1931-140) and is inspired but many of the premises. For more on Warisata and its relation to current educational policy see Bosshard 2015; Salazar de la Torre 2006; Efron 2013; Viedma 2015.

⁵² https://www.minedu.gob.bo/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=816:nombre-modulo-3-ejemplo-de-proyecto-sociocomunitario-productivo-en-educacion-alternativa (accessed 17/03/2024).

Similar challenges are currently faced in the implementation process of the new law. As for ASEP, Lopes Cardozo speaks of an “internal diversity of opinion” (2013: 22), though leaning towards support in the rural and critique in the urban teacher training institutes, concluding that “a new ASEP counter-hegemonic fix has not emerged and certainly has not yet been institutionalised” (ibid). The urban teachers’ confederations (Sp. *magisterio urbano*) have openly criticised the reforms, particularly so in the context of the 2019 political unrest (see Ch.3), which led to the installation of a temporary opposition government and opened up the debate about the potential annulment of the educational laws. The kind of arguments the confederation leaders presented against Law 070 considered its focus on Indigenous knowledge as ‘backward’ and unsuitable for contemporary educational needs (Curivil & Pinto 2020).⁵³ A perspective reiterated by teachers at my Bolivian field (see Ch.2).

An important aspect differentiating the new law from its predecessors is its emphasis on education being “transformative of economic and social structures” (Law 070: Art.3.1) in the construction of the Plurinational State and *vivir bien* – the thrust of which was explained above. While *vivir bien* appears in the Law 070 only a few times, it does so in formulations calling for the construction of a new society based on its terms. On the other hand, the numerous references to the scientific or technological appear mostly in descriptive enumerations or bureaucratic technicalities. The legal utopia of the law’s bureaucratic all-inclusiveness is not only overshadowed by the novelty and resounding character of Indigenous markers in legal text but also by the state’s broader performativity of an image associated with Andean Indigeneity, making it the public face of national imaginaries. Thus, the state’s Indigenous performativity draws attention to itself while the parallel commitment to scientific and technological advancements, such as equipping schools with portable computers for educational purposes, remain in the shadow.

The emphasis of the Polish school curriculum could not have differed more, yet it equally mirrored the debates present in the national social attentionscape at the time of my fieldwork. To the best of its abilities, the PIS government aimed to move cultural narratives of martyr-based patriotism and conservative Catholicism to institutional levels through curricular and bureaucratic changes in education. The Minister of Education between 2020 and 2023, Przemysław Czarnek, did not shy away from what he believed the objectives of education should be, frequently speaking

⁵³ Full quotations include the opinion that the law “prioritises ancestral values, leaving aside learning fundamental topics related to new technologies” or that it is “retrograde, unscientific, and of little use to the academic formation of students” (in Curivil & Pinto 2020: 84)

about the need to include more patriotic and Catholic content at schools.⁵⁴ Steps towards this were already made by the previous Minister of Education Anna Zalewska who, as part of broader structural reforms, revised the literature canon. Her curricular reforms substantially expanded the obligatory literature list restricting teacher freedom in the choice of covered literature. The expansion chiefly consisted of literary positions with patriotic and/or Catholic undertones as befitting of the broader cultural project PIS was undertaking. For example, including poetry by Wojciech Wencel described in press as “the bard of the Smoleńsk right-wing” (Leszczynski 2017: n.p). Czarnek introduced additional positions by John Paul II and Cardinal Wyszyński into the complementary literature list and further meddled with the core curriculum.

The 2022/2023 school year witnessed the introduction of a new subject, “Historia i Teraźniejszość” (HIT, Pl. History and Contemporaneity) replacing “Wiedza o Społeczeństwie” (WOS, Pl. Knowledge about Society). The core curriculum of WOS focused on a detailed presentation of Polish and international legal and political organs, global affairs, and elements of sociological and anthropological thought. The newly implemented subject combined post-1945 Polish history with selected social issues, exhibiting a much more nationally oriented approach. HIT faced wide criticism from the opposition camp, accusing it and the ministry-endorsed textbook of being too ideologically skewed.⁵⁵ The programme painted a rosy picture of Poland and Christianity, while marginalising, and at times even demonising, other nations and religions. For instance, students were expected to describe religious persecution using examples from Christianity but were only exposed to the political idea of “Islamism” rather than a comprehensive understanding of Islam as a whole. Those were clear attempts to substitute what PIS politicians refer to as “politics of shame”⁵⁶ i.e. undermining national strength and the value of Polishness with national pride. The new Minister of Education in the opposition formed government post-2023 election already declared that they will be eliminating the subject from the school curriculum, manifesting a turn in the direction of selective state attention in education.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See e.g. <https://serwis.gazetaprawna.pl/edukacja/artykuly/1495917,czarnek-trzeba-zwiekszyc-wysilki-zeby-tresci-patriotycznych-bylo-wiecej-np-poprzez-zmiane-kanonu-lektur.html> (accessed 4/11/2023).

⁵⁵ See e.g. <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75410,30031255,nowy-hit-czyli-ucz-sie-z-papieżem-jest-tu-i-smolensk-i-lewak.html> (accessed 4/11/2023).

⁵⁶ See e.g. <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/prezes-pis-w-polsce-przez-lata-uprawiano-pedagogike-wstydu-i-mikromanie-narodowa-my> (accessed 4/11/2023).

⁵⁷ See <https://strefaedukacji.pl/ten-przedmiot-znika-z-planow-lekcji-to-juz-pewne-po-dwoch-latach-zostanie-zastapiony-nowym-jakie-beda-zmiany-i-kiedy-wejda-w-ar/c5-18210065> (accessed 5/03/2024).

While public fears of a further moralization and sacramentalisation of schooling were founded and valid, it is worth noting that the media linked to the opposition provided a one-sided negative portrayal of changes within the educational system made by PIS. Summary accounts published at the end of the government's first term in office failed to mention those alterations that increased student and teacher rights and liberties.⁵⁸ For example, introducing the possibility to contest examination results or the elimination of obligatory and unpaid extracurricular project hours for teachers. The media outlets' direction of attention, just like that of the ruling politicians and teachers, whether in Poland or Bolivia, was determined by their objectives. In Bolivia, educational curricula did not constitute a topic debated in public media and protested on the streets with equal vigour.⁵⁹ One potential reason for more collective attention directed at education in Poland is the controversial persona of Przemysław Czarnek, known for publicly expounding his conservative views and making discriminatory statements. He, minimally, declared that LGBTQ are not "normal people"⁶⁰ and compared "gender ideology" to Nazism.⁶¹ Whereas Morales's aesthetics acted as an attentional pull for their novelty at the administrative level, Czarnek attracted attention for his lack of political correctness and socially extreme views – at least when considered by a liberal urban public.

1.6. Conclusion

A historical apprehension of ideological elements of the national social attentionscape illuminates contemporary directions of collective politicised attention. Building on Arjun Appadurai's notion of –scape I described the political and ideological social attentionscape at the level of the Bolivian and Polish nations. A scrutiny of the explicitly attention-grabbing social issues via the notion of cognitive schemas and selective attention can aid our understanding of the processes through which we associate certain ideas with tangible images and stick elements together to form collectively shared imagined worlds, which contribute to the maintenance of ideological stability in a world of fluidity. When we consider schemas of broad social ideologies, such as modernity or decolonisation, their value systems become a conjunction of ideas about life, moral principles, and

⁵⁸ See e.g. <https://oko.press/5-grzechow-edukacyjnych-pis-czyli-krajobraz-po-katastrofie> (accessed 4/11/2023).

⁵⁹ Of course, educational issues were vigorously debated within specialized social circles and social media groups. Teachers are also very politically active and frequently stage protests although most of them evolve around economic and work stability demands, rather than teaching contents.

⁶⁰ See e.g. <https://oko.press/czarnek-o-lgbt-studio-polska> (accessed 4/11/2023).

⁶¹ See e.g. <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1498733,czarnek-mowi-o-podobienstwach-ideologii-lgbt-i-nazizmu.html> (accessed 4/11/2023).

social aesthetics that will vary across people yet show similarities within groups acquired through common experiences and historical references. Thus, although, psychologically speaking, schema formation and selective attention happen at the individual level, a socio-cognitive attentional framework can illuminate the working of ideological systems at a macro-social scale.

Governments and civil society make use of cognitive heuristics when they selectively attend to elements of national history and demographics that fit into the schemas forming their “imagined worlds” and base their policies, including educational ones accordingly. In Poland, the government supported the construction of an imagined world of Polishness intimately tied to its history of Catholicism and martyrdom, which clashes with the urban civic society’s more liberal and European vision for the country. In Bolivia, the state’s imagined world also held roots in the country’s history of foreign exploitation, relying on Indigenous cosmovisions and aesthetics, yet romancing with other elements of national ideoscape and mediascape.

I decided to begin this thesis with a scrutiny of the main schematic elements of the governments’ imagined worlds and their historical construction through selective attention because those are the imaginaries all my interlocutors at Liceum Gawiecki, and most staff at Colegio Alalay, stood in an antagonistic relation to. The perspective from which we interpret the social attentionscape is highly dependent on our social circles, which shape, maintain and transform our schemas by channeling the direction of our attention. The next chapter will turn to the everyday interactions that sustained the mechanisms of schema maintenance and selective attention within the school attentionscape and discuss the dominant pedagogic orientations at my fieldsites, which strayed far from the ideological objectives set by the states’ educational reforms.

Chapter Two: Normative Attention: Pedagogic Orientations at School

“Politics on the grand scale can never administer its molar segments without also dealing with the microinjections or infiltrations that work in its favor or present an obstacle to it; indeed, the larger the molar aggregates, the greater the molecularization of the agencies they put into play”

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari (1987: 2014)

2.1. Pedagogic Orientations

Every Monday morning at Colegio Alalay, all students, both primary and secondary, line up in class order in the courtyard before the start of their lessons. It was the weekly *formación* (Sp. assembly/lit.formation). The *formación* aims to instil the seeds of discipline and appropriate civic behaviour in the student population. Once most students stood at their designated place, the headmaster would first greet the primary school kids and then the high schoolers “Good morning, boys and girls; good morning, young ladies and gentlemen.” Instead of saluting back, the students would greet him with a confident chant: “*Bolivia reclama derecho al mar!*” (Sp. Bolivia reclaims the right to the sea!) in reference to the coastline Bolivia lost to Chile during the Pacific War (1879–1883). After this rather peculiar greeting, the students would be reminded to take position for the national hymn (i.e. straighten up). The national tricolour flag would be pulled up the mast, and the sound of trumpets and drums reverberate through the speakers as rows of straight bodies sang the national anthem with multiple pitches and tones.

The remaining assembly time was devoted to announcements and civic lessons run by the *profesor/a de turno* (Sp. teacher on duty). The topics of the lessons varied week by week, touching upon ethical, social, and environmental concerns. They were often accompanied by student performances or artwork on the topic in question. One theme prevailed throughout all weeks: the necessity to study hard with the ultimate goal of entering university. Most of the headmaster’s speech inaugurating the 2020 academic year reminded students of the importance of schoolwork and motivation to study: “I am so proud when a student returns to the school to visit already a professional. One day you too will be lawyers, doctors, and architects. This is why it is so important to study hard...to ensure this future for yourselves.”

Civism – devotion to one’s country and model citizenship – was highly valued at Colegio Alalay, but it was rather distinct in form from the nation-glorifying civism that the Polish PIS-government

aspired to with their schooling reforms. Education at Colegio Alalay was explicitly driven by societal professionalisation. As a crossborder “universal aspiration” (Tsing 2005: 1) of development, education is desired and seen as a means through which a country can improve its standing in the international world order. Student success becomes intertwined with a successful future for their country. The national sentiment of my Bolivian interlocutors was tinted with a sense of embarrassment at the nation’s global positioning that an educated society could help improve. Going to university was also a more tangible means of societal contribution than, for example, the possibility of reclaiming the coastline the students chanted about each Monday morning. In this sense, the school’s orientation towards professionalism was a collective rather than individual matter.

There were many occasions to celebrate at Colegio Alalay, many more than I remembered from my school days in Poland. One such occasion was the *despedida* (Sp. goodbye party) of the promo 2019 that the pre-promo class organised for them with substantial help of their parents. On the day, the pre-promo students stayed after school and decorated the school courtyard with balloons, streamers, and a large sparkling cardboard arch with “Promo 2019” in gold letters. Their parents soon arrived carrying food (chicken, corn, and salad) and sweet drinks. Parents and students collectively decided on the division of tasks, type of food, and décor at the party during a pre-promo parent’s reunion. The party was an occasion to come to school dressed *de gala* (Sp. formally), a rare opportunity cherished by the students. The boys from the promo 2019 class all wore white shirts and jackets. Their female classmates all rented burgundy dresses for the party. Bianca, who worked to pay her rent and raise her child without family support, could not afford to rent one, but the class made sure to provide her with a matching outfit for the night. Nation-oriented professionalisation was thus not the only outstanding feature of schooling at Colegio Alalay. Communal effort towards at school and after-school activities received much pedagogic attention.

At the Polish Liceum Gawiecki, the importance of study was a similarly core element of pedagogic focus. When Pani Wąchocka had the opportunity to see her class of final year students for an in-person *wigilia* (Pl. Christmas Eve dinner) in December 2020, academic success was the basis for her speech: “In the New Year I wish you perseverance to work hard and score well in your *matura* (end of school exams), not only enough to pass but to enter your dream university course.” No school-wide gatherings akin to the *formación* took place during the time of my fieldwork because of the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but within the intimacy of the classroom, teachers repeatedly reminded students about the axiological priority of

preparation for the *matura* examinations. The objective of schooling at Liceum Gawiecki could also be interpreted as geared towards forming professionals, but everyday schooling focused on the necessary and nearer-in-time midpoint of nation-wide school leaving examinations and individual student aspirations.

Minutes after Pani Wąchocka's speech, at the very same *wigilia* table, the girls discussed their choices for the *studniówka* (Pl. prom) dress. It was a hot topic among them months ahead of the event. Some girls had their dresses custom-made by a seamstress. Others bought ready-made dresses but ensured they will be 'unique' amongst the school crowd. At the Christmas *wigilia*, the girls talked about the colours and particularities of design of their prom dresses. Irena considered going to a local department store specialising in fancy attire. The sellers there took note of the schools that girls buying dresses came from, to make sure no two identical dresses made their way into the same dance hall. Irena was undecided about the colour of her dress, considering burgundy, navy blue, or dark green. Upon hearing Irena mention dark green, her friend, Asia, chipped in that it is the shade of her dress and it would be "weird" if they both went wearing the same colours. While girls at Colegio Alalay strived to match in their dress, girls at Liceum Gawiecki strived to individually distinguish themselves.

The pedagogical goals, world views, and power relations that guide the two fieldsite contexts differ profoundly, showing that a similar emphasis on academic endeavours, hard work, and higher education can be upheld by distinctive foundations and directions of attention. At Colegio Alalay, academic education is mostly future-oriented, governed by an aspiration for a place in the developed world, achievable through Western professionalism and linked to discourses of modernisation discussed in Chapter 1. Modernisation at the school does not seek societal secularisation, continuing to channel much of the teachers' attention towards Christian pedagogics. It also works in tandem with a strong pedagogic orientation towards community and national belonging intimately tied to present-oriented necessities. At Liceum Gawiecki, attention is mostly present-oriented, governed by the *matura* exams. Outside the classroom space, and contingent on flexibilities in the bureaucracies of *matura*, attention is guided by the ideological schema of European cosmopolitan liberalism. This form of liberalism links individual freedom and modern European identity with tolerance and understanding of other cultures the school aims to cultivate orienting students towards European citizenship.

This chapter moves the analysis from national ideologies and educational legislation to consider the attentional priorities of teachers and schooling on the ground. The previous chapter considered how the national social attentionscape, topics made worthy of public interest, is selectively channelled to fulfil the state's political and ideological objectives. This chapter focuses on elements of the attentional nexus that are relevant to the direction of people's routine normative attention at the school. I use the term normative attention in the double sense, as a certain attentional norm as well as a value judgement. The degree to which a normative direction of attention upholds itself depends on the accepted norms of interaction and power relations they are nested in. Environmental stimuli can reinforce attentional priorities because of a feedback loop of confirmation bias and attentional alignment with others. In this chapter, I continue the intellectual endeavour commenced in Chapter 1 of analysing the interaction between symbolic and structural dimensions of cultural schemas via a socio-cognitive attentional lens. In what follows, I will briefly elaborate on the contributions my approach makes to an ethnographic understanding of schooling and examine the main normative pedagogic orientations at my fieldschools: academic pedagogics towards examinations in Poland and Western professionalism in Bolivia and the pedagogics of collective belonging to liberal Europe in Poland and the nation and local community in Bolivia.

2.2. Teacher's Schemas & School Ethnography

School norms of interaction are part of what Charles Goodwin termed "professional vision", i.e. "socially organised ways of seeing and understanding events that are answerable to the distinctive interests of a particular social group" (1994: 606). Goodwin's work is a pioneer within the anthropological study of attention since it is directly concerned with the socialisation of perception through which one learns to discern certain elements of the landscape as relevant – "all vision is perspectival and lodged within endogenous communities of practice" (ibid). Teachers' professional attention within their endogenous community of practice is achieved using "coding schemes" (Goodwin's term for schemas), "highlighting" selected elements, and building "representations" (ibid: 607). Like an archaeologist searching for and classifying soil types, educators highlight elements of relevance within the school attentionscape that inform their opinions of the student body and their progress. I consider pedagogic orientations to be an agglomerate of common directions of attention as informed by teachers' semantic schemas and action scripts.

The pedagogue's professional vision directly contributes to the formation of young citizens. This is why teachers' professional visions are particularly immersed in and contingent upon historically

established schemas of the nation and the broader set of symbolic and structural power relations of schooling. Those schemas are not only axiological, i.e., value-laden, but also aesthetic since they set value statements upon images. During his inauguration speech at the *formación*, the headmaster also reminded students to “*poner bien el uniforme*” (Sp. adhere to uniform rules/lit. put the uniform on well) because the school wants them to appear “presentable” and to prepare themselves for their future lives as professionals: “one day you will work and will need to appear presentable.” The pedagogic emphasis on aesthetics in post-colonial settings echoes elite concerns over the impurity of Indian bodies (see Canessa 2012: 193). Those concerns have crystalised themselves in automated cognitive schemas of appropriate professional appearance that need not hold the moral valence they used to continue to be re-enacted by teachers at schools.

In the last chapter, I considered how the historically embedded national ideoscape directs the attention of educational legislatures and programmes. The school is, nevertheless, far from a direct mirror of curricula and reforms, as ethnographers of schooling have amply demonstrated beforehand (Lopes-Cardozo 2013; Luykx 1999; Plaza Martinez 2002; Yan & He 2012). Teachers are not blind followers of the government’s educational objectives but channel their pedagogic attention in accordance with their own ideological beliefs and dominant schemas. During the inauguration of the new educational law, Evo Morales said that teachers are “soldiers of liberation and decolonisation.”⁶² Yet not all teachers, and even less so in urban centres, wanted to recruit themselves into his army. Many teachers at my Bolivian fieldsite found the law’s emphasis on the Indigenous not only superfluous but even disadvantageous, holding the students back from professional achievements. Others were not vocal opponents of the law but still prioritised hegemonic schemas of professionalisation and education in their teaching.

My exploration of teacher ideologies and normative attention at Colegio Alalay builds on the anthropological body of research on neo-colonial pedagogics in Latin America (Hurtig 2008; Rival 1996) and in Bolivia specifically (Canessa 2004; 2012:194-215; Howard & Canessa 1995; Luykx 1996; Plaza Martinez 2002; Regalsky & Laurie 2007). Schooling contributes to the symbolic legitimisation of power and the re(production) of social inequality, which Bourdieu & Passeron encapsulated in the term “symbolic violence” (1990 [1977]: 5). Bourdieu’s discussion of schooling should be considered in conjunction with his work on the habitus (1990; 2013 [1977]) and the politics of aesthetic taste and intellectual judgement (2010 [1984]). Sarah Kollnig combined

⁶² <https://eju.tv/2010/12/evo-promulg-nueva-ley-educativa-dijo-que-el-maestro-es-el-soldado-de-la-liberacion-y-descolonizacin/> (accessed 30/06/2023).

Bourdieu's work with insights on coloniality from Anibal Quijano to describe the "habitus of coloniality" (2020a: 23) in the everyday food taste and eating practice of Cochabamba's middle classes which "reproduces and negotiates social inequalities with deep colonial roots" (ibid: 38). The continuance of neocolonial discourse and practice at school can be similarly explained by the persistence of specific schemas of thought and action in teaching practice. Neocolonial thought at Bolivian schools stands in "relations of competition" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990 [1977]: 18) with the educational reforms introduced by the Indigenous government, which can also "lay claim to the legitimate exercise of a power of symbolic imposition" (ibid).

Recent ethnographic research demonstrates the potential for significant decolonial contestation of education at Latin American schools, including the co-option of the institution of the school to realise bottom-up local Indigenous community devised programmes (e.g. Przytomska 2015), the rise of various Indigenous voices in educational politics (e.g. Gónzales Apodaca 2008) and the power of Indigenous teachers to content assimilationist schooling agendas (e.g. Anthony-Stevens & Gallegos Buitron 2023). Such optimistic conclusions were, nevertheless, all drawn in dominantly Indigenous geographies with the presence of activist and/or highly ethnically conscious teacher actors. My research at Colegio Alalay, with a more mixed demographic and mostly *mestizo* teachers, pointed to the persistence of neo-colonial logics in the pedagogic orientation of the school, despite top-down policies meant to counteract them. Nevertheless, local schemas of event organisation and collective success showed decolonial potential by encouraging community-oriented attention.

Polish teachers at my Warsaw fieldsite were similarly unapproving of an educational programme geared towards a religiously conservative patriotic citizenship model. They, nevertheless, held little agency with regard to the lesson content because of the preponderance of state level examinations. Educational research in Poland places exams within the broader panorama of the neoliberalisation of schooling, which instrumentalises education for the market economy (see e.g. Gromkowska-Melosik 2016; Michałowska 2013; Potulicka & Rutkowiak 2018) and causes social and class inequalities in the structures of educational access and success (e.g. Kwieciński 2019; Sadura 2017; Zawistowska 2012).

The spread of state-mandated mass educational systems in nineteenth century Europe introduced educational practices that remain well alive to this day, including exam-oriented teaching. The normalisation of pedagogic attention around the focal point of *matura* examinations at Liceum Gawiecki can be considered, in Bourdieusian terms, a "forgetting of history" (1977: 78)

or “doxa” (ibid: 164) – the taken-for-grantedness of the social world as ‘natural’ and self-evident. A focus on numerical grading creates an educational situation in which the reception of a grade becomes an end goal in itself. It forms an important measure of student success in the official discourse but is considered a time-consuming and ineffective form of evaluation in the private convictions of many teachers (Dudzikowa & Kubinowski 2012: 426). When standardised exams are a key requirement for students’ future educational success and become the principal objective of schooling, the roots of a grade-based education grow stronger, further undermining opportunities for critical learning and educational practice.

Teachers’ pedagogic directions show individual variations but also identifiable normative patterns of behaviour and thought. Zalewska-Bujak’s (2017) research stands out in relevance amongst sociological work on Polish teacher ideologies and pedagogies by thoroughly situating the teacher *habitus* within the school bureaucratic and ritual environment. Inspired by Bourdieu’s work, her book discusses teachers’ schematic reproduction of stratified symbolic capital at the school and their subordination to bureaucratic and curricular restrictions. Zalewska-Bujak’s analysis of teacher narratives stresses the lack of active teacher opposition or acts of resistance despite discontent at the structural realities of the school. Rather, she speaks of strategies teachers’ employ to navigate, endure, and justify the “symbolic violence” of the school environment.

Those strategies can be considered cognitive schemas that guide attention towards specific interpretations of a situation and action. I encountered similarities between the strategies in Zalewska-Bujak’s interviews and at my fieldsite and focus especially on what she refers to as teaching “with and for tests” (ibid: 306).⁶³ Teacher’s strategies in Zalewska-Bujak’s account, as in my analysis of attentional practice, are highly goal-oriented and circumstance-dependent and do not necessarily fit into an easily describable ideological whole but still tend to contribute towards the reproduction of the status quo of the school. The perspective of attentional nexus and practice sheds light on the everyday cognitive processes and human agency involved in the (re)production and challenges to bureaucratic and ideological hegemonies at school.

Schemas are not fully pre-programmed and require conscious adjustments a mechanism that can be illuminated by the example of the gym teacher at Colegio Alalay. Approximately two months before their graduation, he decided to give the promo 2019 students the option of taking a “general

⁶³ Other strategies I came across at my fieldsites include “achievements and showoffs”; “following orders”; “assisting students” and “taking care of the school image” (Zalewska-Bujak 2017: 306).

culture” exam for an extra non-compulsory grade. He told the class that “if you do not want to, you do not need to study, you say, ‘I want to be a driver, construction worker’ (said with a tone of contempt), let me know. If you want to undergo this test, let me know.” His reasoning was driven by a schematic interpretation of occupations. A driver or construction worker is somebody who did not study and thus has no knowledge of “general culture”. In contrast, somebody who went to university and is a professional does have it. The idea to ask students to take a test in “general culture” was, on the other hand, not automatic. Instead, it was consciously deducted from those schemas and the teachers’ immersion in a setting that directs attention towards professionalisation. In what follows, I will ethnographically expand on the structuring power of schemas, bureaucracy, and sociality in shaping teachers’ attentional priorities and pedagogic practice through a discussion of pedagogic orientations of academic success (2.3, 2.4) and collective belonging (2.5, 2.6) and a comparison of the two at my fieldsites.

2.3. Neo-Colonial Pedagogics: “Western Professionalism”

Teachers’ contempt for the Bolivian educational law 070 (see Ch.1) comes from a focus on those elements of the law that clash with their schema of what constitutes modern, high-quality education. Much of the analysis in this section derives from interviews with the social sciences teacher, Profe Eugenia, and observations of her classes. Originally from Tarija, Profe Eugenia trained at the teacher’s institute in Sucre and worked there before taking up the post at Colegio Alalay. She was tall with full lips, round eyes, and long straight hair she let loose and brightened with blonde streaks. She self-identified as *mestizo*. Her character was confident, and while she usually donned a smile, it would disappear at the sight of student misbehaviour or disagreements in opinion.

In February 2020, on the first day of school, Profe Eugenia inaugurated the year by letting the new promo class know what she thought of the 2010 school reforms:

“This law needs to be repealed. The law made us regress thousands of years. It’s more a model of the countryside, not the city (...) you don’t need to know about the Pachamama (Mother Earth). We know about it, *ch’allamos*!⁶⁴ The new law needs to be technological, because those

⁶⁴ In reference to *ch’alla* – a ritual watering of the earth, usually with alcohol, as a means of asking for protection and rendering thanks to the Mother Earth.

are the interests of today, not the intercultural, the ancestral, but robotics, computing, IT, the web.”

Profe Eugenia ended her rant about the current education policies by stating that with the educational reforms, the government wants a nation of easily manipulated “mediocre people” and that the students should “kill themselves to go to university”. Evo Morales’s lack of university education was one of the targets of her disregard for him – “you have to be a professional to be president” she once told the class. What Profe Eugenia chose to ignore with regard to the educational reform is that the government did not eschew science and technology but included it as one of the educational pillars and made efforts to innovate schooling, for example through the provision of portable computers for class use. Legislation positions the technological and Indigenous as complementary, not contradictory. However, teachers at my fieldsite were closer in opinion to the side taken by urban teachers’ confederations, believing that too much focus on the “ancestral” deviates students’ attention from acquiring skills and knowledge useful for passing university entrance examinations and succeeding in the market economy.

Blatant discrimination towards the Indigenous is not an adequate explanation for the contempt for what Profe Eugenia and others called *pachamamismo* (Sp. “Mother Earthism”) within the educational reforms. Firstly, many Indigenous teachers also disapproved of the reforms. On my first visit to Bolivia in 2014, I met with a teacher of Indigenous origin. Rather than praise the reforms, as I had expected her to, she condemned them. She stated that, “they want to send us back to where we came from, back to the countryside. We came all the way here [to the city] and they want to keep us from advancing, keep us ignorant”. Like Profe Eugenia, the teacher reinforced the symbolic connection between traditional Indigenous practices, illiteracy, and the countryside. Secondly, even non-Indigenous teachers like Profe Eugenia considered it important to include and valorise Indigeneity within school curricula. During one of our interviews, she stressed that “if you want to have a culture of civism you need to know your roots, where you come from (...) Quechuas, Incas, Tiwanakotas, Collas, Aymaras etc, we have always taught that”. To her, however, knowing where one comes from did not signify acting as one’s ancestors had, as she selectively considered governmental objectives to be focused on, but recognising Indigeneity as part of a *mestizo* identity and culture – “We are a *mestizo* culture, we are mestizos because we are a mix of Spanish and Indigenous.” The Indigenous of this *mestizo* culture in urban Cochabamba and Colegio Alalay are, nevertheless, embedded in international relations of power favouring European cultural heritage, as discussed in the previous chapter.

One of the main points of this thesis consists of demonstrating the roles and importance of everyday sociality within attentional nexus and practice. Lynn Thomas (2011) suggested spotlighting cognition within practices of sociality as a way of establishing correspondence between the intellectual projects of cognitive and social anthropologists. The heuristic selectivity of attention-maintaining ideological schemas, such as those founded on the unquestioned superiority of the Western ways, does not occur in vacuum. Profe Eugenia's immediate social circle and school colleagues largely agreed with her regarding the reforms and state "*pachamamismo*" thus providing her with few conflictive stimuli and little incentive to change the direction of her attention and reflect on her views. Such a stance is compatible with the phenomenological assumption of everyday embodiment of our attention, "for by using one's body in the same way in the same environment one (...) remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived" (Jackson 1989: 135).

The headmaster himself concurred with Profe Eugenia's opinions. For example, during a meeting with parent delegates, he responded to their concerns about the university entrance exams with reference to the law – "Before the Law 070 education prepared for university; now with all the things about the socio-productive project, about the *pachamama*, education has gone down." In his view, education should cultivate *profesionales* and thus channel attention towards exam preparation rather than strengthening Indigenous heritage and non-academic tasks. It did not matter that "all the things" the law envisions were not actively taking place at the school. Promo 2019 students 'ticked off' participation in the "socio-communitarian productive project" (see Ch.1) by giving presentations about hygiene to younger classes without much involvement in the school's immigrant Indigenous neighbourhood. Indigenous language teaching was abandoned in secondary school despite legislative recommendations to the contrary. Indigenous cosmovision and customs were presented to the students in the form of abstract and foreign practices of "the Quechuas". Overall, students did not learn with the community and environment, as you might expect from an education based on *vivir bien* but continued learning about them.

In practice, thus, the reforms did not significantly alter the pedagogic orientation of the classroom. Still, by making publicly visible and bringing attention to the Indigenous at school, the state spurred a counter-focus on Indigeneity as the reason behind a perceived educational decline and a possible threat to attaining a top place in the social hierarchy of the imagined world of modernity and development centred around Western conceptions of living. Quijano describes Latin America looking at itself through a distorted mirror influenced by the European perspective.

In this mirror “the image that we see is necessarily too partial and distorted” (2000: 222) because of the way in which it conforms to humankind’s place within the Western perspective of space-time and its idea of the future. This future is one of Western modernity to be achieved through professionalisation understood in terms of a university-educated society the school should focus on preparing students for.

Adherence to the schema of “Western professionalism” does not automatically imply opposition to educational reforms. Such was the case of Profe Lourdes, who taught the subject of “Cosmovisions, Philosophy, and Psychology”. She was a young teacher of average height with brown hair worn in a neat ponytail or bun and, unlike some other teachers of her age, always dressed ‘formally’, usually wearing a straight trouser and jacket. She was the strictest teacher with regard to uniform rules and the overall need for ‘professional’ aesthetics, but she was also one of the most supportive of the curricular changes. She taught students about Indigenous worldviews with enthusiasm and believed that students should reconnect with their Indigenous identity. Her lessons, nevertheless, followed a schooling schema that prioritises textbook knowledge, memorisation, and individual problem solving, reproducing the superiority of traditionally Western ways of knowing within the hierarchy of the school’s epistemic training. For example, students read Quechua myths but were never asked to investigate the presence of oral stories within their families. In an interview, she further told me she believed the biggest weakness of the educational reforms was the elimination of a variety of topics forming part of the university entrance examinations, accentuating the normative orientation of gearing students towards university-level education.

Neither did Profe Lourdes question the aesthetic and ‘professional’ superiority of “Western Business Attire” on which student uniforms and acceptable teacher dress were modelled. She repeatedly complained about uniform incomppliance – “Why are you wearing colourful sweaters? You are only allowed to wear dark ones.”⁶⁵ “Marcelo, Ignacio – your hair is too long! At my other school, *la regenta* (Sp. disciplinary member of staff) would stand at the school gate with a ruler and razor and cut a boy’s hair on the spot if it was too long. If you don’t cut it by the next lesson, I will do it myself!” In highlighting aspects of student appearance considered inappropriate, Profe Lourdes followed a particular professional vision of what makes ‘good’ students and what the goal of education is – the formation of ‘professional’ in image and demeanour citizens. Profe Lourdes

⁶⁵ It is worth mentioning that colourful aesthetics are an essential component of *cholo* urban culture see Sanchez-Patzy (2014).

was equipped with a professional schema of pedagogic action that favoured student socialisation into neo-colonial epistemology and aesthetics but, unlike Profe Eugenia, she did not internalise a belief in Western superiority.

Halvard Vike (2011) problematised the Marxist legacy of understanding hegemony in terms of ideological dominance, a form of “false consciousness” or collectively internalised set of beliefs. He suggests we understand hierarchy “as a system of distributed reaction [rather] than a system of shared meanings, which serve to legitimise power” and conforming to norms as an “often pragmatic affair” (ibid: 377). I concur yet do not think we should do away with internalised meaning when conceptualising normative attention. Rather, we should seek to understand how social actions create meaning tied to a specific situation (e.g. the classroom) shared among a social circle in enough degree to guide action, be it ideologically or pragmatically. Since schemas operate in a largely automatic and unconscious manner, they are usually executed without consideration of conceivable alternatives, regardless of one’s overall awareness of them. Hence why Profe Lourdes was able to execute elements of neocolonial pedagogy through her everyday directionality of attention at the school, even though she championed decolonisation of the education system. Still, Vike’s emphasis on the pragmatics of conformity and strategic choice in following ideological status quo is integral to understanding the value of study and academics for Zona Sur youth.

Students at Colegio Alalay share the school’s vision of student professionalisation. Becoming *profesionales* was the common dream of all the students I had met. Not everyone was equally academically successful, but almost everybody saw value in it and wished to one day be one of those school graduates the headmaster was so proud of for having completed a university career. Omar, a pre-promo student when I first began fieldwork, is an example of such an educational success story. Omar was born into an Indigenous agricultural family in a small rural village in the department of Chuquisaca. He carried a popular Indigenous-origin surname and self-identified as Quechua. He was tall in comparison to most of his classmates, with a slim face and dark, thick hair he swept upward, and he was good-humoured by nature. Omar came to the city of Cochabamba to live with his father at the tender age of 7 after attending one year of schooling in Chuquisaca. In Chuquisaca, Omar had to walk eight hours a day and climb up a hill to get to the district school and back from his remote village, which is why his father brought him to the city.

The boy decided he had to study hard to avoid working on the streets like many of his family members, whom he described as “suffering” – “I see my dad carrying rice and I don’t want a life

like that.” His diligence paid off and in 2020 he entered the local public university to study engineering based on merit as a *bachiller destacado* (Sp.distinguished graduate),⁶⁶ without having to take entry exams. Blith Lozada’s remark that “earning degrees at the distinct levels of educational formation remains the most recurring visualisation of the possibility of social ascent and status” (2006: 61) is still valid and drives the aspirations of students at Colegio Alalay. Omar and most students at Colegio Alalay were the first generation in their family with a realistic chance of a university career. To understand the pedagogic orientations of Colegio Alalay, we must consider actual socio-economic realities that feed the attractive “mirage” (Quijano 2007: 176) of a European civilization model.

Omar’s classmate and equally top student Betty made an interesting linkage between study and decolonisation. During one of our interviews at my rented apartment in Zona Sur, I asked about her opinions on the government’s efforts to decolonise the education system. Having grown up with Law 070, she did not know the details of the 2010 reforms, but suggested a thought-provoking idea for the decolonisation of education:

“Decolonisation is the contrary of colonisation, right? Colonisation is what the Spanish brought and imposed. So... at the school it is the typical lessons, typical hours, typical routine...so decolonising would mean the contrary...renovating it...adding more subjects and more hours of study...because it would be the contrary...because in other countries like in Japan, China they study like 12 hours, they study more...their advances are better than here....we are *retrasados* (Sp. we are behind)⁶⁷ in English, in our studies”.

Betty’s heuristically evoked link between study and decolonisation can be understood in reference to Bolivia’s geopolitical context. In this reasoning, if colonisation is one of the reasons behind the country’s “underdevelopment” decolonisation requires overturning relations of power and dependence. Since education is the scaffolding of society, we should make this scaffolding stronger by studying more and improving our positioning in the world system.

While in Betty’s reasoning the structure of the education system is responsible for Bolivia’s “backwardness”, others referred to the deficiencies in the nature of the people that education must seek to eliminate. During one of the many Monday morning assemblies I observed, the *profesora de turno* lectured the school body on the importance of discipline and referred to littering as an

⁶⁶ The *bachiller destacado* is a title granted to the best female and best male student at each educational unit since 2014. It provides the student with direct access to a selected higher education unit and a 1,000 bs (£114) monetary incentive.

⁶⁷ The term *retrasado* is also used as the adjective “retarded”.

example of an unruly and undisciplined behaviour common amongst students. She ended her address with a spectre of international comparison: “this is why we are under-developed, that is why we are a Third World country, we do not know how to run it”. Overall, many students and teachers at Colegio Alalay held beliefs that Bolivia is “underdeveloped” because of a deficit in education and discipline amid its inhabitants.⁶⁸ A critical diagnostic of their nation’s geopolitical positioning did not, nevertheless, deter them from civism. In fact, participation in patriotic celebrations was an occasion for schools to showcase student talent and flaunt the country’s future potential in a more theatrical and materially palpable manner than the less flamboyant academic grades. I will return to this point further along (see 2.6). Beforehand, I wish to turn to my Polish fieldsite where the pedagogic orientation of academic success is more oriented towards immediate *matura* exam results than the long-term future of students.

2.4. Bureaucratic Pedagogics: “Matura”

At Liceum Gawiecki in Warsaw, the equivalent of student ‘professionalism’, or whether a student is considered on the track to becoming a ‘good citizen’, was closely related to their preparedness for school leaving examinations. *Matura* temporarily enters the national Polish social attentionscape once a year during springtime as exams approach. As I am writing this chapter in Warsaw in May 2023, the first exams have just begun. The news on television and radio informs the population which exams students will face on a given day. Journals speculate about the exam content and then comment on it once the youth put their pens down. Advertisements for energy drinks or foods are addressing *maturzyści* (Pl. exam writing students) at bus stops. Youth dressed in formal dress signal to the passersby that they are en route to or returning from their exams.

At Liceum Gawiecki, *matura* is present throughout the year, structuring the everyday running of the school. It is arguably the most important and firmly institutionalised pedagogic orientation at the school, which infiltrates many aspects of school life. The exam was first introduced in 1818 in and was originally reserved for elites but socio-economic developments and growing demand for skilled jobs made sitting the exam increasingly accessible and eventually widespread in Poland. Since 2005, as part of major educational reforms altering the education system that began in 1999, school leaving examinations have been universalised at the national level. They fully replaced university entrance examinations in admissions, becoming the high school student body’s bridge to higher education. Each subsequent modification of the exams increased the compulsory

⁶⁸ Hurtig (2011) observed a similar belief in an incapable and undisciplined citizenry among Venezuelan school students.

elements required to pass. Since *matura* examinations are based on a subject's core curriculum, changes to the curriculum will inevitably be reflected in the examination content. In comparison, the Bolivian school system does not require students to take universal school leaving examinations, relying on subject and university specific exams for entrance into higher education. Consequently, Bolivian teachers are freer to adjust and re-interpret the curriculum without jeopardising students' futures.

Students at Liceum Gawiecki are constantly reminded of the importance of *matura* during subject lessons and the so-called pedagogical hours (Pl. *godzina wychowawcza*) with their class teacher. Worried about low attendance numbers at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year, Pani Brodka advised her class that "they cannot just skip class if they are writing *matura* from the subject," bemoaning their selective attention towards the examinations. As exams approach, students are excused from attending subjects they are not examined in, assuming they fulfill the minimum attendance requirements. Teachers face a lot of pressure to cover the full syllabus of material on time, leaving little time for in-depth discussions about a topic. If a class teacher teaches her class a *matura* examined subject, they are more likely to devote the weekly pedagogical hour to subject material than discuss and advance non-subject related pedagogic matters and activities the hour was officially meant to address.

To sit their *matura* examinations, students require a passing grade in all subjects. Teachers are usually lenient in this regard unless a student wants to write the examination in their subject. One September afternoon, at the beginning of the school year, several bilingual students were sitting and talking about their *matura* exam choices during the five-minute break between their Spanish classes. Ola was yet uncertain about the subject she wanted to study at university and whether taking Geography examinations would be a requirement or otherwise useful for her higher education admissions. She lamented that because of the teacher's approach to *matura* students, she risks not being permitted to sit the exams at all. "He just gave Ola a failing grade for coming to class unprepared" another student appended as a means of demonstration. In response, Ola said she spoke to the teacher earlier today and told him that unless they are required for her future studies, she does not plan to sit for the geography examinations. "He became so joyful!" Diana mimicked the teacher's reaction by patting Ola on the back and saying contentedly "Good, good you do that child, I won't hurt you." As long as Ola did not try to write the geography exams and risk failing them, Pan Robert was willing to provide her with a passing grade.

Pan Robert's concern that the students sitting exams should be adequately prepared was not unfounded, for he had clear stakes in ensuring satisfactory results. *Matura* exam results were presented and discussed during the annual teacher assembly. Teachers whose students scored best in their *matura* exams were praised by the school principal and received applause from the teachers' community. Geography is the only *matura* subject in which students at the school tend to score above the national average, and the teacher wished to keep this up. Such accomplishments are considered in a teacher's application to step up the salary scale. In the teacher coding schemes, student success was thus considered in terms of their preparation for *matura* examinations. There was also no time for any discussions that did not contribute to the students' mastery of the material, such as critical assessment of the learned content. A *matura*-structured order of attentional priorities at Liceum Gawiecki also meant that government-imposed curricular changes were more strictly adhered to than at Colegio Alalay regardless of teacher disapproval.

Interviews and informal chats I had with teachers suggest that most teachers held critical opinions about the government's educational objectives and reforms. A specific example was Pani Sroczyńska, a slim tall blonde with square eyeglasses in her mid-50s who began teaching in the late 1980s. She was kind and understanding towards students and her face was lit up in class as she discussed the topics from her subject "Polish and Literature". I attended several of her Polish lessons with third year (pre-graduate year) students. The class changed their Polish teachers a few times and was behind with the material. Pani Sroczyńska had to sprint through the lesson content as fast as her pedagogical sensibilities allowed her to. Like most teachers at the school, she sprinted not only metaphorically but also literally, running between the lessons in her busy schedule.

Pani Sroczyńska felt that the new curriculum is overloaded and ideologically biased towards nationalism. After weeks of trying to get hold of her, she finally found time for a quick interview during her 20-minute lunch break. Pani Sroczyńska confessed she believed the new additions make the programme "spookily patriotic, as if 'Dziady Part III'⁶⁹ did not suffice". She further believed the programme taught students materials alien to their experience and should include more contemporary texts they could relate to – less about uprisings and defence of the nation ("we are living in times of peace") or romantic love ("they don't experience it this way"; "they have got other problems"). Pani Sroczyńska considered the sheer quantity of issues and topics unlikely to hold in students' minds. It was also clear to her, however, that in the high school curriculum as of

⁶⁹ See Chapter 1 for the significance of Mickiewicz's play in Polish culture and history.

2020 one issue held precedence: “we talk about materialism and money, then idealism, then romantic love, then orientalism, then national martyrdom, and again martyrdom, and again martyrdom”.

Her dilemma as a teacher of an obligatory exam subject was whether to teach “exam materials or literature”, and whether to prepare students “for the exam or for life”. When focusing on issues she found relevant to the students’ lives or interesting in literature, she did not manage to cover the full programme and her students received lower marks. She consequently “re-evaluated” her teaching strategy and stuck to the core curriculum despite it being “boring” and “leaving no space for discussion”. This disjunction between pedagogic desire and possibility contributed to feelings of helplessness among teachers, which also fuelled a vicious cycle of demotivation and hindered efforts at joint attention in student-teacher interactions (see Ch.5).

Even if Pani Sroczyńska did not make public statements against governmental pedagogy, as did Profe Eugenia, her opposition to it was visible in subtle conversational exchanges during class. When a student suggested they should attend the new staging of “Dziady”, she smiled and agreed that it would have been a great idea if only they had the time and could travel to Cracow. The play the student referred to was not just any production of Mickiewicz’s work. It was a production openly disapproved of by the conservative superintendant of education in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship, Barbara Nowak.⁷⁰ Nowak discouraged teachers from taking students to see the play since, to her mind, it “contains and promotes content that is in direct contradiction with the goals of educating young Poles”.⁷¹

This contradictory “content” was a representation of Polish society as multifarious and chaotic. One of the principal ways in which the play symbolized this diversity was through the people that gathered for the event of Forefathers Eve. There were girls in fancy dresses with patriotic adornments, a trans female, WWII Warsaw uprising survivors, members of the religious group ‘Warriors of Mary’, and Hassidic Jews. One critic described it as “a true personality fair” (Krawczyk 2022). Furthermore, the protagonist, a male in Mickiewicz’s text, was portrayed by a female actor. This emphasised the fluid nature of gender and other formerly firmly established social roles in

⁷⁰ Not to be confused with Barbara Nowacka, the Minister of Education as of 2024.

⁷¹ Her statement is available at <https://kuratorium.krakow.pl/dziady/> (accessed 16/11/2023). See also her opposition as expressed on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Br_Nowak/status/1463100842236600322 (accessed 16/11/2023).

contemporary Poland. By stating that she would have liked the class to see the play, Pani Sroczyńska defied ministerial recommendations and embraced, or at the very least deemed worth debating, a particular vision of Poland the ministry considers threatening. Elements of social and aesthetic diversity present in the play are part of a broader liberal and cosmopolitan vision of urban Poland. The following section will turn to describing this vision's role in orienting pedagogics of belonging to Europe at Liceum Gawiecki and subsequently compare it with a contrastive pedagogy of belonging towards the nation and local community at Colegio Alalay.

2.5. European Cosmopolitan Liberalism

Liberalism as a philosophy comprises ideas that value freedom, equality, and individual rights, which evolve with time and differ in manifestation depending on their application, e.g. politics or economics. I describe Liceum Gawiecki as liberal as a heuristic term rather than specific political viewpoint, grouping a set of values prioritised by my interlocutors. As a cognitive schema, 'liberalism' works as a locally situated guide to interaction that signposts our convictions, actions, and reactions in social situations. While much of the discourse of professionalisation in Bolivia also originates in liberal thought, it is placed within community-oriented attentional norms. The limits of individualism and freedom of thought and action at Liceum Gawiecki were set at the point at which they interfered with the freedom of others. Hence, the importance of learning tolerance in the desired focus of schooling.

According to the school statute of Liceum Gawiecki, the bilingual classes have the objective of fomenting the "posture of a young European, tolerant and open towards other cultures, and fluent in two foreign languages". In this statement, liberalism at the school, positing the right of others to their own opinions and demeanors (manifested in 'tolerance'), becomes conflated with cosmopolitanism ("open to other cultures") and Europeaness. The familiarisation with the quintessential cultural "other" understood through the lens of ethnic diversity becomes the training ground for learning "tolerance". School activities move beyond mere tolerance, promoting a cosmopolitan lifestyle and active engagement with cultural 'others'.

Languages are the pride of Liceum Gawiecki, which promotes itself on the school website as "a modern, language learning school of the XXI century in the borough of Targówek" and further presents their bilingual classes as "the hallmark of the school". Bilingual school programmes have been on the rise in urban Poland. There were 16 such public offerings available in Warsaw alone

as of 2021 and a few state schools even offered the International Baccalaureate (IB).⁷² At Gawiecki, the programme was taught by an internationally diverse team. At the time of my fieldwork, the Spanish teaching staff at the school included teachers from Bolivia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Spain, and one teacher of Polish origins. Thus, the staff composition in itself exposed the students to cultural diversity.

Cultural immersion was also explicitly promoted through extra-curricular events and activities. For example, during a radio episode hosted by the bilingual classes, the Spanish teachers gave an interview about their experiences of migration. The teacher of Polish origins described her time as an exchange student in Spain as “the best six months of her life”. She did not face any difficulties with adjustment and experienced the biggest “cultural clash” upon her return to Poland, having forgotten how “closed” to conversations Polish people are. The Latin American teachers spoke about how learning the Polish language was the biggest difficulty they faced, followed by adjusting to a different climate and cuisine. Instead of focusing on the “closed” nature of the Poles, they talked about their own acclimation process and Polish hospitality. Summarising his experience in the podcast, the teacher from Costa Rica, laid out what can be considered a benchmark opinion of the bilingual programme staff: “Living abroad, regardless of where, is always an experience. Travelling and getting to know other countries, is a very positive enrichment.” Whilst very few of the students had the opportunity to live abroad, many considered it an option for their university studies, and most were already frequent travellers, although their destinations were mostly touristic enclaves in Spain, Egypt, or Mexico.

The school’s aesthetics and materiality reflected its focus on fostering cosmopolitanism, further acting as feedback stimuli towards the reinforcement of its attentional prioritisation. On the school’s ground floor, students could marvel at photos taken by a school graduate during his travels in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and Armenia. In the corridors, you could also spot a poster recalling the school patron’s military collaboration with Denmark and another one promoting the programme eTwinning – an initiative inviting collaboration between European schools. The Nativity scene, set up at the school in December 2021 by students of the bilingual Spanish-Polish class, wished everybody “Merry Christmas” in seven European languages reflecting the languages taught at the school, as well as on screens inside Warsaw’s public transport (see Ch.1). Students in bilingual classes were the most likely to provide similar décor and organise intercultural activities

⁷² Those numbers exclude the ample and growing range of bilingual programmes and international examinations offered by non-public schools.

at the school. This is because language lessons were among the few during which the liberal cosmopolitan pedagogic orientation, rather than exams, took over teachers' attentional precedence.

Bilingual language teachers set activities involving cultural exchange on an equal – if not higher – footing to exam-related knowledge. Even among bilingual students, few chose to write Spanish *matura* exams, preferring to fulfil the foreign language requirement with English. The teachers also exhibited a certain professional vision of cultural immersion as a crucial element of language teaching. Hence, identifying and highlighting those experiences as productive learning. Unlike the specific information-heavy examined subjects, bilingual language lessons devoted considerable space to activities of cultural immersion. For example, the students had the chance to become involved in a student exchange with a school in the Canary Islands or prepare Latino dances for an inauguration event celebrating the school's collaboration with the Spanish Ministry of Education.

It is worth underscoring that the kind of cosmopolitanism promoted by the Warsaw school fits a common bourgeois understanding of a cosmopolitan persona, for it assumes students' status as “elite travelers who move easily between different physical locations and activities” (Goodale 2006: 639). While this is indeed the position from which most students at Liceum Gawiecki approach cultural exchange, it is not the only possible kind of teenage cosmopolitanism. I mention this to underscore that cosmopolitanism is not limited to elite urban European life as evidenced by the digital cosmopolitanism of students at Colegio Alalay (see Ch.1). Furthermore, what differentiated cosmopolitanism as a pedagogic orientation at Liceum Gawiecki was the explicit objective of learning tolerance and engagement with cultural ‘others’ as an element of a progressive ‘liberal’ schematic orientation of belonging in line with European Union ideals of “respect for and public recognition of ethno-religious diversity” (Dobbernack & Modood 2011: 7). In Bolivia, engagement with foreign cultural production was student initiated and initially entertainment oriented, although held the potential to modify students' schemas of thought towards an increased tolerance of diversity (see Ch.4).

An embrace of the ‘other’ at Liceum Gawiecki was not just about cultural diversity but about diversity as such. This was visible in the importance of diverse colour aesthetics in the girls' *studniówka* dress choices I spoke of in the chapter's opening vignette and matters of ethics and faith (see 2.7, see also Ch.3). At Liceum Gawiecki, attention towards the other was advocated to foster

acceptance of aesthetic and behavioural choices in the spirit of championing diversity and European membership. At Colegio Alalay, attention towards the other was equally important but constituted part of a pedagogic orientation of national and local community belonging, aimed at building community unity and collective action to which I devote the next section of this chapter.

2.6. Community Pedagogics

Despite rejections of the state-imposed forms of community-oriented academics, community pedagogics at Colegio Alalay come to the fore in many school activities. Performances and event organisation at Colegio Alalay were collective class endeavours that every student was expected to participate in. Collective responsibility meant that individual success became intimately intertwined with others. The number of bodily harmonisation rituals, both quotidian and ceremonial, taking place at the school and the associated emphasis on collective aesthetics and success led students to inevitably attend to and discipline each other. They prepare students to take part in community life that speaks more to heritage of the Indigenous socio-political unit of the *ayllu* than a liberal citizenship model of individual-based political participation.⁷³

Expressions of civism acted as the students' *carta de presentación* (Sp.business card), showcasing the collective future of Bolivia. Bodily aesthetics allow students to demonstrate their 'worth' firstly as class units, during *formación* and *horas cívicas* (Sp. school celebrations/lit. civic hour), and secondly as school units, during public parades. The day before the city anniversary (14th September) all schools from the Zona Sur gathered on Avenida 6 de Agosto for a parade of the promo classes. I arrived early to find the promo 2019, but the gathered crowd was large enough to impede my pass. I took a convenient spot, standing in front of the seating tiers occupied by local authorities and commentators.

The school parade is a grandstand of the academic and physical skills of schools. Each school is led by a distinguished student holding the school banner, followed by the *banda* (Sp.brass band), the rest of the students, and the teaching staff. During the parade, the students would perform elaborate chorographies, show off their musical skills, and occasionally include solo performances by the most artistically talented students when passing by the authorities with hopes of impressing them. The commentators provided live remarks on those performances, making note of the

⁷³ For a comparison between *ayllu* and liberal forms of democracy see Cusicanqui (1990).

student outfits, characteristic props, and the overall civicism of school youth with comments such as “those are steps of youth, yielding with civic fervour.”

The order of marching was determined by school achievements and the flair of past parades. It took almost three hours for Colegio Alalay to arrive, making the school among the last ones in those informal Zona Sur school classifications. Promo 2019 blamed their position on last year’s poor performance and assured me that the school will march much earlier on in the following year. Nevertheless, competition was fierce as other schools prepared elaborate performances. Student performative abilities and presentation skills were directly linked to civic devotion and a school’s local reputation. Whenever the future of the school band was discussed its importance as a school’s *carta de presentación* was always mentioned, coupled with the students’ inability to appropriately invest themselves in it and give performances of quality, angering the teachers and parents.

Lazar (2010) comments on the way in which school organised parades and *horas cívicas* in El Alto, Bolivia, serve as youths’ preparation ground for the widespread and politically imperative protest marches and civic parades. Elsewhere, Lazar (2012) distinguishes the obligatory nature of participation in organisational and social activities amongst unionists in El Alto as an ideology of collectivity cultivated in everyday practices of sociality. The sociality of my field was similarly governed by obligatory participation. It is this obligatory collective involvement for the achievement of a common social or political objective that is more broadly at stake in promoting bodily unity and the importance of harmonisation during civic events.

At Colegio Alalay, it was customary for students to receive an obligatory grade in music or physical education for participation in dances and parades. Contrastingly, artistic, extra-curricular activities at the Warsaw Liceum Gawiecki were sometimes given a complementary grade but would never be compulsory. Students, especially older ones, often saw them as a waste of time, citing the need to focus on exam-related material. At Colegio Alalay, on the other hand, artistic and civic contributions outside the classroom constituted a central focus of school life, frequently outweighing the importance of the more ‘academic’ schoolwork. This held for both the more civic-oriented (like the city anniversary) and the more fun-oriented events (like the *ciudadela* [Sp.fun fair]).

At an event, each helping hand was considered useful. Students were tasked with making sure the school grounds were appropriately decorated and arranged for any celebration. At Liceum Gawiecki, final year students are unlikely to get actively involved in extracurricular school activities

unless they strongly align with their interests or future career plans. The closer the students are to exams, the more they are expected to focus on them only. Students at Colegio Alalay are, on the other hand, expected to be more involved in extracurricular activities the nearer they are to graduation, demonstrating their leadership and management skills. In what follows, I wish to ethnographically demonstrate how collective performance preparation socialises attention toward the achievement of community objectives.

For the September 2019 city anniversary *hora cívica* the promo 2019 class were preparing a Cochabambian version of *huayno* – a traditional Andean dance danced in couples. The first rehearsal took place right after school to prevent students from deserting or arriving late. Still, only half the class stayed behind. Among them were Letizia and Luisa, two girls of a self-assured nature who often took it upon themselves to maintain order and enforce class participation. The students began discussing amongst themselves, trying to find solutions to the lack of attendance and willingness of the others:

Letizia: “Those who are here will dance and the rest will have to find excuses and confront the teacher.”

Vanessa: “Are you sure it is obligatory? Maybe we should just not dance.”

Emilia: “They cannot fail us all.”

The last two comments were met with strong opposition from Letizia and Luisa who retaliated on the importance of appearing and performing at the celebration as a promo class. The next practice took place during class hours, which the students negotiated with Profe Eugenia, the social sciences teacher.

Marcelo, the class *payaso* (Sp. clown), and every teacher’s student nightmare, was not very keen to practice and was busy sitting on the platform stairs a considerable distance away, playing music and texting on his phone as the class divided into couples. Ultimately, to his contentment, he was left with no girl to practice with and refused to dance alone, continuing to sit on the platform. Noticing Marcelo’s lack of participation, Profe Fuentes, the promo 2019 class *asesor* (Sp. advisor), asserted that he must make himself “useful” and tasked him with looking after Bianca’s son so that his mother could dance in peace. Bianca’s one and a half year old son accompanied her to school and it was customary for students to take turns taking care of the child. The lack of a pair for Marcelo was soon resolved by pairing him up to dance with me, though he rarely took part in subsequent rehearsals. Collective endeavours were not straight-forward but required juggling focus

between competitive stimuli fighting for student attention. Marcelo's ignorance of the rehearsal in favour of music and his phone is a case in point.

The biggest competitor to both rehearsal and academic work was the attractiveness of having fun and fooling around that, once begun by a student or two, could turn the whole class into a playground. Fooling around, referred to as "*hacer bulla*" (Sp. lit. making noise), frequently took place in Colegio Alalay's hallways, classrooms, and the courtyard. It was loathed by the teachers and enjoyed by the students, who saw it as a fun way to socialise and bond with each other. Its essence is well captured in a video posted by a student on Facebook during the COVID-19 school closure, captioned "my mom: my son, why do you miss school so much?" It showed school students dancing, hitting each other, jumping on each other, throwing things at each other, sliding on cardboard, running around, imitating sex moves, and laughing, as an answer to the mother's question. Boys and girls were equally involved in *hacer bulla*. The girls would not hesitate to chant insults at, hit, or twist the wrists of a fellow male friend, who would respond back, leaving no mercy. Adolescents continued a *bulla* outburst until a teacher or fellow student decided to calm them down, usually by yelling "*Ya! Basta!*" (Sp. Hey! Enough!). Some students were more likely to take on this task, whether because of their social role (e.g. class president) or their personalities, but few were immune to fooling around themselves. Much of the success of class performances and events depended on effective human resource management.

The day before the city anniversary *hora cívica*, we organised a costume rental outing to *la cancha* market. At the *cancha*, we were met with a crowd of other school youth that came to hire dresses for the celebrations. We grabbed each other by our backpacks or shoulders and squeezed forward. We were looking for longer antique-style skirts. When we finally found them, we were met with disappointment as the skirts turned out to be reserved for Colegio España. At the end, we settled for traditional white shirt and short blue skirt *cholita cochabambina* outfits and messaged the girls who arrived late about the decision. Back at the school, Letizia and Luisa were astonished to see them carrying different coloured outfits – burgundy skirts and lilac shirts, instead of the typical blue skirts and white shirts we had rented. The latecomer girls defended their choice, likewise mad at the other group for choosing a conventional outfit. "Remember? We were meant to stand out!", Eva reminded them angrily. "But we cannot demonstrate lack of unison", Letizia replied. The lack of outfit uniformity suggested disagreement, which should not be visible in a distinguished promo class.

Tensions between the group continued throughout the practice. It was the first time I had seen the class get similarly mad at each other. The rehearsal was scheduled for 6 p.m. but only began at 7 p.m. My dance partner Marcelo only appeared at 7.45 p.m. after being summoned via a mobile phone by one of the girls with an angry voice of complaint: “Your partner Kasia is here, you cannot just stand her up!” Still, Marcelo, and others were much more interested in fooling about, making progress of the rehearsal slow. On the day of the *hora civica* our *buayno* dance did not substantially differ in quality from the primary school performances who danced in total disharmony, even though it was expected from the older classes to be superior dancers.

Lazar’s (2010) point about the school’s role as a preparation ground for civic involvement can be zoomed in on by considering how students learn to direct their attention and combat conflictive attentional stimuli to achieve collective success. This time, the performance was considered a failure, but students learned about the importance of paying attention to each other’s actions and taking collective responsibility in the process. Further on in the school year, the 2019 promo class organised a fun fair to raise money for their graduation ceremony. This time, the students made sure that everybody took responsibility for the organisation and prepared themselves accordingly and the event ended up a great success. When stakes were higher, as they tend to be in adult life, the students channelled their collective attention to succeed.

Collective endeavours strike a contrast with my experiences at Liceum Gawiecki, where delegates were responsible for the organisation of events. The organisation of the *studniówka* (Pl. prom) at Liceum Gawiecki demonstrates those key differences. Customarily, the prom was organised by a committee comprised of teachers and parents. In 2022, in opposition to the committee’s decision to organise the prom on school grounds, a group of students took it upon themselves to organise the event without official endorsement from the school. Although prom organisation was a class idea, only a group of six students proceeded with it and formed a Facebook Messenger group in which to discuss arrangements. As time passed, the students involved dwindled to three girls and their parents. When I interviewed them after the party, the girls affirmed that involving more people would have only been a nuisance. It was already difficult to divide the tasks and agree on matters between themselves.

They further claimed, some people were simply not a good “fit” for such event organisation because they were “not responsible enough”. It did not please them that some members of the initial Facebook group would only voice their opinion when they disagreed with something but

were not active or driven to help otherwise. The solution was to let them go rather than, as I expect would have happened at Colegio Alalay, channel attention towards increasing their involvement. Students at Liceum Gawiecki had a clearly less consensus-oriented experience of the school than students at Colegio Alalay. Still, differences in prom organisation should also be considered in light of students' economic realities. For the student-organised *studniówka* at Liceum Gawiecki, a professional company took care of the decor, a DJ entertained the guests with music, and the catering was provided by the hotel in which the prom took place. At Colegio Alalay, the provision of entertainment materials, food and decorations for events were student and parent responsibilities, and any external delegations were carefully considered and communally discussed.

In Cochabamba's Zona Sur, teachers and parents were also expected to take part in school life. If teachers did not make an appearance at a celebration, they were discounted days from their salary. The priciest absences consisted of the public *desfiles* (Sp. parades). Absence at the city anniversary march cost teachers 3 days of work and the Independence Day cost them 5 days. Parents were also charged for not appearing at and coming late to reunions, parent strikes, and protests and expected to help organise and participate in school events. For the promo 2019 pre-graduation party the class danced a parent-student waltz. During the parent reunion planning the event, Profe Fuentes stressed that all parents have to participate in the dance. "*Tukuy* doña Maria, *tusuyki* doña Maria" (Q. everybody, Mrs Maria, you dance Mrs Maria) – Profe Fuentes directed a native Quechua-speaking parent who was shaking her head and waving hands in negation, but also laughing at the perspective of dancing, already aware that she would inevitably end up joining in the waltz. Students learned to pay attention to the actions of others during event organisation at school as a means of socialisation into community life, in which they will be similarly attended to and evaluated as a group member. Community coherence is a prerequisite for collective political action prevalent throughout Bolivia, which could be understood as grassroots democracy (see Ch.3) with roots in the Indigenous *ayllu* (see Cusicanqui 1990). In this sense, community-oriented pedagogics at Colegio Alalay hold decolonial potential, contributing, rather unwittingly, to the national project of decolonising education.

Collective attire, as evident in the importance of dress choice described above, contributed to the process of student aesthetic harmonisation and socialisation of attention towards community-oriented goals. Final year students got to choose their uniform, which served as a transition towards entering more conscientiously consensual forms of bodily harmonisation beyond those offered by everyday school discipline. This is not an easy feat for, quoting Julia, "they have to show

who they wish to be”. As a first step towards establishing aesthetic coherence students in their penultimate year were able to order distinctive gym t-shirts with a “pre-promo” label. Promo 2019 had light grey t-shirts with a lion logo to which they added matching jumpers, distinguishing them as “promo” when they entered their final year. Julia’s class, promo 2020, got turquoise-dark blue gym t-shirts with a fox logo made in 2019. They were immensely proud of them and flaunted them even on no-gym days. For members of the promo 2020, one of the biggest let-downs of the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown was being deprived of the possibility to wear their ordered promo school uniforms.

Julia admired the uniform of the class that had graduated a few months before my arrival. She described it to me by focusing on the boys’ attire – “khaki trousers, a white shirt, and a really nice blue tie with little crowns and a jacket.” She commented that they all looked “really nice, friendly...a bit like pupils in the United States”. On the contrary, Julia did not fancy the simple grey suit of the class who was promo when I arrived at the school in 2019 – “I just don’t like it, it doesn’t look good.” “They look”, Julia struggled to find the right expression, “...just chewing on their chicken wings” (she burst out laughing). Julia’s instinctive understanding of the promo 2019 was made through a schematic contrast of the refined representation of “pupils in the United States” the previous promo class reminded her of with chicken fast-food on Zona Sur’s main street, where students at Colegio Alalay sometimes went to eat in after school.

Kollnig argues that chicken marketing and food parlours present the food in Bolivia as “Western and modern” (2020b: 42). Yet since chicken has become “the fuel of the urban poor” (ibid: 43) for Julia it represented the opposite of refinement. Chicken fast foods in Zona Sur were small spaces with a simple banner and plastic chairs and table sets. Julia’s reasoning linked a uniform she found aesthetically pleasing with the idea she held of a Western country, the United States, thus reaffirming Western superiority and the desired direction of community-oriented attention. I will devote the last section of this chapter to a comparison of lesson content and attentional priorities of religion teachers at my fieldsites to demonstrate how both normative attention at the schools and previous personal experience of teachers influence pedagogic orientations in the classroom.

2.7. Two Religion Teachers

Profe Rosales, the teacher of the subject “Values, Spiritualities, and Religions” at Colegio Alalay, and Pani Różycka, who taught “Catholic Religion” at Liceum Gawiecki, both diverged from the prescribed curricula in their lessons. Profe Rosales “evangelised” the secular subject in line with

the normalisation of Christianity at the school, while Pani Różycka ‘liberalised’ and ‘internationalised’ her Catholic religion lessons. “Religion” at Liceum Gawiecki was not so significantly influenced by *matura* bureaucracies because it lacked formal examinations and was voluntary in participation. It thus provided me with illuminating data for the comparison of the ideological underpinnings of pedagogic orientations without them being overshadowed by bureaucratic constraints.

At Colegio Alalay, Christian practices were normalised within the school. For example, the school anniversary celebrations began with a Catholic mass, despite regulations deeming public schools secular. A fact the representatives from the ministry present during those celebrations did not seem bewildered by. Teachers of other subjects, including the social sciences teacher Profe Eugenia, frequently used books of Christian parables to cultivate values. The students would read a story at the start of the lesson and discuss its moral, which would often, although not always, include the need to have faith in God. Some teachers even asked the students to say a prayer before the start of their lesson. With very few exceptions, most students at the school were either Catholic or Evangelical and did not question the Christian character of the school. Students at the Polish Liceum Gawiecki also normalised certain aesthetic elements of Christianity at school, for example, the historically commonplace presence of crosses above classroom doors. Student and staff attention is attuned enough to not take much notice of them. Nevertheless, theological teachings and religious practices outside of religion lessons, like the ones that took place at Alalay, never took place. They would have likely been frowned upon for assuming a common religiosity, which violates freedom of religious thought.

Concerns about religious freedom were outside the educational priorities at Alalay, where Catholic religious identity took precedence. Profe Rosales was born in the provinces of La Paz and was in her mid-60s when she came to teach at Colegio Alalay. She had dark skin and hair, a round face with sizeable features, and a calm expression. Her attire was formal and tone of voice and movements composed. She was of Indigenous heritage with Quechua origin surnames and found Indigenous culture and pride in one's origins important. Even so, she considered the focus on Indigenous spirituality too obsolete for students’ interests and needs – “It contradicts itself, you know, because 60–70% of the population is Catholic.” During one of our interviews, she recalled the time when a parent complained that his son did not know how to recite prayers: “And I told him... but mister now with the Law 070, I don’t teach “Our Father” or “Ave Maria”. This is in

your hands now. I teach him how to do a *q'owa*...what aromatic herbs he has to buy, that is what the curriculum asks of me.”

Profe Rosales taught what the curriculum asked of her for a few years but found the material inappropriate:

“The students of today are not interested in this and will not practice it. As knowledge, yes [it is good], but in the world and all there is, for example, the Christian religion, Catholic or Protestant, or what do I know, but the love for God and love for Jesus Christ is what needs to be instilled more, according to my formation and according to my religious identity as well.”

The teacher’s pedagogic focus came across on her first day at Colegio Alalay in the way she framed questions about Christian and Indigenous religious practices. During her first lesson at Colegio Alalay, Profe Rosales gave students a diagnostics exam aimed at testing their prior knowledge of her subject. She asked the class “what Christian values do you know and practice in your community?” and later asked them to “write down some of the cultures and religions of Indigenous people that you know”. By assuming the presence of Christian practices within the students’ community but ascribing Indigenous beliefs and customs to an anonymous “people”, Profe Rosales distanced the latter from the students’ lives, despite an Indigenous class demographic.

Profe Rosales’s Catholic identity and upbringing influenced her teaching practices, but so did a certain understanding of contemporary times as Christian rather than Indigenous (see also Ch.1). Such a vision ignores the prominence of pre-Hispanic beliefs and rituals within the Andean religious landscape, better described as hybrid (see Harris 2006). The present-oriented interest in teaching religion contrasts with the future-oriented focus on moulding the country’s new professionals, which Profe Rosales supported as much as the other teachers. This contrast cannot be explained by religious identity alone but needs to be considered in relation to the broader social acceptance of Christianity at the school that channels attention toward and highlights Christian practices while neglecting the continuing relevance and importance of Indigenous customs within the community.

Profe Rosales is an active member of an association of like-minded teachers “El Consejo Nacional de Profesores de Religión, Ética y Moral Católica de Bolivia (CONAPREMC – B)” (The Council of National Teachers of Religion, Ethics, and Catholic Morality in Bolivia). To address the perceived need for Christian teaching at the officially secular school, the association has been

working to, as she puts it, “evangelise” the curriculum. Both the association’s and official ministry materials refer to practices of different world religions and modern values considered ‘universal’ but they strikingly differ in terms of their presentation and judgement. The ministry materials often stress equality between world religions and the colonial roots of Catholicism in Bolivia. The unit on religious transcendence, to give an example, begins with an interview with the Dalai Lama, telling readers that the best religion is the one that makes you a better person (Ministerio de Educación 2021: 235). To Profe Rosales’s taste, the ministry materials were too critical of Christianity, presenting it in “a bad light” by focusing on its role as the coloniser’s religion.

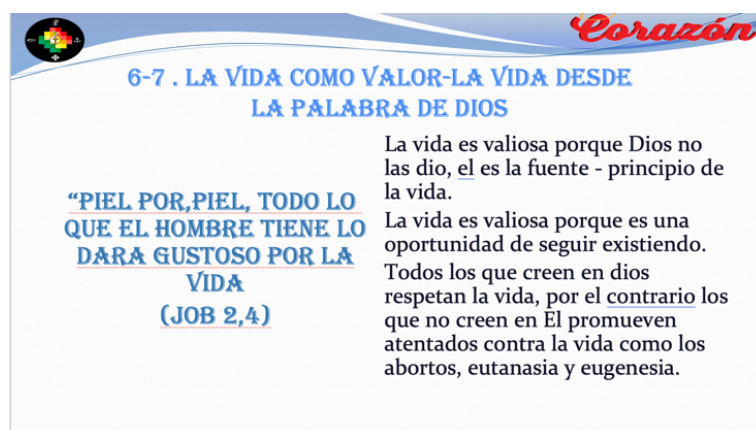
The association teaching materials, on the other hand suggest, a universal applicability and preponderance of the Christian religion. They use biblical quotes throughout each unit as a means of universal validation of the presented views and values discussion e.g. the unconditional valorisation of life (see im. 2.1) and a language of superiority when speaking of Jesus Christ and the Catholic tradition. In their unit on leadership, for example, Catholic leaders are listed as defenders of dignity, life, and the cosmos. Jesus Christ tops the list as “the perfect leader” (see im. 2.2), followed by Luis Espinal and John Paul II. Non-Catholic leaders, such as Gandhi or Tupac Amaru, are simply classified as world or Indigenous leaders. Thus, despite a secular curriculum that treats all values and religions on an equal footing, Christianity was the focus of religious teaching at the school.



Im. 2.2. Lesson slide from CONAPREMC teaching materials.

Title: Defenders and promoters of dignity, life, and cosmos.

Text: “Jesus Christ, the perfect leader. Jesus Christ was a leader that has never existed, the principles and fundaments of his leadership are the base on which actual leadership rests. He is the leader of love and forgiveness, because he taught us the real meaning of love when he said in Mark 12:31: You shall love your neighbour as yourself”.



Im. 2.1. Lesson slide from CONAPREMC teaching materials.
 Title: Life as a value – Life from God’s word. Bible quote: “Skin for skin. All that a man has, he will gladly give for his life” (Job,2,4).
 Text: life is valuable because God gave it to us, he is the source-principle of life. Life is valuable because it is an opportunity to keep existing. Everyone who believes in God respects life, on the contrary those who don’t believe in Him promote attacks on life like abortion, euthanasia, and eugenics.”

At the Polish Liceum Gawiecki, Catholic religion was taught as an autonomous subject but its content was less conservative than during Profe Rosales’s lessons in adjustment to the schools’ pedagogic orientations. Pani Różycka, the catechist at Liceum Gawiecki, was a petite blond with a bob haircut. She was young relative to the other schoolteachers and a married mother, who, at the time of my fieldwork, had been teaching for the past 15 years. Pani Różycka was conscious and receptive to student diversity and the declining importance of church doctrine in students’ everyday lives. She realised that most students do not share her more conservative Catholic convictions, and as such, there was little point in trying to pull them over to her side. In her own words, it was best to discuss “why is it that the Church believes in this and why is it that they believe otherwise” and “coincide in our opinions”.

The contrast between her approach to teaching religion and Profe Rosales’s was visible in the way they dealt with the discussion of premarital sexual relations. Both teachers believed students should abstain from sex before marriage. Pani Różycka gave her students a list of the benefits of abstinence and discussed them with the class, honouring the fact that most students disagreed with them. Profe Rosales, on the other hand, simply declared – “Can there be sex before marriage? No.” Still, Profe Rosales felt strongly about the need for women’s emancipation. She lectured the girls that they should wait with marriage and motherhood to be able to study and focus on their careers – a view befitting of the school’s pedagogic orientation of “professionalisation”.

Pani Różycka was grateful that religion was an unexamined subject and admired, although did not envy, teachers of other subjects who must, in her words, “stick to the evaluated material and pass on *matura* targeted knowledge”. PIS state officials argued that examinations in the subject of Catholic religion would strengthen the nation’s religious identity. Pani Różycka believed that this would have led to a further dwindling of class attendance to the most devoted students and a by-book approach to faith, neglecting its contemplation. She was fairly satisfied with the subject curriculum itself, which “treats religiosity from different perspectives” but believed it should include a more in-depth discussion of other religions.

In her catechist formation, she specialised in religious studies and was highly knowledgeable about non-Catholic religions. Other religions were featured in the curriculum with a 45-minute lesson timeframe for each; too little, according to Pani Różycka, especially so for Judaism and Islam because “Jesus was a Jew” and Islam is a “dynamically developing religion” problematically positioned in the modern world of which students should be aware. To cover those religions, Pani Różycka needed at least three lessons each and ‘plugged’ the teacher’s log with topics she considered less important and could skip. The teacher’s log served as an official bureaucratic cover, which suggested she followed the curriculum as expected. The cosmopolitan pedagogic orientation is made visible here in the perceived need for students’ understanding of other religions and international affairs.

In her teaching, Pani Różycka prioritised progressive liberal European values by giving students freedom of choice in the realisation of their faith and opinions, regardless of her own conservative Catholic beliefs. The kind of ‘hidden curriculum’ the teacher conveyed is that the student has a right to decide about their private life. Her pedagogic orientation was by no means unanimous among urban religion teachers. Student experiences with conservative catechists often came up in my discussions with teenagers as the reason for deserting religion lessons. They associated religion teachers, usually priests and nuns, with ideological single-mindedness and felt they could not comfortably voice their opinions during the lessons. Profe Rosales’s Catholic approach to teaching the “Values...” subject at Colegio Alalay is also not the only feasible one. The teacher responsible for the course before Profe Rosales joined the school was much more secular in his pedagogic orientation. By zooming in on Pani Różycka’s and Profe Rosales’s teaching practices, I sought to demonstrate how personal convictions influence a teacher’s approach to nationally imposed programmes and their correspondence with the normative pedagogic orientations of the school.

2.8. Conclusion

Everyday sociality is key to the lived maintenance of schemas and world-imaginaries. It influences normative components of attentional practice, which in turn guide the daily focus of schooling at my fieldsites. “Western professionalism” and “Catholicism” continued to act as crucial pedagogic orientations at Colegio Alalay, entrenching schooling in neo-colonial relations of power and hampering legislative efforts promoting Indigeneity and secularisation. This perception of the incommensurability between Indigeneity and modern urban schooling was reinforced by schemas equating the Indigenous with the countryside and archaic modes of living. Bolivian teachers were not, nevertheless, uncritically putting on a ‘white mask’. They based their opinions and actions on a complex identity assessment of one’s, and the school’s, place in a global imaginary of nationalism and development, colonial history, religion, and Latin American notions of *mestizaje*, supporting Goodwin’s claim that professional vision is “a socially situated activity accomplished through the deployment of a range of historically constituted discursive practices” (1994: 606).

Such discursive practices were also prominent at Liceum Gawiecki. Teachers and the school environment explicitly sought to socialise students towards European citizenship membership, linked to liberalism of a cosmopolitan sensibility and the embrace of ‘other’ cultures. In practice, an orientation towards exams took precedence in the everyday pedagogic practices of the school, directing teacher attention via a present-oriented administrative, rather than discursive, hegemony. Language and religion lessons were a space of bureaucratic exception, which allowed for a change in the direction of normative attention from *matura* to liberal cosmopolitanism. A similar switch in the directionality of attention occurred at Colegio Alalay, where the future-oriented objective of forming *profesionales* was in discord with the on-the-spot needs of the school community that required collective organisation of events, fostering community coherence endorsed by educational state legislation. Nevertheless, directions of community achievement and collective aesthetic presentation, such as uniform choice, still carried the shadow of neocolonial aspirations. I sought to show how ideologically or pragmatically fuelled normative attention at the school is inherently political and linked to historical socio-economic processes, acting in contribution or defiance of top-down educational policies. The next chapter will continue looking at the linkage between the macro and micropolitics of attention but shift the focus from teachers to teenagers and from normative attention to more sporadic events, underscoring the role of emotions and reflexivity within attentional practice.

SECTION II: “Disenchanted” & “Disinterested” Youth

Chapter Three: Moral Attention: Emotions & Political Participation

“Thought has its origins in the motivating sphere of consciousness, a sphere that includes our inclinations and needs, our interests and impulses, and our affect and emotions.”

Vygotsky (1987 [1934]: 282)

3.1. Moral Emotional Attention

On November 10th, 2019, after almost fourteen years of serving Bolivia as its head of state, Evo Morales renounced the presidency in a message aired from the bastion of his supporters in the Chapare region of Cochabamba. His resignation was the culmination of twenty-one days of road blockades, confrontations, and protests that unsettled the country’s urban centres two months into my fieldwork, following suspicions of electoral fraud. On the 20th of October, following the election, *cabildos* (Sp. public councils) sprung up across the country, calling for a national *paro cívico* (Sp. civil strike) in rejection of the results. The public demanded a second round between Morales and his runner-up Carlos Mesa and, subsequently, the resignation of Morales and his vice president Alvaro García Linera. Morales decided to step down from office after a nationwide police mutiny and the loss of support from the military itself.⁷⁴ The streets of Cochabamba’s wealthy North and the city centre erupted in joy at the news, with people sounding car horns, waving national flags, and screaming chants. At Colegio Alalay, located in an Indigenous and MAS-supporting neighbourhood, not everybody was jubilant about the president’s departure. On the morning of November 11th, a group of students gathered in the courtyard to discuss the president’s resignation. “*Tata* (Q. father) Evo left”, seventeen-year-old Esther announced, imitating a sob, and brushing off fictitious tears. Her friend Abigail followed suit with a pretend cry and comment: “*Que triste!*” (Sp. How sad!). After giving off a few more sobs, she added, “But he had been [the president] for a long time already”. “*Si, no ve?*” (Sp. yes, right?), Esther nodded, but without losing the sad expression on her face. “Linera went with him. Always by the side of his *indígena* (Sp. Indigenous person)” their classmate Jimena observed.

All three girls – Esther, Abigail, and Jimena – were of Indigenous Aymara and Quechua origins and, aside from the slightly taller and lighter-skinned Esther, had a short posture, dark complexion,

⁷⁴ Morales resignation was directly incited by the army general’s public suggestion that he resign for the peace and stability of the country.

and thick black hair. Their parents were migrants from the surrounding valley countryside and the *altiplano* (Sp. high plateau), regions whose populations symbolically and economically benefitted from Evo's office. The girls did not, however, take an active part in the counterprotests defending Morales, nor did their colleagues at the school. The exchange between the girls in the courtyard shows a cognitive and affective conflict between the accrued sentiment towards Morales, who had been "the people's" president since the girls were toddlers, and the recognition of his attempts to prolong his presidency as divergent from democratic ideals. Their attention switched from their feelings of sadness about the departure of the only president they remember to a reflection on his undemocratic tendencies. Our previous experiences shape our emotional attachments and influence political reasoning, which can be re-considered according to social circumstances and interpersonal relationships. Hence, the collective pondering of the girls in the school courtyard on how they should feel about the morally ambiguous situation of Evo's departure.

Political instability seemed to follow my footsteps. Exactly a year after Bolivia's plunge into political crisis, a wave of protests spurred across my native country of Poland. A few months after my unexpected return to the country because of the coronavirus pandemic, the government declared abortion in cases of fetus deformation and illness as unconstitutional. The ruling tightened what were already the strictest abortion rules in the EU aside from Malta. In October 2020, people took to the streets in numbers not witnessed since the demonstrations accompanying the 1989 socio-economic transformation, infringing pandemic regulations against mass gatherings, and risking exposure to the coronavirus. The 'Woman's Strike', a feminist social movement founded in 2016, demanded the annulment of the ruling and abortion rights in line with those of the rest of the EU. At the time, schooling took place online but from subsequent discussions and social media, I inferred that students' reactions to the political crisis were not as ambivalent as in the case of Colegio Alalay, and their opposition to the anti-abortion bill was unanimous.

This chapter aims to introduce the centrality of emotions within attentional practice, highlighting the affective aspects of moral perception and their situatedness within practices of everyday sociality. Emotions form an inherent constituent of attentional management. Through examining the interaction between emotion, reason, and morality in relation to politics at my fieldsites, I continue my exploration of adopting a socio-cognitive approach towards an understanding of attentional practice by considering the role of emotion in guiding attentional patterns. Morally channelled attention highlights aspects of our environment and mental repertoire. Those moral

highlights differed between my two fieldsites because of the distinctive moral sentiments and particularities of the two political scenarios.

The protesting Polish youth held a broad liberal moral stance with an emphasis on personal choice, which stood in an antagonistic relation to the conservative moral values of the governing party and its supporters. Bolivian youth held a more ambivalent moral stance in the political crisis. They agreed with the opposition in their criticism of Morales's undemocratic tendencies but held positive sentiment for the president's previous social action and highly condemned the racist behaviours of the opposition. This ambivalence prevented them from taking clear sides during the political conflict. Their only direct and convinced action was against city blockades, which they saw as a much clearer injustice, presenting barriers to work and the livelihood of their neighbourhood.

I am influenced by the “attentional moral perception” (Vance & Werner 2022: 1) stance, which argues that our attentional mechanisms are “attuned to pick up on moral features in our environment” (ibid). The resulting attentional patterns influence moral cognition so that “changing patterns of perceptual attention can change moral judgements and decisions” (ibid: 7). I am also motivated by the growing anthropological appreciation of the prominence of emotion and sentiment in moral reasoning (Allard 2013; Cassaniti 2014; Sykes 2012; Throop 2012; 2014) and the ample record of anthropological literature considering the relationships between history, politics, and emotions or affect (Fassin 2013; Kleinman 1995; Laszczkowski & Reeves eds. 2018; Reddy 1999; Saramifar 2019; Scheer et al. e.d. 2019). Moral attention is inherently affective. Hence, I will refer to it as moral emotional attention. I will use the all-encompassing terms emotion and affect to group together sentiment, mood, feeling, affection, desire, and other affective states.⁷⁵

Work in the social, psychological and biological sciences has long acknowledged the congruence of emotion and reason. Antonio Damasio's (1994) work seriously challenged any claims of an emotion-free human logic by demonstrating how brain damage to regions responsible for emotionality curbs decision-making processes. I fully endorse Damasio's claim that feelings are not just a separate impact factor that influences decisions but are part of everyday reasoning. This chapter builds on the insights of ethnographic accounts of decision-making and logic that take

⁷⁵ I will not be explicitly engaging with the recently popularised distinction between affect and emotion as a fundamental theoretical tool (c.f Richard & Rudnycjk 2009; Stewart 2017). Others, both favourable and critical, have discussed the potentials of this distinction in much detail (e.g. Beatty 2019; Mazzarella 2009; Rutherford 2016; Wetherall 2012).

emotions on board as more than mere ‘distractors’ to the rational thinking process (Henning 2008; Heiss 2018; Stafford 2019) as well as philosophical (Solomon 1973) and psychological (Greene et al. 2001; Imbir 2016; Jarymowicz & Imbir 2015) work studying the intricate conjuncture of emotion and reasoning. In what follows, I will identify the collective moral sentiments that channelled emotionally charged attention, elaborate on the experiential logic behind them, and discuss the way in which affective social and political divisions in my fieldsites were embellished. I will also ethnographically zoom in on how my interlocutors juggled potentially conflictive stimuli around protests and the role of social media in enhancing moral emotional attention.

3.2. Emotional Heuristics and Affective Politics

The rates of participation and rationales for involvement in civic dissent activities and politically charged confrontations differed between the two urban centres. Many of my Warsaw interlocutors not only opposed the anti-abortion bill but also joined the masses that mobilised against the government. Overall, youth participation in the Polish protests was high. One social survey found 29% of the questioned national population aged 18-24 actively took part in the 2020 protests compared to only 8% of the general public overall.⁷⁶ There is no data available on underage protest participation, yet younger youth were also visibly present. I attended the protests and often bumped into students I recognised from Liceum Gawiecki and others of similar age. No comparable statistics are available for Bolivian youth protest participation, but Bolivian teenagers at my research school in Cochabamba did not actively take part in the 2019 wave of protests on either side of the political conflict. They did, nevertheless, comment on them and sometimes got involved in non-side-taking acts of civic vigilance and dissent that surged amongst the protests. This is unsurprising given that the protests were a temporary “total social phenomenon” (Mauss 2001 [1954]: 3) and, unlike the Polish protests, affected all aspects of everyday life in the city.

The *cabildos* in the streets of Cochabamba and other Bolivian cities popularised chants against Morales such as *Evo de nuevo? Huevo carajo!* (Sp. Evo again? Bullshit!) or what became the opposition’s ‘hymn’, *Evo Evo cabron, Evo Evo cabron, sos un hijo de puta, la puta madre que te pario!* (Sp. Evo Evo bastard, Evo Evo bastard, you are a son of a bitch, birthed by a whore). In the opposition’s eyes, Evo Morales was a clear enemy who embodied undemocratic tendencies. Evo’s resignation did not however put an end to the troubles, which only intensified as the ex-president’s

⁷⁶ Based on a survey carried out by an international market and public opinion research analytics company Kantar. See <https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art413941-sondaz-kantaru-70-proc-badanych-popiera-protest-strajku-kobiet> (accessed 21/11/2023).

defenders advanced into the cities to demand his return, leading to deadly clashes between civilians and the police. The interim government opened fire on pro-Evo demonstrators on November 15th, 2019 in the Sacaba Municipality near my fieldsite and on November 19th, 2019 in Senkata, the city of El Alto. Each clash resulted in 11 civilian deaths. The casualties only intensified the anger of Evo's supporters, groups of whom called for 'civil war', and amplified the already widespread generalised atmosphere of fear experienced by the broader population.

Emotional chants also accompanied the Polish protests. The opposition sang "*Jebać PIS*" (Pl. Fuck PIS) to the dance tune 'Call on Me' by Eric Prydz. ***** *** designating the swear phrase *kurwa mać* (Pl. fuck/lit. whore's mother) was the favourite protest slogan on placards during opposition marches and manifestations. Direct anger at the PIS party and its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, predominated.⁷⁷ It was, however, accompanied by a variety of claims over one's body, secularity, and LGBTQ rights written on poster signs in Polish and English. How come those urban societies became angry enough to go out on the streets to not only make demands and condemn actions but to bitterly swear at the people they held responsible?

The affective politics of antagonism witnessed at my fieldsites result from collective moral emotional attention and political tactics that triggered it by scaffolding on moral sentiments and stirring emotional and heuristic reasoning. Warsaw youth at Gawiecki are affectively attuned to pick out features of the environment that upset the sentiment they hold for personal choice. PIS voters, on the other hand, prioritise traditional Catholic values in their moral attentional compass. The protests in Bolivia bolstered a very specific moral sentiment towards the defence of democracy understood in terms of the right to choose the people in governance – a sentiment that Evo Morales stirred up. Hence the anger against him.

The political parties in state power in Poland and Bolivia during the time of my fieldwork, PIS and MAS, strongly relied on an antagonistic populism as a key political strategy, seeking to unite their supporters against a common enemy. PIS and its civic stage had several enemy figures that rose to the social attentionscape.⁷⁸ During my fieldwork, PIS's hostility towards LGBTQ people, legitimised in the name of the defence of the traditional family, stood out most prominently; at least to me and my interlocutor youth. Correspondingly, MAS created common 'people's' enemies

⁷⁷ For a list of popular 2020 protest slogans in Poland see <https://szpilkiwplecaku.pl/hasla-z-protestow-kobiet/> (accessed 21/11/2023).

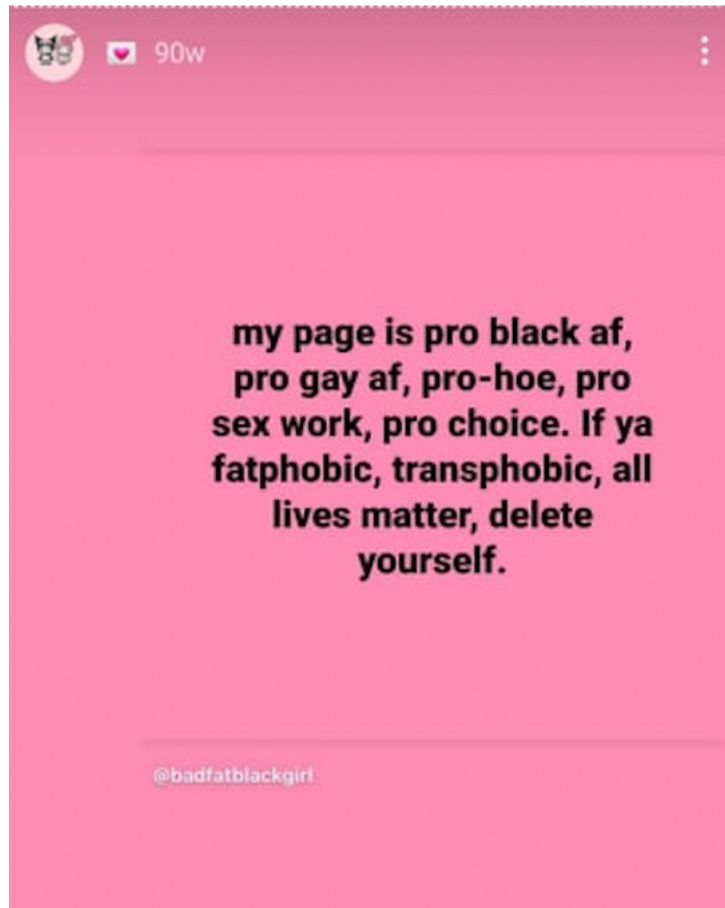
⁷⁸ Other enemy figures PIS mobilised sentiments against include the EU, migrants, and the political Left.

of foreign powers and *mestizo* elites. Nevertheless, the distinction between friend and foe is not as clear-cut as in the case of PIS. MAS formed significant alliances with ideologically favourable *mestizos* and power nations. Evo Morales strategically chose Alvaro Garcia Linera – a Marxist scholar of European descent – as his vice-president and encouraged financial dealings with China.⁷⁹ It is also worth noting that a significant part of the workers’ and Indigenous sectors became disillusioned with Evo Morales and joined the protests against him.⁸⁰ Still, class and racial divisions played an important role in the awakening of antagonistic political sensibilities. In the remaining part of this section, I will elaborate on the moral sentiments shared by the protestors against the government and the actions that led to their awakening. The opposition at both fieldsites shared concern over the government’s disregard for democracy, but the Polish protests encapsulated a broader range of human rights issues, which resonated more with the high school population.

My Polish interlocutors are affectively attached to the modern European liberal ideal (see Ch.2), which posits personal choice as a moral right. They commonly interpreted the government’s anti-abortion bill as a negation of the personal right to decide and thus considered it morally ‘wrong’. It did not matter what one’s personal stance on abortion was; there was a social consensus that such decisions were personal. For example, Aneta, a seventeen-year-old from the Spanish bilingual class, told me she “would not abort” but she “does not want this choice to be taken away from another” and “does not want the government to decide about her uterus.” Many of the girls I have met and interviewed also considered themselves incapable of having an abortion. Still, all advocated for its legality. The few boys I have discussed the matter with were equally agreeable. For Dawid, a 17-year-old from the Spanish bilingual class at Gawiecki, “it should depend on the woman, not the government, because it is the woman’s choice”. Choice is part of the broader modern moral liberal ideal, which allows for a large scope of issues that can attract moral attention. Diana’s, bilingual Spanish student’s, status on Instagram delineated this well (see im.1.1). It champions diversity and tolerance yet disapproves of opinions considered “phobic”.

⁷⁹ Under the MAS government, China became Bolivia’s principal creditor and Chinese companies are responsible for most of the large scale construction projects in the country (see e.g. Achtenberg 2017).

⁸⁰ For example, the coca growers of the Yungas and part of the miner sector. See France 24 2019; <https://www.france24.com/es/20191018-indigenas-bolivia-elecciones-evo-morales> (accessed 22/10/2023) and Urgente 2019 <https://urgente.bo/noticia/la-cob-dice-que-no-sera-cómplice-y-le-pide-evo-que-considere-la-renuncia> (accessed 22/10/2023).



Im. 3.1. Diana's (Liceum Gawiecki student) Instagram status. Re-posted from the page of an Afro-American podcaster from Chicago.

Shoshan suggests that anthropologists should look beyond affective politics in Europe and consider the politics of affect of Europe (in Bangstad et al 2019). This means scrutinising “the notion of Europe itself and the orchestration of affective attachments of various sorts to its imaginary space” (ibid: 101). To my Polish interlocutors, the loss of choice signalled a threat to the liberal multicultural European ideal they were affectively attached to. A socially conservative government like PIS threatened this ideal and shattered their hopes and expectations of future life in the country.

Sentiments are an integral part of moral reasoning. The connection between morality and emotion is clear when we follow Solomon in considering emotions as judgements that are “inseparable from the overall network of our motives, beliefs, and intentions” (2003 [1973]: 13). Jason Throop's (2012; 2014) phenomenology-inspired ethnographic work on moral sentiments, echoes one of the postulates of this thesis that considers embodiment and experience as inherent elements within attentional practice. In Husserlian phenomenology, which Throop draws upon, attention makes the shifting reality “coalesce for moments into discernible objects” (2012: 157),

which I understand to be both material and conceptual. Conceptual ideas can be axiological, i.e. based on concepts of good and evil (Jarymowicz & Imbir 2015: 184). In the case of my Polish interlocutors, ‘the right to decide’ was such a discernible axiological object and attracted moral attention. This included the right to decide about one’s body and sexuality, which the government visibly upset.

Emotions and affect are detrimental if moral standards are to hold sufficient regulatory power over the individual – a factor Jarymowicz and Imbir call “axiological emotionality” (2015: 186). Polish students saw the moral importance of personal choice as obvious and were affectively attached to it. It is thus not surprising that the only explanation seventeen-year-old Gosia found for the government’s actions was also emotional: “PIS must hate women enough to wish to make their lives unbearable ...I just cannot explain it in any other way than hatred towards another human being.” As judgements, emotions are rash – “something I do but in haste” (Solomon 1973: 11). They are notably heuristic. Like any judgement, emotions are contingent on experience and subject to change, diffusion, or dissolution at both the individual and social level.

Everyday sociality, the importance of which is a recurring theme in this thesis, influences the appeal of certain moral emotional judgements and alternative interpretations. In psychological parlance, sociality influences the amount and strength of mental standards against which we judge representations in cognitive appraisal and whether they elicit an emotional response (see Imbir 2016: 42). Durkheim reminds us that for man “the feeling society has for him uplifts the feeling he has for himself” (1995: 213). He requires “moral harmony with his neighbour” (ibid) that produces “a perpetual uplift of our moral being” (ibid). Thus, the moral features we pick up and emotionally respond to within our environment are related to the characteristics of our social circles.

Teenagers at my Polish fieldsite grew up in the highly liberal environment of urban Warsaw or in liberal families in the surrounding towns. I met Gosia during the non-compulsory religion lessons, and, like many students at Gawiecki, including the above mentioned Aneta, she is a progressive young Catholic. She was equally bothered by the government’s negative stance towards LGBTQ – “When they say it is a sickness... I just don’t get it... it makes me feel sad because...shit...everybody is different, and this is amazing...everybody has the right to love who they want.” Gosia’s experience with her LGBTQ friends brought forth the positive valence association she held about them, which became particularly emotionally charged when contrasted

with the way they were treated by some conservative portions of the population. “I just adooooore gay and lesbian people! I have many friends who are gay or lesbian and they emanate such great energy...you just cannot not like them” Gosia told me. It made Gosia sad and confused that there were people who not only disliked them but showed open hostility towards LGBTQ.

According to Herm-Morris (2021), we are currently living in an inherently antagonistic digital ‘Dislike society’. Within the ‘Dislike Society’, media filter bubbles deliver similar content within social networks and “content from outside the bubble is met with hostility because it is at odds with the prescribed relationships already in place” (ibid: 4). Much of the anger and hostility directed at PIS by the urban population during protests, and vice versa, the animosity towards LGBTQ coming from PIS politicians and civic society comes from a mutual lack of understanding resulting from diverse life experiences. While such antagonistic animosity was also visible in Bolivia, I will later show how teenagers at Colegio Alalay understood both sides of the political conflict, likely because of a broader range of experience guiding their moral emotional attention.

The LGBTQ prejudice of the state in Poland was a counter-reaction to the increase in queer visibility and activism in liberal circles. Open discrimination intensified in 2019 in an attempt to set the population against Civic Platform’s presidential candidate and Warsaw’s mayor, Rafal Trzaskowski. Trzaskowski publicly campaigned for the rights of LGBTQ communities and signed a declaration, popularly referred to as Karta LGBT+ (Pl. LGBT+ Card), which set in motion anti-discriminatory and other support measures in the capital. Those included the introduction of sexual education standards that would include awareness-building of sexual diversity and orientation in primary schools. Sexual education served as the main backdrop for accusations from PIS politicians made against LGBTQ communities considering them a “rainbow plague”⁸¹ wishing to spark an “ideological revolution”⁸² and “sexualise children”.⁸³

Vans sponsored by a conservative NGO with banners linking the LGBTQ movement and sexual education at schools to paedophilia started driving across Polish cities, including Warsaw, aiming

⁸¹ A term coined by the archbishop of Cracow and echoed by PIS members on twitter <https://tvn24.pl/polska/arcybiskup-marek-jedraszewski-teczowa-zaraza-zamiast-czerwonej-ra957818-2308295> (accessed 25/08/2023).

⁸² Jacek Sasin during an electoral debate on national television. See <https://www.frona.pl/a/jacek-sasin-trwa-ofensywa-srodowisk-lgbt-chca-przebudowac-model-rodziny-w-polsce,134008.html> (accessed 19/07/2023).

⁸³ Beata Szydlo, the vice-president of the PIS party and former Prime Minister at a 2019 press conference. See <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1413235,szydlo-pyta-politykow-ke-czy-bedzie-proba-wprowadzania-programow-dot-gender-lgbt.html> (accessed 19/07/2023).

to spread concern amongst the more conservative and dubious population sections. In the early months of 2019, a number of voivodeships and municipalities adapted anti-LGBTQ resolutions, some even controversially declaring themselves “LGBT free zones”.⁸⁴ Yermakova (2021) argues that in presenting the LGBTQ movement as a threat, PIS could position themselves as a messiah that can shield the Church and traditional family values from unwelcome intruders and mobilise conservative voters. Trying to appeal to the moral sentiment of tradition, they caused indignation among the liberal circles, where the actions of PIS and their civic support attracted attention as clear immoral highlights.

The LGBTQ prejudice from the state caused disbelief and anger amongst my teen interlocutors.⁸⁵ Aneta was clear about her disagreement with the PIS stance on LGBTQ: “Sexual orientation does not change a human, love is love, it doesn’t change a human...Saint Jesus *ja nie moge* (Pl. Holy moley!/lit. I just can’t!).” In her choice of words, “it does not change a human”, Aneta hinted at the public stir that happened when in 2020 a member of parliament was excused off a TV programme after stating that LGBTQ people are ‘not people but an ideology.’ Poland’s president Andrzej Duda further dehumanised LGBTQ people at a 2020 election presidential rally by declaring, in allusion to the event, that “they are trying to trick us into believing they are people, but it is just an ideology.”⁸⁶ Their words resulted in the indignation of progressive urban circles. Variations of the reverse slogan “LGBTQ are people, not an ideology” became popular during the 2020 conflicts and a reference point for urban criticism of the government’s attitude to LGBTQ persons.⁸⁷ My interlocutors’ liberal sentiments led them to discern wrongdoing against the right to difference and choice and direct their moral emotional attention towards them. The abortion ban became a trigger to voice discontent over other spheres of governmental action, such as the discussed above case of LGBTQ, media autonomy, the education sector, or environmental policy.

The Bolivian protests also evolved around the ‘right to choose’ but more narrowly encapsulated in the democratic ideal of voting for those in governance. In 2016, Morales called for a referendum

⁸⁴ The existence and criticism of LGBT free zones has been extensively covered by international press including the BBC (Ash 2020) and CNN (Picheta & Kottasova 2020)

⁸⁵ Since most of my research in Warsaw took place during the covid pandemic under school lock down and politics talk was absent during lessons at the school my data about political sentiments comes mostly from online interviews.

⁸⁶ <https://www.rp.pl/wydarzenia/art8909311-andrzej-duda-o-lgbt-probuja-wmowic-ze-to-ludzie-to-ideologia> (accessed 25/08/2023).

⁸⁷ In 2021 a book titled “Ludzie, nie ideologia” (Pl. “People, not ideology”) was published presenting interviews with people from the LGBTQ community and their close allies (ed. Żurawiecki 2021).

aiming to decide whether his government could modify the constitution to allow for his indefinite re-election. Morales's party disregarded the marginal rejection ('No' winning with 51.3 %) and motioned to the Supreme Constitutional Court to abolish presidential term limits. The Court approved this motion on the grounds of Bolivia's ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights. The Court interpreted the convention's assertion of the freedom to run for office in favour of Morales, invalidating the referendum's results and allowing Morales to run for what would have been his fourth term.

During the city *paro* in November 2019, I walked around the streets of Cochabamba, conducting flash interviews with people blocking the roads. I also interviewed members of the opposition-backed paramilitary organisation Resistencia Juvenil Cochala (Sp. Cochabamba's Juvenile Resistance) formed amid increasing confrontation. Members of the opposition frequently began explaining their motives for protesting with the referendum. Estremadoiro Rioja described the referendum as "*la gota que rebalsó el vaso*" (2018: 54) (Sp. the straw that broke the camel's back /lit. the drop that spilled the glass). In the initial post-referendum mobilisations, the defence of democratic institutions was a much more efficient interpellator of multiple social sectors than the conservative, at times racist, undertones of parts of the opposition (Komadina-Rimassa 2018). Nearly all the accounts of the opposition I came across in my interviews considered respect for democracy and their vote as the main reason for protest.⁸⁸ To them, Morales was nothing more than a dictator, who needed to be condemned. A few blockage points even went as far as hanging Morales dummy dolls by the neck on nearby trees.

In anticipation of the troubles to come, Sven Harten noted that "the idea of an individual embodying an entire people is, of course, deeply problematic for democracy because it may signify that only the presidency of Evo Morales can ensure that the people are able to exercise their sovereignty" (2011: 173). By ignoring the referendum "the people's president" showed that he is capable of not listening to his people in order to stay in office, making him look untrustworthy. My teenage interlocutors were also disappointed with Evo Morales and condemned his actions, and I will elaborate on their opinions and feelings about him ahead (see 3.4). Evo's tinkering with democracy caused negative affect against him to accumulate, bringing him unfavourable attention. His action made him and his party look immoral, raising the suspicion of fraud when the electoral count was suddenly suspended on October 20th, 2019, the night after the presidential election.

⁸⁸ One significant exception were the drivers of the local Zona Sur bus 27, who saw Evo's departure as inevitable and wished to speed it up in order to return to work.

Suspensions quickly turned into a classical Durkheimian case of intense ‘collective effervescence’ of shared emotion and purpose. It ceased to be important whether electoral fraud happened or not. The affective momentum against Morales reached a point of no return, and people would not be satisfied until he left office. *Cabildos* were crucial in upholding this moment and stirring collective action. The act of an assembly generates “a sort of electricity” that brings people “to an extraordinary height of exaltation” (Harten 2011: 218). In the words of Durkheim, “the midst of an assembly that becomes worked up, we become capable of feelings and conduct of which we are incapable when left to our individual resources” (1995: 212-13). Collective affect similarly explains the sudden exaltation of the diversity and quantity of public discontent and demands of Warsaw’s residents in 2020.

The 2019 and 2020 political crises at my fieldsites saw an affective contagion that escapes easy encapsulation as one sort of feeling or another stepping into the terrain currently dominated by affect theory. Nevertheless, one cannot help but spot the resemblance between Durkheim’s theorisation of emotion and the pre-individual currents of force characteristic of affect theory. The sociologist Ashley Barnwell made a similar observation and notes how re-engaging with Durkheim can help us think about “affects as social and systematic” or “forces that can coagulate and defer our attention as often as they liberate and resist (2018: 22). I will now turn to the way affect at my fieldsites spilled away from the initial cause of turmoil onto people associated with it, sparking historically accumulated affect and leading to behaviours easily interpretable as racist and classist.

3.3. Historically Accumulated Affect and Affective Spillage

Moral emotional attention is highly susceptible to the influence of historically accumulated affect. Still, changes in experiential logic lead to “moral breakdowns” (Zigon 2007: 137) and generational gaps in moral emotional perception. In this section, I will demonstrate how historically accumulated affect forms the basis of much of the appeal of PIS and MAS to voter populations. I will also discuss instances of ‘affective spillage’ in which moral emotional highlights crystallise amid displacements of affect, prompting discrimination and adding fuel to antagonism in politics. Bolivian youth in Cochabamba’s Zona Sur got caught up in political antagonism, reacting against the racism directed at the Indigenous and rural populations the adolescents or/and their families originate from. Young urbanites in Warsaw were at the centre of criticism as the living proof of PIS’s vision of social degeneration caused by growing secularisation and liberal culture but themselves perpetuated the stereotypical urban perspective of PIS voters as naïve and ignorant.

The cultivation of societal fears of moral degradation and child sexualisation by PIS politicians was an affective cherry placed on top of a historical accumulation of resentment. In Poland, disillusionment in the myth of the West prevalent during immediate post-communist enthusiasm (see Ch.1) developed the need for new politics that would fill the emotional void left by its collapse. Economic transformation and company privatisation did not bring the empowerment and social justice Polish workers had fought for, causing resentment towards the new economic elites (Kalb 2009). This is the sentimental history behind much of the PIS electorate, who felt abandoned by the intelligentsia they previously collaborated with against the communist state and exploited by foreign companies. Insights from Don Kalb's research exemplify how resentment from the past can stir antagonistic feelings. When in 2004 and 2005 the city authorities prohibited the Warsaw Pride Parade and the EU was putting pressure on its allowance, one of his interlocutor's, Zazdrozny, commented that "nobody in Brussels says a word if Polish workers starve on low wages, have to work like dogs, and get exploited" (ibid: 216).

The interlocutor Zazdrozny's opposition to the parade, Kalb elaborates, rests on its association with liberal frivolity as defended in the name of equality by the same people who neglected the social equality and rights of workers at the time of economic and political transformation. Kalb writes that the Kaczyński brothers, who founded the PIS party have, "finally lifted the anger and concerns of Zazdrozny's class and generation out of local communities and on the level of the nation-state" (2009: 216). Zazdrozny's previous experiences led him to pay attention to and care about aspects of the parade that were not on my interlocutors' radar. For our purposes, Kalb's research helps highlight how the attentional practice of like-minded citizens is historically embedded and emotionally guided. PIS politicians and their electorate routinely blame political progressiveness, changing family values, and the decreasing appeal of the Church for heightened instances of youth aggression, depression, and suicide.⁸⁹ Attributions of blame for social and youth degradation are part of the double-sided landscape of affective political antagonism in which the PIS electorate is also stereotypically incriminated. Kalb's interlocutors not only felt betrayed but also humiliated and offended at their portrayal by the media and intelligentsia as "dysfunctional for the new civil Poland" because of "alcoholism and laziness" (ibid: 213).

⁸⁹ See e.g <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8687052,czarnek-proby-samobojcze-i-agresja-wsrod-dzieci-i-mlodziezy-nawarstwiaja-sie-od-lat.html> (accessed 21/11/2023).

Similar portrayals continue till the present day, politicised with a critique of the working class sectors' linkages to PIS and equipped with the power of free commentary characteristic of the modern internet. One such line of attack is the social subsidies programme "500+" introduced by PIS, which provides parents with 500 zł (around £100) monthly per child. Article headlines such as "We do not want to work because 500+ is enough? The data is terrifying"⁹⁰ or "My neighbour got over 4000zł from benefits. Work is bad for her"⁹¹ appeared in the online press. Commentators on social media and underneath online articles were also quick to make adverse judgments about the families relying on benefits. They were most frequently accused of laziness and being freeloaders who got money for sitting around and doing nothing. Some critiques went as far as to consider families on benefits a breeding ground for pathology.⁹² Similar public accusations are, nevertheless, a toxic myth unbacked by actual data (Szymczak 2022). In one popular press article, a social psychologist was invited to explain the hatred behind 500+. He deemed that 500+ is never the sole object of hate but can create negative feelings in conjunction with other phenomena (Baryła in Smuczerowicz & Stolarska 2017). 500+ became associated with PIS and the pro-birth stance of the party even if the subsidies benefit families across the whole political spectrum (see e.g. Pawłowski 2019).

Angry at PIS and bewildered by their political stances Gosia told me she could not understand people who vote for them, despite attempts: "I accept other people's points of view; I will listen to what they have to say (...) try to put myself in their shoes and understand...but shit...they just threw themselves at PIS because they are giving out this 500+...such *ciemnota* (Pl. ignorance (informal)/ lit.darkness)." Gosia's attention was juggling her desire to understand the 'other', anger at PIS voters, and stereotypical contempt. Gosia was self-reflecting on her tolerance but could not find anything about PIS voters she could relate to. A lack of understanding of a morally unsettling issue can lead to anger. An affective internal stimulus interrupted her introspection. The 'but shit...' signalled an emotionally channelled change of thought to the stereotypical association of PIS voters with naivety. According to Herm-Morris's analysis of the 'The Dislike Society' (see 3.2) such emotionally rushed antagonism "is an assertion of free will" (2021: 6) because when people's

⁹⁰ <https://gazetaolsztynska.pl/497556,Nie-chce-nam-sie-pracowac-bo-500-plus-wystarcza-Dane-sa-przerazajace.html> (accessed 21/11/2023).

⁹¹ <https://www.edziecko.pl/rodzice/7,79361,28442584,sasiadka-wyciagala-ze-swiadczen-ponad-4-tysiace-zlotych-praca.html> (accessed 21/11/23).

⁹² Summary of comments based on comments under facebook posts about 500+ and online articles, including the ones cited in the text.

lives are manipulated by “algorithmic governmentality (...) the only thing that truly belongs to them is their hate” (ibid).

Herm-Morris bases his assertions on a philosophical analysis of new technologies and their effects on attention and knowledge, as put forward in the works of Bernard Stiegler and Gerald Moore. Moore (2019) sees the roots of “emotional automation” (Berardi 2015: 89) in “technological automation” (Moore ibid: 120) and the “dislocated ecology of contemporary consumption (ibid). Such automation arguably leads to rushed conclusions, emotional responses, and the degradation of reason. Stiegler (2019), let us recall, considers reason to be an attentional form threatened by new media technologies. In contrast, I wish to underscore that heuristic reasoning and emotionality are part of our everyday cognitive processes. I do not wish to undermine the addictive potentiality of social media and the “attentional narrowing” (Moore 2019: 123) of dopamine feedback loops (see Ch.4). Nevertheless, I do not find moral “attentional narrowing” in the sphere of politics to be directly related to a lack of critical exchange and engagement in an algorithmic subordination. It is too simplistic to blame digital capitalism for the rise of political antagonism and animosity. Rather, we should always consider the historical particularities and experiences behind the starker divergences in moral attention highlights.

Divergences in stimuli favouring moral emotional attention can lead to an affective ‘inattentional blindness’⁹³ in which we fail to perceive the moral reasoning of another, causing misunderstanding and antipathy. The 2020 protests in Poland were predominantly a result of a “generational conflict” in which “those born after 1989 are a new generation of European Poles (...) oriented towards individualism (...) with a higher sense of freedom” (Kik in Opas 2020). Social divergences in moral highlights result from more than the sense of social injustice of the Polish working class. They are deeply entangled with contradictory visions of Polishness and Europe detailed in Chapter 1. Polish citizens born before the 1980s are more likely to hold affective attachments to the Church for its integrative function under Soviet influence and previous occupations. In times of political freedom, conservative moral values became the last defence bastion of a Polish identity “constructed around the dichotomy ‘us’ vs ‘them’” (Mach 2007: 56). According to this “symbolic model of the world” (ibid: 55) authentic Europe is a “moral entity” (ibid: 69) grounded in Christian values and civilization. Conservative Catholic Poland is thus “more European than other countries, where decadent people have forgotten the Christian essence of their heritage” (ibid: 69). The EU

⁹³ The phenomenon of inattentional blindness has been chiefly studied in the field of perception. The most famous experiment on the topic is the ‘gorilla’ study (Simons & Chabris 1999)

threatens the moral integrity of the Poles by “allegedly propagating euthanasia, abortion, drugs, and sexual perversions” (ibid: 70). The liberal vision of Europe and Poland posits it in the tradition of democracy and human rights, in which “the right to choose is the most central” (ibid). Such contrasting visions of Europe and Poland require different moral emotional highlights, which divide Poland into two moral camps.

Those moral camps have an age dimension that is particularly visible in urban areas, where most youth adhere to the liberal vision of Europe. Aneta lives with her grandparents, who are avid PIS supporters. During our interview, when I asked her whether she took part in the protests, she sighted and leaned forward, letting her straight, dark blond shoulder-length hair fall on her face. She recounted how, on the day of the main Woman’s Strike protest, she had to wait till sunset and sneak out the back door and through the garden dressed all in black. In her hands, she was holding a protest poster that said: “My grandparents did not fight for this kind of Poland”. “Oh the irony”, Aneta commented about the poster sign. She believed that if she were to be spotted going to a protest or her grandparents would otherwise learn of her opposition to PIS, they would “throw her out immediately”. The thought of being “thrown out” by her grandparents concerned her. When disclosing it to me, she hit her chest with a fist and took a deep breath before moving forward with her narration. “Recently, my grandmother said that this is a protest in favour of paedophilia and when I heard this...”, Aneta made a dramatic gesture of swinging her head behind and opening the fist she held on her chest before continuing, “it choked me up...I thought I would fall”.

Her grandmother’s comment was an allusion to earlier ‘Woman’s strike’ backed protests against a 2019 Citizen Bill, misleading titled ‘Stop Paedophilia’, which proposed imprisonment for “promoting” or “praising” underage sexual activity. The project was justified with fears over the “sexualisation” of children (see 3.2) and considered an open attack on sexual education at school by the liberal population strata.⁹⁴ Aneta’s grandparents did not understand the exact nature of necessity for sexual education in schools, hence their acceptance of its heuristic linkage with paedophilia. Aneta’s affective state is not one of anger but heartache and agony at the lack of understanding between herself and her grandparents. Aneta’s feelings for her grandparents can be contrasted with the ire and contempt my adolescent interlocutors felt towards anonymised PIS

⁹⁴ The vague wording of the proposed bill left it to interpretation what “promotion” or “praise” could consist of but its justification statement openly criticised standards on sexual education devised by the World Health Organisation Europe and Germany’s Federal Centre for Health Education as promoting underage sex and homosexuality.

voters. Our feelings, directions of attention, and interpretations of social stimuli hinge on the kind of social relationships at stake. We can think of older generations and the countryside as spilling negative affect that originated in their sense of injustice onto LGBTQ populations, whom they perceive as receiving more care and justice than they ever did – a Freudian displacement of affect. The anti-PIS youth, on the other hand, find it hard to understand the historically accumulated moral affective stance of PIS voters, including the importance of the Church and traditional family values for them. Without the full picture in the scope of their attention, the youth are quick to make negative stereotypical judgments about them.

In Bolivia, affective spillage was most visible in the racist behaviour of the opposition, which tapped directly into the historically accumulated affect of my interlocutors and attracted their moral emotional attention. In semiotic vernacular, there exists an indexical relationship between MAS and highland Indigeneity strong enough to become iconic, i.e. for an association to turn into a natural resemblance. There exists a collective cognitive schema for a typical MAS voter. In many parts of Bolivia, people equated highland Indigenous ethnicity, dress, and language with support for MAS (see e.g. Babel 2018). The process of iconisation is of interest in the context of the 2019 political crisis because it helps to explain why a significant proportion of the opposition resorted to racial slurs and acts of discrimination. The rage against Morales was channelled into everybody and everything associated with him. This was probably best manifested in the spontaneous police act of cutting out and burning the *wiphala* flags from their uniforms during the mutiny. A symbol of Indigenous highland people, the flag was introduced as a national emblem with the establishment of the new constitution and the plurination by the Morales government. The action angered the Indigenous community enough to motivate a response from the civic opposition leader, Luis Camacho, who condemned the impulsive behaviour and called for respect for the flag of the Indigenous people.⁹⁵

The indexical continuance between Morales and Indigeneity triggered the surfacing of racist sentiments and legitimised the circulation of discriminatory and dehumanising messages on social media (see Villarreal 2019). A common denominator between the urban opposition in Bolivia and Poland involved a belittling attitude towards rural or lower-class government-supporting populations. Rural communities in Bolivia were considered naïve and easily manipulated because

⁹⁵ According to Zamarano Villarreal (2019) Camacho's emphasis on the flag as a symbol of 'the Indigenous people' rather than a national emphasis emblem weakens the plurinational project and signals a return to a neoliberal multicultural discourse.

of higher rates of illiteracy. Urbanites accused them of, as one person I interviewed on the street put it, “selling votes for rice” – a view ignorant of alternative bottom-up forms of democracy (see 3.4) and of the value of material help over empty promises.

While the public opposition to racism by key figures of the movement against MAS and Evo allowed the middle classes to dissociate more explicit acts of racism from the movement itself, Indigenous-origin populations, including most residents of Zona Sur in Cochabamba, could not as easily ignore and make peace with acts of discrimination. They have accumulated memories of the battles fought by their ancestors and themselves that permitted an Indigenous presidency in the first place. Students at Alalay were outraged when they heard about discriminatory acts. Videos of the policeman cutting and burning the *wiphala* flags circulated the web and even appeared on Facebook walls of students. Abigail re-shared a screenshot from the videos and comments of indignation and received angry face responses from other students. She also re-shared photos of young members of the opposition insulting and attacking an Indigenous woman *de pollera* (see im. 3.2). The photos suggest the young man was raising his hand against the woman. The photo caption identifies the man as sympathisers of the political party Comunidad Ciudadana, suggesting their racist actions were guided by the party’s leader Carlos Mesa. Acts of racism became associated with the opposition altogether, and the circulation of social media presenting them in such a light reinforced this association. Some of the messages circulating the web included warnings that if Evo leaves, Indigenous people are going to lose all their rights, will be discriminated against, and will be unwelcome in the city. Such messages do not act in a void but speak to fears and sensibilities developed over years of (neo)colonisation and racial divisions, making them alarming and attention-worthy.



Im. 3.2 A post re-posted on Abigail's Facebook wall.

Text: A few minutes ago outside Ex Hotel Radisson. LAMENTABLE THAT YOUTH SYMPHATISERS OF THE PARTY COMUNIDAD CIUDADANA, guided by CARLOS MESA HIT A WOMAN (DE POLLERA). NOTHING, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING JUSTIFIES RAISING A HAND AT A WOMAN. Share so that the population knows those youth who like to hit women with a stick.

This historical accumulation makes affect pre-individual, not pre-social, in the Durkhemian sense. Still, I do not believe an anthropology of affect should escape from “psychological individualism” (cf. Richard & Rudnyckij 2009). Psychological individualism is crucial for the maintenance of social affective accumulation. It lives on in individuals like the racism condemning Abigail from Zona Sur, who become touched by it through lived experience and historical conscience. Zigon phenomenologically describes morality in terms of embodied dispositions of persons, which they acquire while being-in-the-world that is simultaneously “openly shared and deeply personal” (2007: 135). Taking a socio-cognitive stance on ethnographic data involves a recognition that individual neural connections are made according to experiences, which are both deeply personal and social and form schemas subject to confirmation biases, favouring the formation of moral ‘filter bubbles’. Those bubbles are reinforced by social companionship, its accompanying information, and judgments but can burst as individuals engage in meta-attentional reflective processes and bring new perspectives into their social circles.

3.4. “Moral Cognitive Conflict” & Youth Political Disenchantment

This section will consider cognitive conflict regarding political choice with an emphasis on my Bolivian field case, where youth were in the middle of a yet to be resolved generational “moral breakdown” (Zigon *ibid*). Zona Sur Youth have a strong sense of historical justice and morally highlight communal well-being but are increasingly drawn towards personal choice as a moral emotional highlight in politics. However, an overall climate of political disenchantment among my Bolivian interlocutors thwarts the moral emotional significance of individual electoral choice. For my Polish interlocutors, such significance of personal choice was more firmly established but they shared the disenchantment in party politics with Bolivian students, undermining their valorisation of the electoral vote.

Lessons about democracy at Colegio Alalay consider it in its liberal understanding of an individual voter-based statutory electoral system. A few weeks before the election day in October 2019, the pre-promo class discussed democratic and civic values. The teacher asked students whether they consider Bolivia to be a democratic society. Nobody seemed to be certain. Negative answers referred to the lack of respect for the vote and political corruption. One girl remarked that the “people’s vote is not respected. We all know who is going to win the election!” The discussion’s focus quickly turned from democracy to the person of Evo Morales. Omar, the *campesino*-born top student introduced in Chapter 2 said that Evo Morales “has done a lot for this country, brought back our culture, for example coca leaves” and that he “would have supported Evo but he did not respect the public vote.” He later reiterated similar claims during an interview with me. The class discussion on democracy ended with the teacher asserting that, by law, Bolivia is a democratic country. He recognised the validity of the students’ points about Morales and added that “some people agreed with the change of the law, some did not...and this is why we will vote now...and this is why, as the constitution states, we live in a democratic society”. The teacher’s emphasis on the selection of political intermediaries as the crux of democracy is, however, not the only way to envision a democratic society.

Social movements in Bolivia have long exercised an alternative democratic project based on more direct and community-based political participation. This form of political organisation has its roots in dialogical and associational Indigenous ‘*ayllu* politics’ (see Albro 2006). It became the basis for collective mobilisation and action during the 2003 ‘Gas Wars’ that through a combination of strikes, road blockages, and marches forced the resignation of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (Lazar 2006). As an experienced union leader and budding politician, Evo Morales played a

significant role in the 2003 protests over gas sovereignty (Cruz-Rodriguez 2012: 182-185; Risor 2021). His election represented the possibility of scaling up grassroots democracy to a national scale. In fact, the largely middle class 2019 protests used the participatory democracy tactics popularised by working class and Indigenous social movements. The strike and protest action that led to the resignation of Morales mirrored the events from thirteen years before. The protestors' sobriquet '*pilitas*' came from Morales' mockery at the fragility of materials used for blocking roads by the opposition he called *pilitas* (Sp. threads). Morales laughed at protestors, stating that he could give them workshops on civic dissent and protest, so that they learn how to do it right (see e.g. Hurtado Calderón 2019).

The person of Evo Morales was, nevertheless, much more than a symbol of the power of grassroots democracy. Despite his tinkering with liberal democracy, a significant number of students expressed present or former support for Evo Morales in class discussions, interviews, and casual chats. They quoted his commitment to the usually overlapping population categories of the poor, *campesino*, and Indigenous. This commitment and emphasis on brotherhood with the people made him a kin-like figure. Much of the student population who grew up under his presidency were affectively attached to him. Recall Abigail's words I cited at the beginning of this chapter – "*Tata* (Q.father) Evo left". This calls to mind similar metaphorical kinship connections between political leaders and citizens elsewhere (Borneman 2004; Delaney 1995; Steinmüller 2018).

Unlike political "orders of the father" based on hierarchical parent-child relations (e.g Borneman 2004), Evo's politics were based on a socialist ideal of comradeship and brotherhood with the people. This metaphorical equivalence made him subject, at least in the abstract, to similar forms of scrutiny as other members of the community. The students were emotionally attached to Evo, the Indigenous leader of humble origins, but recognised his political mistakes, which created a sort of moral attentional conflict that led them to refrain from taking sides during the political unrest. Negative feelings can mobilise individuals and communities to undertake political action and incite social transformation (Ngai 2005). Students lacked the anger and hatred towards Evo visible during the opposition's protests. Their moral attention towards Evo's democratic wrongdoing lacked the emotional strength that could lead the students to eschew their positive sentiments towards his persona and turn against him. Neither did they develop strong negative feelings towards the opposition, understanding the reasons behind their dissent. In the abstract, Morales's presidency troubled the liberal ideal of democracy the students in theory supported. In practice, they recognised the system as faulty, and its defence meant little to themselves or their communities.

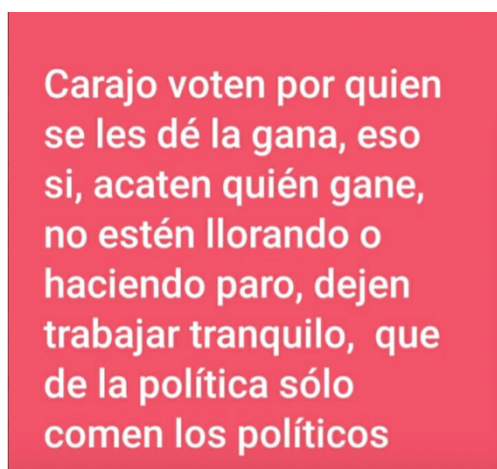
This strikes a contrast with the Polish youth, who were angry at the government and felt they held visible stakes in protesting the abortion bill, which represented their freedom of choice.

According to Roberto Laserna (2018), Bolivian middle classes show a predilection for community will over individual choice. My Bolivian interlocutors certainly gave weight to community will and its collective execution as was evidenced in the school's pedagogic orientation of belonging, discussed in Chapter 2. They did, nevertheless, criticise the obligations of their relatives in the countryside who were pressured to attend political marches, which the students considered as "unjust" and a form of "political exploitation". One student even travelled to march in a pro-Evo gathering in place of his grandfather to prevent him from fatiguing himself or receiving a fine. This signals a shift away from equating community alliances and needs with party politics.

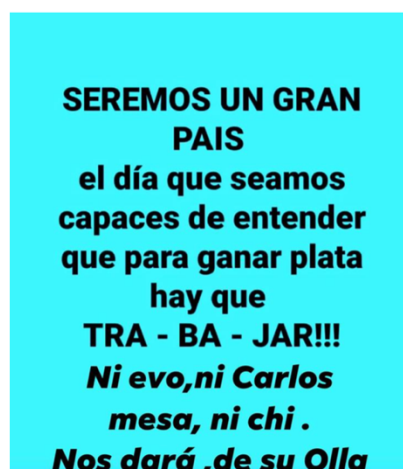
Mobilising to demand respect for the electoral vote or the return of Evo Morales as president was not only not worth the students' time and effort but also attracted attention as morally wrong for disrupting everyday life. Jorge, one of my key interlocutors from the 2020 promo class, went to tear down a pro-Evo defence blockade point with friends from another school. He was a sociable 19-year-old troublemaker, who changed schools many times and always wore a hat and a pull over jumper to class in defiance of uniform rules. He was, however, also very hard working. As the eldest in a multi-child family of *campesino* migrants, he contributed to family chores and finances. Jorge was an active member of his neighbourhood community and often attended the *junta vecinal* (Sp. neighbourhood association) meetings on behalf of his parents. He complained that he and his neighbours could not get to work and thus believed that "blockades must end". Like most students of Indigenous descent, he believed that Evo had "done many good things" but "was not a saint" and "crossed the line" by ignoring the referendum and adhering himself to power. Hence, even though he despised the racism of the transitory government and believed they "removed [Evo] because they did not want an Indigenous president", he did not advocate for his return.

The morally conflicted Abigail equally did not take part in any of the explicitly pro or anti-Evo protests, yet she accompanied her mother to an anti-blockage *cabildo* in defence of the right to work. Most students had a similar agnostic stance to protests focused on the city blockage's work impasse, as was further evidenced by the Facebook statuses they posted around the time of the protests (im.3.3; im.3.4). In a culture where protest, blockages and publicly voicing political

demands are firmly ingrained, the students' opposition to the blockages during the 2019 political conflict must be considered within a broader milieu of political disenchantment.



Im. 3.3. A original post on Ines's (Colegio Alalay student) page.
Text: Fuck, vote for whoever you feel like, that yes, accept who wins, don't cry or strike, leave people work in peace because only politicians feed on politics.



Im 3.4. A post re-posted on Abigail Facebook profile.
Text: WE WILL BE A GREAT COUNTRY the day we are able to understand that to gain money you have to WORK!!!. Neither Evo nor Carlos Mesa or Chi (candidates in the 2020 election) will give us from their Pot.

Adolescents are disenchanted with official politics and do not trust politicians. This rang true in both my fieldsites. 88% of Bolivian young people surveyed by UNICEF in 2020 did not feel represented by any political party.⁹⁶ According to a survey I had carried out in two classes at Colegio Alalay, a null or blank vote response to voting preference represented about half of the responses. The other half of the answers, with very few exceptions, were supportive of MAS. Further conversations with students revealed that they were nevertheless only mildly supportive of the party, believing there was no better alternative. The rest had little idea who they should vote for. When I brought up the matter during informal chats with students, I usually received a variation of the explanation that Emilia gave me – “They are all the same. All corrupt. With money they all become corrupt.”

Disenchantment in state politics sheds light on the lack of moral emotional attention of Zona Sur youth towards Morales's misdeeds in the defence of democracy. For the students, Morales did not cause democracy's ill-health. Bolivian politics was corrupt by nature. Evo was not an exception,

⁹⁶ According to a sample of 459 respondents in the country and 54 in Cochabamba. See <https://bolivia.ureport.in/opinion/1921/> (accessed 23/11/2023).

but a case in point. Ousting him would do little to heal the system. Rather than a lack of desire for democracy, the students exhibited a lack of belief in its immediate possibility and disenchantment in official state politics. While explaining why she would not vote for anyone, one 17-year-old, who was one of the most articulate and intellectually curious girls in her class, simply stated that the elections do not affect her. For her, and the others, it did not matter who was in power. After the election day, politicians will always act for their own sake.

Youth in my Polish fieldsite expressed similar disenchantment with party politics. According to a survey I conducted at Liceum Gawiecki with 129 respondents, 50% of students were not able to point to a political party they support, 20% declared support for Lewica Razem (the parliamentary left-wing representation), 16.5% supported the Civic Coalition and only 5% (6 responses) stated a preference for PIS. Akin to the students in Bolivia, my Polish interlocutors referred to inadequate representation and inertia of the politicians as the reasons behind their lack of party endorsement. The only significant difference was that Polish students did not consider most politicians as corrupt, only impotent and self- or party serving. In the flash interviews I carried out during the Woman's Strike and Pro-Environment marches, both underage and older youth considered protest a more efficient form of political action than voting. To cite one recently enrolled university student – "voicing our demands on the streets is the best way to pressure politicians into doing something."

Disenchantment in party politics is not only characteristic of my fieldsites but is widespread enough to speak of a global post-democratic turn (see Bluhdorn 2013; Crouch 2016; Zembylas 2022). Younger populations in democratic societies across the world are particularly likely to sense that official state politics does not address their concerns (Marsh et al. 2017; Venegas Muggli 2016; Pontes et al. 2019). The effects of political disenchantment more greatly influenced Bolivian protest participation because of the opposition's almost singular focus on the undemocratic tendencies of Evo Morales and the need for governmental change, an objective the students felt they held little stakes or interest in.

3.5. Political (Mis)information

The last factor that influenced moral emotional attention I wish to underscore in this chapter is the character of circulating information amongst youth in my fieldsites because of the way it highlighted or embellished moral sentiments. Social media were not only a central factor in the channelling of moral emotional attention but also in its diffusion. Among Zona Sur youth

(mis)information decreased the overall certainty of the truthfulness of circulating stimuli. Mair calls for an ethnographic engagement with the cultural specifics of the post-truth era, including the “techniques for selectively applying or withdrawing attention” (2017: 3). Teenagers at Alalay were not immune to the influence of fake news. A few days before Abigail posted the photo in image 3.2, she re-posted a fabricated racist campaign poster from Carlos Mesa’s political party Comunidad Ciudadana (im. 3.5), which came from a fraudulent page created to disrepute the opposition. Ex-president Morales himself, consciously or not, posted a video filmed in Mexico six years before that allegedly showed violence against Indigenous people in Bolivia (see Guerrero 2019).



Im. 3.5. A post re-posted on Abigail’s Facebook Wall.

Comment: It is now or never Bolivia!
Never again the Indigenous in power they are a shame for Bolivia.

Image text: He will go by any means necessary, we want you out of the palace

The historically accumulated sensibility to racist stimuli I described above made students like Abigail particularly susceptible to believing in fake or inflated racism on the web. Students were, nevertheless, very aware of the high amounts of fabricated content and misinformation circulating on the internet and thus cautious about what they believed in. Digital channels permit an ease of publication and distribution, leading to ‘information overload’ and the emergence of cognitive concerns and strategies of dealing with them (see Andrejevic 2013; Mair 2017; Veel 2011). Amid the plethora of information, teenagers know they are likely to encounter contradictory news. They developed a form of “anticipatory schema” (Neisser 1978: 93) that predicts the existence of inflated and fabricated information.

I wish to illustrate how students interpret such conflictive media materials and the way it can saturate political debate in the classroom with a discussion that took place during a social sciences lesson the class had with Profe Eugenia, which took place soon after Evo's resignation. Eloisa, one of the few native Quechua speakers and a soon-to-be young mother, with whom the teacher frequently quarrelled, asked "Why is the police hitting *campesinos*?" Profe Eugenia brushed her question off, saying that "The police are hitting everyone!" She added that "all those Argentine media that say bad things [about the new transitory government] are bought. Evo sent them 400 million...or was it 100? But *mi-lío-nes* (she accentuated each syllable) of *bolivianos* (Bolivian currency)". Another student remarked that he had heard that "there was *gringo*⁹⁷ police in the Chapare". The teacher replied that "those in the Chapare now are FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia), Cubans, and Venezuela to take control of the drugs. No police can enter Chapare now".

Profe Eugenia proceeded in her efforts to dispel student doubts and convince them of her truth. "They shot each other; there is proof" she announced with reference to the citizens shot by the armed forces during the massacre in Sacaba.⁹⁸ Eloisa raised her hand, but the teacher ignored her. Tired of waiting for permission, she spoke up, insisting that "we cannot be sure", but the teacher shut her off, requesting that she listen. When Eloisa finally got her voice across, she seemed upset: "maybe it happened, maybe it did not. *Yo no soy de política* (Sp. I am not into politics/lit. I am not of politics). I am just saying you cannot know. I am only giving my opinion." The teacher's reaction showed that she thought little of Eloise's opinion: "I will never say anything without consulting the source, stay in your ignorance." The students, on the other hand, were mostly sympathetic and agreed with their classmate. "It is not known, it is not known" Emilia backed Eloisa up, shaking her head, "there is fake news all around". The teacher finalised the discussion by announcing that she "will not say anything more" telling students to "stay ignorant" without ever revealing her "good source". Unlike their teacher, who was unwilling to consider information outside her political conviction, the students reflected on the diversity of news and the extent to which they could ever determine their veracity.

⁹⁷ A colloquial term referring to somebody from the United States often extrapolated to label any white skinned foreigner.

⁹⁸ Later investigations by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and a group of designated independent experts declared the police and army forces as guilty of using unnecessary force. For the latter report see https://gieibolivia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/informe_GIEI_BOLIVIA_final.pdf (accessed 23/10/23).

The students' caution should be considered within the context of social diversity they grew up in and the need for an understanding of others required to achieve a Durkhemian “moral harmony” with one's neighbour. Albro accentuates the “historical depth of social hybridity” (1997: 75) of the Cochabamba region, which can be characterised as a space of encounter for populations with roots in other parts of the nation. After the 1952 revolution, Cochabamba exemplified the national ideal of *mestizaje* (ibid: 76, see also Torrez 2012). When it comes to contemporary political patterns in the Cochabamba region, the *cercado* (Sp. urban city) diverged from the rest of the region's electoral districts by voting for the main opposition party in both the 2014 and 2020 elections.⁹⁹ In the predominantly migrant Zona Sur, support for MAS was stronger than in other parts of the city, although not as unanimous as in the countryside.

Ludic overtones defused the potential for political antagonism between students at Alalay. Politics was often part of ‘messaging around’ with somebody. The promo class jokingly nicknamed an openly MAS-supporting boy in the class as “Andronico” in reference to Andrónico Rodríguez Ledezma, a young political leader close to Evo Morales. Some forms of political humour did, nevertheless, take on a darker tone. During a class trip, Luisa spotted a young boy on the street dressed in a blue uniform and announced to the rest of her class on the bus “He is from MAS. I will lynch him!” and burst out laughing. Luisa was the only one who admitted to taking part in the opposition's road blockages. She was well aware that a blue school uniform was not an indication of party alliance, and her comment was not made with a serious intention. Still, open demonstrations of animosity towards MAS may have influenced the actions of the less politically convinced students. They would not want to lose friends or get into conflict with their classmates by espousing firm political statements.

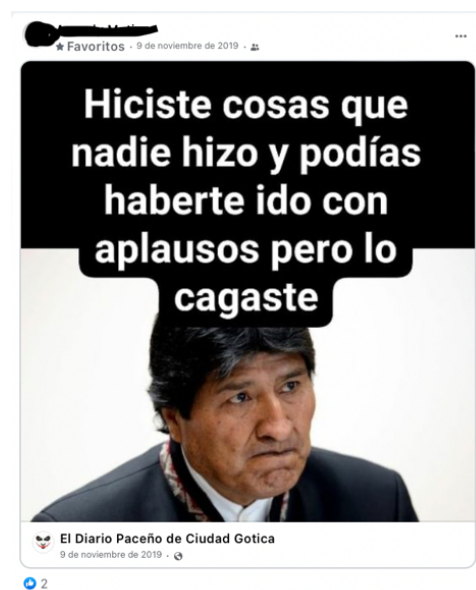
Being a *masista* (an avid MAS supporter) had negative connotations amongst the students. When Luisa laughingly ‘accused’ her classmate Isabel of supporting MAS during a night of school oversight in fear of looting, Isabel sprung forward a wooden bat she brought to the vigil as if in defence and firmly declared, “I am not *masista*”. Despite being a MAS voter, she, like many others, put a firm line between voting for MAS and being a MAS “militant” or party supporter. The post re-shared by Abigail on the day of Evo's departure exemplifies the difference between support for Evo and devotion to his party (im. 3.6). It also makes an interesting contrast with a post she shared

⁹⁹ The 2014 election results by district can be found at <https://es.slideshare.net/weberbol/resultados-completos-elecciones-nacionales-2014-en-bolivia> (accessed 7/09/23).

a day before that accentuated Evo's mistakes rather than merits (im. 3.7), indicating that he could have stepped down with an applause but failed.



Im. 3.6. A Facebook post re-posted on Abigail's wall.
Text: WE ARE NOT *MASISTA* Like it or not the best president of Bolivia is leaving and he showed it by not wishing to spill more blood!!



Im. 3.7. A Facebook post re-posted on Abigail's wall.
Text: You had done things that nobody has and could have gone with applause, but you screwed up.

Sociality also contributed to the caution students exercised when interpreting news from social media. Amid the chaos of Evo's resignation, Abigail once re-shared an audio message to the class WhatsApp warning of '*bordas masistas*' (Sp. MAS supporting hordes) approaching the city from the tropics. Another student replied that he "thought that she did not believe in such things" to which Abigail reacted by deleting the audio. This demonstrates the kind of policing interactions between the students that remind them not to take the information content that circulates in the media at face value. My Polish interlocutors did not seem to process similar amounts of political misinformation and conflicting stimuli as did teenagers in Cochabamba's Zona Sur. One plausible reason for the relative absence of fake political news within teenage social media networks in Warsaw is the strength of political antagonism, which makes such posts strategically superfluous if we assume their goal is to set voter populations against each other. PIS politicians provide enough statements on the radio, television, and official social media channels for the Polish students to rage at without fabrications adding fuel to the fire. Gosia's view that PIS politicians were not fit for their position nor should represent her country was backed by their public statements: "When I hear what they say on TV...I want to *nypierdolić* (Pl. fuck it out) the window! They travel, give interviews abroad, and then they think there that Poles are idiots." Gosia was not the only student negatively affected by PIS politicians' media appearances. For example, students'

negative opinions of the Minister of Education in office in 2020, Przemysław Czarnek, were mostly formed based on reading his posts on Twitter.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained divergences in the moral and emotional objects of teenage political attention. Past experiences and social relationships foster affective attachments, which influence perception and guide attention, pointing to the centrality of emotion in any consideration of the politics of cognition. The 2020 anti-abortion bill in Poland attacked freedom of choice, which was a clear moral emotional highlight for students invested in the liberal European moral ideal. There exists a visible generational gap in experiential knowledge, leading to political antagonism based on discrepancies in the direction of moral emotional attention and stimulus interpretation.

In Bolivia, students considered Evo's prolonged presidential office problematic but did not join efforts to oust him in the name of democracy. The racism amongst sectors of the opposition was offensive enough for students to wish to disassociate themselves from the opposition's efforts. Furthermore, the students held sentimental value towards the person of Evo Morales. They associated him with many virtuous deeds that acted as internal stimuli, which came to their attention as they reflected and made up their minds about him. Students were disenchanted enough with official democratic institutions for me to suggest that they were not enough emotionally vested to give their time and attention to a cause in its defence.

Polish students were equally disenchanted with electoral politics, but the 'Women's Strike' appealed to them since it encompassed a variety of issues that awakened their moral concern. This chapter also briefly showed how information in the media can enhance moral emotional attention but can also be taken with a pinch of salt when interpreted via a schema anticipating fake news. Emotional reactions to politics on social media networks are facilitated by the digital affordances of asynchrony, asymmetry, and decorporalisation in interaction as well as the ready-made nature of the pre-circulating political posts students shared online. I will elaborate on those features in the following chapter, as part of my discussion on the relationship between attentional affordances of social media and digital forms of teenage sociality and relationship building.

Chapter Four: Phatic Attention: Affordances & Digital Sociality on Social Media

“Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex.”

Marshall McLuhan (2001 [1964]: 4),

4.1. Phatic Attention

One Saturday evening, I was scrolling through the notifications on my phone when I noticed that *jadwigakielecka* was livestreaming on Instagram. I entered the stream and heard loud music, chatter, laughter, and enough people flashing by to suggest a party. My mobile screen showed the profile owner, Jadwiga, a student at Gawiecki, and her friend making a salad in the host’s kitchen. The camera was set so that her followers could see Jadwiga’s head and torso profile with bob-styled black hair, cat eyes, and an unpinned loose-fit white shirt overlaid over a black bra. She was mixing ingredients in a bowl. At times, her friend passed her novel ingredients and blocked the view of Jadwiga on the screen with her red, wavy, layered hair. I watched with distaste as oil, beer, and even washing up liquid were added to what looked like a perfectly fine *salatka jarzynowa*.¹⁰⁰ “You fucked up the salad” user *kozak_Owicz*’s comment popped up on the screen. Jadwiga did not seem to mind the remark and continued to mix, smiling and swaying to the music. She stopped only to take a sip from the *żubrówka*¹⁰¹ bottle standing next to her and pour more of it into the salad. “When we get to 10 viewers, we will eat the salad,” Jadwiga dared herself and her friend, but minutes passed, and the observers only seemed to dribble away. “Boring” *kozak_Owicz* commented again, “show us the house”.

It soon became clear to Jadwiga that the viewer numbers won’t rise anytime soon, so she abruptly got up and agreed to “do a little tour”. Jadwiga moved the camera around the kitchen as if taking a panoramic photo before moving down the corridor and up the stairs. She proceeded to show the viewers other rooms in the house but was interrupted by a new user joining with enabled video. “Ooooooh it is Janek. Hi!”, Jadwiga excitedly greeted the user. The appearance of two new male

¹⁰⁰ Vegetable salad with diced potatoes, peas, cucumber, eggs, and mayonnaise frequently referred to around the world as Russian salad.

¹⁰¹ A type of rye vodka flavoured with a decoction from the herb *Hierochloe odorata* commonly referred to as bison grass.

faces and bottles of vodka waved at the screen gathered my full attention; I did not take notice when the remaining users had left the stream. Suddenly, I found myself listening to what resembled a private conversation between teenagers making arrangements to meet. Listening in on it felt like eavesdropping and made me uneasy. I left the stream without ever finding out whether the girls or an oblivious party participant would eat the alcohol-and-soap-soaked *sałatka*.

I dreaded Jadwiga's reaction to the news that an anthropologist joined her video stream via an Instagram page and doubted I would receive consent to use the material for research purposes. When I first met her in person, during the final year *studniówka* (Pl. prom) and confessed to watching her live, contrarily to my expectations, she was thrilled and even gave me a hug once we had finished talking. Watching her stream not only provided me with valuable digital research material but proved to be a valid reason for me to approach her in person and ask for an interview. Wherever I bumped into her later throughout the *studniówka* night, she would greet me and introduce me to whoever she was with: "This is Igor, you should talk to him. He posts on social media a lot!" Jadwiga admitted she was a bit drunk when filming the party stream but did not regret sharing it with her social network.

To me, the stream was not just a fragmented piece of 'digital information' about Jadwiga's life but a gate opener that permitted communication between us to happen. Digital channels also facilitated my interactions with students at Colegio Alalay in Bolivia (see 4.4). In this chapter, I focus on how the technical affordances of social media directed youth attention towards phatic connectivity and invited a specific form of public intimacy I call 'extimacy' at Colegio Alalay and Liceum Gawiecki. The focus in my use of the term 'extimate' differs from Lacan's (1997 [1959-60]) who used it to discuss the exterior source of the construction of the self.¹⁰² Instead, I wish to denote a form of public intimacy that invites more distant audiences, which was part of a new norm for adolescent social media interactions at my fieldsites.

There exists a sense of 'moral panic' (see Cohen 2011) within public and academic discourses around the effects of social media on the attentional capabilities and social relationships of youth growing up in the digital era. Philosophers, psychologists, and cultural theorists of the digital age

¹⁰² The anthropologist William Mazzarella uses the term extimacy to refer to a Durkhemian understanding of society's existence within as an "intimate anonymity" (2017: 58). He also describes a set of compromises (or settlements as he calls them) in the history of anthropology in terms of the establishment of an "extimate relation", which "draws a line of demarcation that constitutes a coherent discipline by abjecting its intolerably intimate and thus also irreducibly constitutive other" (ibid:10).

often represent the internet as the new opium of the masses. It is the object of addiction and procrastination (Brailovskaia & Margaf 2017; Gergely 2022; Li et al. 2015), the bearer of misinformation and fake-news (Allcot & Gentzkow 2017; Azzimonti & Fernandes 2023; Peck, 2020), a data thief (Cohen 2018; Odusote 2021), and a host of all sorts of abuse, hate-speech and criminality (Dennehy et al. 2020; Oyedemi 2015; Wiczorkowski 2021). On the other hand, much ethnographic and other qualitative research points to the various ways in which the internet brings opportunities for positive sociality and personal empowerment through online support groups (Kirk & Milnes 2015; Meurer et al. 2022), transnational communication, (Cabañes & Uy-Tioco 2020; Gonzales & Katz 2016; Pfeifer & Neumann 2021), or online dating services (Chahine 2019; Junck 2020; Stoicescu 2019). Social media also provides spaces for youth to hang out outside of adult supervision (boyd 2014: 70-71). Yet the positive effects of attentional transfigurations permitted by new digital technologies have been neglected. Within the ‘attention economy’ social media is often portrayed as a cause of public concern for its attention-grabbing qualities (e.g. Bhargava & Velasquez 2021; Williams 2018). Youth who have been growing up in the digital age are seen as particularly at risk of having their attention captured by screens and marketing technologies and away from each other (e.g. Manago et al. 2015; Stielger 2010; Primack et al. 2017)

Looking at attentional practice as part of the cognitive configuration of adolescent social media interactions contributes to the thesis’s broader aim of applying a socio-cognitive framework towards a better understanding of adolescence within the “political economy of attention” (Pedersen et al. 2021) and highlighting youth’s attentional agency. Bernard Stiegler (2010) puts forward a dismal portrait of youth attentional degradation. He argues that youth are subject to an attentional shift from sources of adult authority to the captivities of marketing and new media technologies. Dominic Pettman engages with Stiegler’s arguments to claim that contemporary digital media inhibit affective synchronisation through the dangerous phenomenon of “hypermodulation” (2015: 61) – a staggered consumption of similar materials that arguably leads to affective dissonance and social alienation.

In the mercantile attention landscape, concerns over the impact of digital technologies on our attentional autonomy are particularly warranted. Recent research in experimental psychology and neuroimaging consistently shows linkages between increased use of digital technologies, notably smartphones, and a reduced ability to sustain attention (Jennings & Tabatabaeian 2023: 131). The plasticity of our brain networks means that the short-term effects of digital distractions are likely to translate into long-term tendencies in attention-related neural pathways (ibid). Posner notes that

while brain plasticity and research on digital technologies certainly suggest a high likelihood of changes in brain circuits and attentional habits, this very same brain plasticity means that those changes are not hard-wired, and we are not necessarily dealing with a permanently changed generation (2012: 139). Furthermore, creative activity and adaptation require some degree of responsiveness to environmental stimuli and attentional wandering (Jennings & Tabatabaiean 2023). What is key is a balance between the activation of different attentional pathways advantageous for success in specific social and natural environments.

Brightening the grim vision of Stiegler and Pettman, I wish to argue that the same affordances of social media that many criticise for leading to lack of control and social alienation help re-structure phatic and intimate communication beyond physical time and place constraints, promoting digital forms of sociality and relationship building adjusted to digital late modernity. Throughout the chapter, I will demonstrate how social media's affordances of portability, ephemerality, decorporalisation, and anonymity pave the way for extimate and phatic interactions at my fieldsites. The affordances of social media scaffold and capitalise on an attentional mode I call phatic. Phatic attention prioritises social connection over semantic information. I will further underscore how the indexical features of phatic interactions (Laver 1975) make phatic and extimate social media culturally relative phenomena in both their form and function.

4.2. The Affordances of Social Media

The term affordances, first coined by the psychologist James Gibson (2014 [1979]) has become part of the common vocabulary in communication, technology, and media studies (Hopkins 2016; Hutchby 2014; Kofoed & Larsen 2016) and is increasingly engaged with in anthropology (Documaci 2020; Keane 2020; Nardi 2015). Gibson defined the affordances of the environment as what it offers an animal in relation to the animal's properties. So, to repeat one of Gibson's examples, a knee-height chair is not knee-height for everyone. An infant would not be able to sit on it. They could, however, use the seat as support when beginning to stand up. Bucher and Helmond (2018) suggest that we distinguish between a high and low-level understanding of the term affordances. A low-level understanding concerns the specific technical features that a technology or other object can afford, while a high-level understanding concerns larger-scale conditions and practices. In this chapter, I will be dealing with both understandings of the terms and showing how low-level affordances of social media can enable the development of higher-level ones.

Cultural and socio-economic differences between adolescents at my fieldsites signified that the affordances of social media they most often made use of were not identical. In both field scenarios, however, online interactions between teenagers in their great majority took place via the same technological “extension of man” (McLuhan 2000 [1964]: 3): the smartphone. Samsung was the most popular smartphone brand at both my fieldsites, followed by Huawei at Colegio Alalay and Apple’s iPhone at Gawiecki. Polish students were more likely to purchase their phones as part of a mobile subscription payment plan. For Bolivian students, purchasing a newer smartphone model was a common savings goal, and they took an overall greater interest in smartphones as consumer products, comparing each other’s models and asking about mine. Despite differences in cultural and structural conditions, the man-mobile assemblages at my separate fieldsites shared many affordances because of feature equivalence between their mobile devices and applications.

A common affordance to all smartphones is their portability, which paves the way for ubiquitous social media use. It thus serves as a form of ‘structural affordance’, allowing for an increased pervasiveness of the other affordances discussed in this chapter. Jadwiga could stream the party through the Instagram application on her portable smartphone and could decide to do so on the spur of the moment. In 2019, most students in Cochabamba’s Zona Sur connected to the internet with pay-in-advance cards, which provided them with mobile data limited by time or megabytes rather than via a constant internet connection. The service throughout most of the neighbourhood was also weak and intermittent, making it difficult to sustain a high-quality video stream. Live streams like Jadwiga’s were thus highly uncommon. Portability was, however, equally important, allowing the students to make use of the camera option to capture their surroundings via photography or video and upload it to social media the moment they reach a connection. Furthermore, the possibility of buying time-limited “unlimited WhatsApp/Facebook Messenger” packages increased the accessibility of social media use at my Bolivian fieldsite and is one of the explanations for the relative lack of popularity of Instagram and Snapchat, which, at the time, were not offered as part of packages by most phone providers.

There is a popular conception that teenagers do not see life beyond their phones. Such a viewpoint was aptly illustrated during a Spanish lesson held at Liceum Gawiecki after the students’ return from summer vacation. Wilmer, the Spanish bilingual programme coordinator originally from Bolivia, decided to kick off the beginning of the academic year with some exercises reminiscing over the students’ holidays. One of them required the students to draw and fill in boxes about the things they had experienced over the vacation period. Diego, a newly arrived

teacher from Spain who happened to pop into Wilmer's classroom, looked at a sample paper with the categories and announced: "Easy! I already know their answers – my routine: mobile phone, love: through a mobile phone, free time: mobile phone, anecdote: something with a mobile phone!" Mobile phone was never directly mentioned in the students' answers and should not be understood as the universal teen recipe for life. Diego's comment, however, was not entirely inaccurate. Youth, and many adults alike, do spend a lot of time on their phones and are unlikely to easily do without them.

Part of the attention-grabbing quality of smartphones stems precisely from their offerings of knowledge-based and socialising applications that directly enmesh themselves with our friendships, romantic relationships, and hobbies. The ubiquity of smartphones provides opportunities and pressures for connectivity (see Katz & Aakhus e.d. 2004). The portability and multifunctionality of social media increase the ease of and expectations around the sharing of everyday moments and engagement in intimate interactions on the platforms. Adolescents can turn their attention to a social media platform at any time to broadcast selected details of their lives to their networks in real or near-real time and create on-demand digital hangout spaces. They browse through, chat with, and post and stream on social media platforms at school, at home, on vacation, and while out with friends.

The attentional affordance of portability is a double-edged sword. Smartphones are "portable dopamine pumps" (Greenfield 2021: 36). When we experience pleasure, the brain stimulates the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which circuits across neural pathways corresponding to the action. This drives us to repeat the pleasurable action, and become desensitised to the stimulus, craving ever more quantities of it, even when the costs clearly outweigh the benefits. This is a standard neuro-psychological explanation of addiction (see Berke & Hyman 2000; Wise & Robble 2020) and is frequently quoted to explain the drug-like appeal of social media and the internet (Greenfield 2021; Charman-Anderson 2009; Moore 2017; Weinstein & Lejoyeux 2015). The internet operates on an unpredictable reward schedule, akin to a slot-machine but one with boundless amounts of highly differentiated content, making it almost universal in appeal.

Gerald Moore argues that the abuse of technology and resultant moral panics are not a novelty but adjustment periods to historical "waves of technological-environmental change" (2017: 69), which include the spread of writing in fifth-century Athens. What distinguishes the contemporary digital era is "the ubiquity of technological hyperstimulants" (ibid). On a brighter note, this very

same ubiquity that makes “craving for attentional distraction the norm” (ibid) augments and broadens digital affordances for social communion and communication. Some of the factors that contribute to the internet’s addictive and distractive qualities, including the possibilities it grants for social connection and disinhibition, contribute to increases in the scope and types of phatic communication. I disagree that social media are a “pseudoconnection” (Greenfield *ibid*: 33) that provide “less socially nutritive value” (ibid: 35) than other forms of social interaction and suggest they serve a crucial phatic function for sociality, nurturing a broad network of social relations. In the next section, I will expand on the mechanisms of digital phatic relationship building, focusing on the technological and attentional affordances of social media that favoured network-wide phatic interactions at my fieldsites.

4.3. Phatic Relationship Building

Social media facilitate the creation and maintenance of phatic relationships between adolescents by directing their attention towards processes of communication and sociability. Bronislaw Malinowski first coined the term “phatic communion” to describe Trobriander’s small talk as driven by the “mere need of companionship” rather than serving “any purpose of communicating ideas” (1946 [1923]: 316). Roman Jakobson later popularised it in linguistic nomenclature by including “phatic” in his hexadic classification of language functions as a form of channel-oriented language with the purposes of commencing, sustaining, and discontinuing communication (1981 [1960]: 24). Jakobson himself asserted that one can “hardly find verbal messages that would fulfil only one function” (ibid: 22) and that message diversity lies in their differential hierarchical order. Messages can be simultaneously phatic and informative, serving primarily to maintain a communication channel open while conveying meaningful information in the process – something that surfaced in my own ethnographic data (see 4.5).

It is not only language that can serve a phatic function, but so can material things and social arrangements. Technology scholars Victoria Wang and John Tucker used the term “phatic systems” (2016: 144) to refer to a new kind of abstract social system in late modernity based on phatic technologies, i.e., technologies with the primary purpose of establishing, developing, and maintaining human relationships. According to Vincent Miller, online media is dominated by phatic communications to such an extent that it is possible to speak of a new “phatic culture” (2008: 388) with potential nihilistic consequences. Miller’s concerns arise from the linkages between phatic media, datafication, and consumerism, as well as the pressures of “network

sociality” (ibid), which emphasises connectivity and expansion over more meaningful relationship-building and contemplation.

When taking on Vincent Miller’s critique it is useful to take note of Zuckerman’s (2021) distinction between phatic communion and phatic contact. The former emphasises rapport building and “ties of union” (Malinowski 1923: 315), while the latter consists of the more technical linguistic features Jakobson referred to. This distinction overlaps with the above-mentioned division between high and low-level affordances. In the case of social media, phatic contact refers to the use of low-level affordances such as the ‘like button’, while phatic communion refers to the social potential fostered by the use of such buttons. The predominance of “phatic culture” in the cognitive configuration of social media does not exclude the construction of significant and purposeful relations.

In her discussion of the phatic in relation to women’s empowerment in Cairo, Elyachar (2010) brings broader practices of sociality and political economy to discussions of phaticity. She proposes the concept of phatic labour as scaffolding communicative channels for the transmission of “all kinds of semiotic meaning and economic value” (ibid: 453). Phatic labour is a useful way to conceive of the ways in which phatic communications can facilitate and pave the way for economic and other social opportunities. Recent anthropological research on phaticity has followed Elyachar’s trope by focusing on the diverse social functions of phatic networks worldwide. Phatic networks and rituals serve as a foundation for vigilance over the well-being of solitary elders in urban Japan (Nozawa 2015), collapsing illiberal political features in rural Northeast Brazil (Ansell 2017), and parental control in Southern Peru (Smith & Barad 2018).

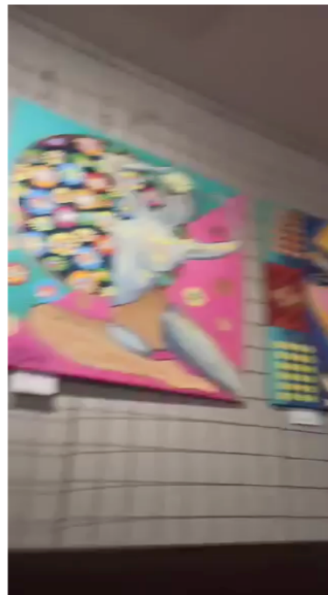
We must ask ourselves whether the social networks described in similar ethnographic scenarios are indeed based on interactions with “no goal to accomplish, no occasion to celebrate, no fixed appointment to make” (Elyachar 2010: 452). Peruvian parents in Smith & Barad’s (2018) ethnography sought proximity and contact with their children to achieve greater control over their gaming practices. The practice of delivering letters from school children to Japanese solitary elders served to ‘check in’ on them in the context of the societal problem of solitary death (Nozawa 2015). In Ansell’s (2017) account, phatic blessings were repurposed by Brazilian politicians to express liberal character traits such as impartiality. Their non-phatic functionality notwithstanding, there is something that motivates the authors of those ethnographic accounts to continue to identify them as phatic.

I follow Rampton and “welcome ‘phatic’ as a helpful overarching umbrella” (2015: 85), but wish to remain cautious, in line with Zuckerman’s (2021) recent critique of the term, to avoid collapsing different meanings of phaticity. A constructive means for taking advantage of the category’s full potential without cutting back on analytical depth is to identify phatic elements in multi-functional phaticity-encompassing interactions or systems. Phaticity can be analysed with reference to the form, purpose, or consequence of social communication. For example, the actions of parents in Smith and Barad’s (2018) account may have been phatic in form but were motivated by a non-phatic purpose and did not result in a phatic consequence because their efforts to connect with their children were mostly unsuccessful.

The bite-size and expandable nature of most social media posts, tweets, and statuses makes them a prime base for database-like digital cultural logics (see Manovich 2002). Those logics do not, nevertheless, as Vincent Miller suggests, imply nihilistic social relationships and need to be judged by different attentional criteria than deep and thorough commitments towards each other. Attention-wise phatic interactions require a different form of attention than information-oriented ones; attention directed towards the process of communication itself rather than the communicated content. In short, they require phatic attention. The attentional affordances of phatic social media provide a sociality lifeboat for spatially distributed urban teenagers burdened with school and work obligations by allowing them to focus on connection-making within an information-heavy media context.

Snapchat, originally founded in 2011, is the social media archetype of phatic communication thanks to the affordance of ephemerality. Its core feature consists of instant visual messaging (snapping) software, with snaps disappearing immediately (1-10 seconds) after being opened by the recipient. Snapchat was also the first to launch the now popular on other social network sites short-lived public statuses or stories. Its affordances serve a phatic and fleeting function, allowing teens to satisfy the need to maintain an open communicative channel without putting emphasis on message durability and content. The phaticity of visual communication on digital platforms has been acknowledged by scholars of new media, with Snapchat representing the zenith of social media’s phatic affordances (Bayer et al. 2016; Kofoed & Larsen 2016; Niemela-Nyrhinen & Seppanen 2019). I will describe Snapchat use in Poland and then turn to comparable functions of WhatsApp status ephemerality in Bolivia.

One feature on Snapchat, the streak, counts the number of days of back-and-forth snap messages between friends and displays them alongside a fire emoji next to a contact's name on a Snapchat friends list. The longest streak I encountered between two teenagers at my Polish fieldsite was 1200 days (over 3 years!). Photos sent to maintain a streak amongst friends are not carefully curated. As Olek explained to me, “they are mostly snaps of whatever is at hand you know – selfies, a table, the floors, a fence you walk by”. He simultaneously snapped a photo of my wardrobe and sent it to a few contacts on his list as means of demonstration. He repeated the same action spontaneously while we were sitting and chatting in a café a few months later (see im. 4.1). Snaps were the only non-curated everyday life photos he would post on social media. Olek was an artsy teenager with blue hair and piercings who aspired to become a tattoo artist and he reserved his Instagram page for posting images of his art and tattoo work.



Im. 4.1. A screenshot from Olek's videosnap. The café interior he sent while we sat and chatted.

Olek's highest snap streak equalled 365 days with a friend from primary school. The streak was erased when he had what he called “a moment of reflection” and realised that he was “wasting a few seconds of his life”. “She was very disappointed in me.”, he remarked of his friend, “She said I let her down.” Olek considered his opting out of the day count as a way of regaining control over what he thought of as an illogical time-wasting activity. By withdrawing from daily snaps, however, he severed a symbolic connection with his friend, which, judging by her reaction, was of value to her, especially since they do not see each other daily anymore. The geographical vicinity of friends may have contributed to the lack of popularity of Snapchat among my Bolivian

interlocutors, aside from the aforementioned lack of “unlimited Snapchat packages”. Colegio Alalay had high levels of membership continuity between primary and secondary level, and most friendships in Zona Sur were neighbourhood-based, decreasing the need for online reciprocal phatic tools like the Snapchat ‘streak’.

The ephemerality of messages on Snapchat drove attention away from the content of the message itself to the sheer process of sending messages and relationship-building. Olek’s friend Mirka, who was with us when he explained Snapchat to me, simultaneously maintained 45 people on a streak. She confessed that she opened very few of the snaps and replied automatically, sending everyone the same image. Streak friends, nevertheless, need to be selected from all Snapchat contacts, bringing attention to their presence and the process of contact maintenance. The importance of such phatic relations between friends was seen when Olek broke the streak with his childhood friend. Its severance meant losing the brief daily moment of attention they provided each other for the sake of acknowledging one’s presence. Mirka often sent Olek non-polished selfies on Snapchat (see im. 4.2). I asked her to elaborate on the motivations and feelings that drove her to send selfies: “I do not know really; it is hard to explain; sometimes if I have not spoken to somebody in a while, I may send them something, like a picture of a fish...I send photos of my dog too!...but my face is always at hand.”



Im. 4.2. A selfie sent by Mirka to Olek on Snapchat.

Kofoed and Larsen (2016) note that the unimportance and ephemerality that characterise Snapchat exchanges make users care less about self-representation and the quality of the visual content they are sharing. Polish adolescents made similar remarks about their private Instagram profiles. Many students at Liceum Gawiecki had two Instagram accounts: a public one that anybody can follow and a private one reserved for friends who need to be accepted to become followers of a user. Diana an extrovert and popular girl at Gawiecki with curly, bouncy blond hair and skilfully applied heavy make-up, was one of my main interlocutors at the school. She described private Instagram profiles as “trash accounts” where the “less pretty” pictures can go including funny memes, “inappropriate” party photos with friends, and images without make-up. Diana’s private profile could be described as messy and intimate with pictures that appear blurry, un-edited, and spontaneous and photos of friends and family, the latter completely missing from her public profile.

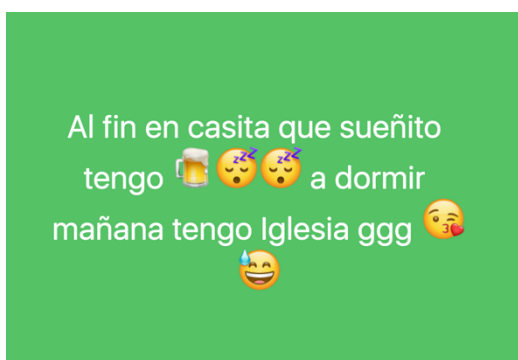
Ephemerality also suits the fluidity of many teenage identities. Some Instagram profiles were stories-only. For example, Iza, a recent graduate from Liceum Gawiecki, told me she does not use posts on Instagram, only stories statuses, because she gets easily bored and changes her style frequently, even “from one day to another”. Just like her styles and preferences, statuses will “flash and pass”. Unlike many students, she did not even save her favourite statuses into permanent compilations. While Snapchat is unique in its degree of ephemerality and attentional divergence from content to communication, adolescent activities on other social media platforms are increasingly entering ephemerality logics.

24-hour live statuses or stories act within a more expansive and less reciprocal network sociality than the Snapchat ‘streak’ model. WhatsApp was the most popular platform for posting such short-lived snap-like photos and video statuses amid Zona Sur adolescents. On average, students at Colegio Alalay would post about 10 statuses a day with the number increasing if they were attending an event of interest (e.g. a wedding, football match or birthday party) or wanted to share what they are watching (e.g. multiple takes of a concert or movie). The highest number of daily statuses I have on record was near to 100. They were all statuses about the K-pop band BTS (a mix of short recordings from concerts and information about them) posted by their fan during the COVID-19 lockdown. WhatsApp statuses would include visual images of the mundane and non-polished selfies akin to Polish adolescents’ Snapchat snaps or private Instagram photos (im. 4.3). Their content was also composed of interchangeable images ‘at hand’ but with a higher frequency

of posts and wider target audience. Bolivian statuses were furthermore likely to consist of text and emoticons without photos (im. 4.4), a status genre absent among Liceum Gawiecki students.



Im 4.3. Jimena's (A Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status. An unpolished selfie.



Im. 4.4. Letizia's (A Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status.
Text: Finally at home I am so sleepy (emojis) to sleep tomorrow I have Church ggg (nervous laugh) (emojis).

Banal ephemeral status sharing is one of the ways in which social media affordances allow for what I call extimate sociality. By extimate sociality, I refer to finding ways to be intimate in “networked publics” in which “the network mediates the interactions between members of the public” (boyd 2008: 125). Amparo Lasén highlights the affective intensity involved in the urge to photograph and share ‘banal’ aspects of everyday life and sees the sharing of photos and other “digital inscriptions” (2019: 314) as bringing about full-time intimacy and “presence at a distance” (ibid: 318). The sensation of presence within corporeal absence emitted by social media platforms is referred to by media scholars as “ambient intimacy” or “ambient co-presence” (Hjorth et al. 2012; Lin et al. 2016; Madianou 2016). Anthropologists of social media argue that the sheer fact of browsing through relatives’ pictures and information online strengthens one’s feeling of belonging as part of an extended family or tribe (Miller et al. 2016: 185). Extimate sharing engages phatic attention to sustain a network of relationships of various degrees of intimacy and communicative concession.

During my time spent at Colegio Alalay, Jorge very often posted WhatsApp and Facebook statuses of himself riding his bike, in which one could see the handle with his hands and the surrounding neighbourhood streets and hear the music he was listening to. He told me he feels happy, relaxed, and calm during those times and likes to share them. He also worked as a clown and often posted videos from the place of a particular event or his way to and/or from it describing what it is, (birthday, baptism, etc.) and where it was taking place. By posting updates about his life Jorge brought amorphous non-intimate others into his affective intimate every day and established

imponderable social bonds with his network. Rather than conveying any purposeful information, Jorge's status updates were essentially phatic; they reminded closer and further contacts of his presence. Ephemerality extends this feeling of presence to allow for asynchronous reading without losing the momentous feeling. Posted the very moment they take place, statuses such as Jorge's hail the network's attention to snaps of everyday 'private' life.

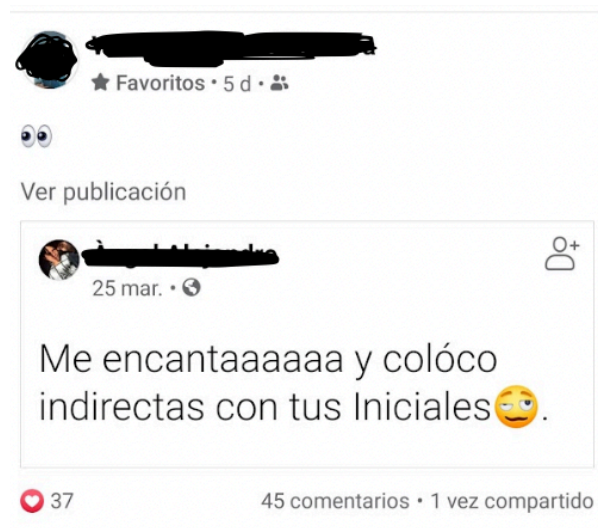
The attentional labour involved in filtering through multiple snaps as well as public statuses or feeds resembles the attentional work during interactions that Erving Goffman described as "unfocused" (Goffman 1967), implying a "sheer and mere co-presence in the same situation" (ibid: 145). The digital network produces such a public co-presence in which people "go on about their respective business unconnected by a shared focus of attention" without the need for individuals to be "in one another's visual and aural range" (ibid: 133). Unfocused interactions involve an attentional stance that Goffman termed "disassociated vigilance" – "a running reading of the situation, a constant monitoring of what surrounds" (ibid 1971: 238). In the boundless realm of social media, phatic attention is highly reliant on the state of dissociated vigilance, allowing us to acknowledge large amounts of information without entering a state of alertness unless the situation requires so. An attentional skill, which is necessary to stretch phatic attention from dyads and small groups to large networks on social media. Everyday digital sociality bears a close resemblance to walking through a familiar neighbourhood; it is recognisable enough to not pay close attention to surrounding details and contributes towards an affective connection with the setting.

Algorithms guide the network's attention towards a similar set of items, but just like people walking the same street, they are unlikely to witness the same elements of scenery in unison and pay attention to them all. Zuckerman's point that phatic contact "is often asymmetrical" (2021: 2) is particularly relevant for understanding digital network sociality. The asymmetry of asynchronous phatic interactions means that, unlike during face-to-face phatic interactions about the weather, the response is delayed, or even non-existent, as is often the case with feed scrolling or status swiping on social media. The asynchrony and multitude of digital 'encounters' within the networked space excuse the social requisite of direct interaction and participatory self-consciousness you could expect from a face-to-face encounter with an acquaintance or friend. Depending on the low-level affordances of the platform and kind of digital publication, we are either aware of or unaware of the number of people that our phatic posts reach. Ephemeral statuses on WhatsApp, Instagram, or Facebook show you the number of people who 'viewed' your statuses. I once sat next to a girl at Liceum Gawiecki who was swiping through Instagram

statuses without even looking at them. She noticed I was eyeing her and remarked, “My friend will kill me if I don’t go through all her statuses”. Fortunately, she did not have to literally look at them but could communicate an ‘as if’ contact signal to maintain good rapport with her friend. The ambient co-presence of digital phatic infrastructure offers connection-making opportunities while leaving ample room for evasion and disinterest.

Phatic attention on social media is a connection, not information-oriented attentiveness, but retains awareness of the circumambient stimuli. A walking pedestrian can recognise and respond to an attentional pull, such as a lost or found poster or a newly opened neighbourhood business. In the same fashion, we temporarily stop scrolling feeds or swiping statuses when arriving at a novel, surprising, or otherwise eye-catching piece of information. For example, while discussing the perks and bothers of Snapchat and status updates, my teenage friend Olek confided to me that he appreciated virtual moments of communal suffering. As he explained, “it is a good feeling, you know, to see somebody sending a snap with a math book and energy drink at 1 a.m. and think ‘oh, somebody is also suffering like me now’”. In Olek’s example, a snap worked as a form of attentional pull that distinguished it from others due to an alignment of stances. In this scenario, the sheer probability of an affective stance sufficed. For all we know, unlike Olek, the sender may enjoy staying up late and solving math problems, but the common experience of schoolwork overload at Liceum Gawiecki (see Ch.5) makes this a highly unlikely scenario.

Prompts consisting of posts created by other users allowed students to re-share already-circulating materials, facilitating the maintenance of digital phatic infrastructures. Prompts can serve a variety of phatic and other sociability-related functions by providing ready-made ‘connection nudges’. One prompt (im. 4.5), posted by Noelia, an 18-year-old Bolivian girl with over a thousand Facebook friends, successfully targeted the phatic attention of her large network. She re-posted an invitation to ‘heart’ her post in order to receive ‘indirect’ phrases (non-explicit information or allusions) about oneself in the comments.



Im. 4.5. A post on Noelia's Facebook wall.
Text: 'Heart' and I will put indirects with your initials.

Below are four examples of comments from Noelia about individuals who 'hearted' her post. Noelia chose to ignore the post's suggestion to provide her network with "indirects" and opted for more explicit statements:

1. "You are really pretty (female), *me caiste super bien*¹⁰³ (Sp. I really liked meeting you), we should talk more 😏."
2. "Heeey we know each other since we were little ❤️ we should all meet up and chat, moreover we all live close haha, let's coordinate to see a movie together or do something haha ❤️ ❤️ ❤️."
3. "*Ay nooo te quiero demasiado!*¹⁰⁴ (Sp. I care about you too much!) you are a great friend (male) I swear! 😏, I miss you too much, really. When you came to the school just to chat 🍷 and the ice-cream that you bought us *ayyy*, we have to see each other with x (girl) more whether or not."
4. "I don't know you. You, you seem like a *chico buena onda* (Sp. good vibe guy) haha, and you are nice, we should talk haha."

¹⁰³ *Me cae bien* (lit. it falls me well) is an informal way of saying you like a person.

¹⁰⁴ *Te quiero* (lit. I want you) is used to denote an affective attachment in close relationships.

Rather than a legitimate way to learn people's opinions about oneself or a game at 'indirects' the prompt-propelled performances of connection that simultaneously actuate interpersonal intimacy and public social relationality (see Lambert 2013: 57). In the comments above, Noelia provided positive portrayals of each contact but marked the differences between them, revealing them as a briefly met acquaintance (1), a childhood friend (2), a close but recently distanced friend (3), and an online contact (4). It is worth highlighting that Noelia ended each of her response comments with an invitation for further contact, accentuating their purpose of establishing paths of connectivity. Facebook friends lists of Zona Sur teenagers were satiated with a mixture of family, close friends, broader acquaintances, and contacts belonging to the same offline (e.g. neighbourhood) or online (e.g. BTS fans) communities, some of whom they never met in person. A prompt like Noelia's did not discriminate between them, establishing phatic channels of communication with contacts with whom one is otherwise unlikely to engage.

The prompt's affordance of amorphous shareability opened a web of channels for the performance of 'mass' network phaticity, while the affordance for the creation of personalised responses distinguished between the kinds of paths and connections built and reinforced in the process. So far, I have explained the mechanisms of networked phaticity, underscoring the importance of disassociated vigilance and phatic attention for digital relationship building. I also began to explore the 'extimate' by looking at posts that concede details of the intimate everyday to the digital network's phatic channels. The following section will illustrate how, by sharing visual images, adolescents contribute to the culturally indexed phatic group 'communion'.

4.4. Cultural Indexicality and Group 'Communion' in Phatic Image Sharing

While phatic photo sharing on social media serves the primary intention of maintaining a channel of communication between friends and acquaintances, the image content itself can be plentiful with social meaning. Laver (1975) points to the indexical identity claims put forward during phatic communication that expand their social function beyond univocal bond-making. Similar multifunctionality claims are markedly clear in Duranti's (1997) analysis of the propositional and goal-oriented character of greeting. The images that teenagers snap because they happen to be 'at hand' often point to the realities of their everyday lives by the sheer fact of being a part of their surroundings. Laver's recognition of the 'indexical information' ingrained in phatic communication is pertinent for a substantial comparison of phaticity in different cultural scenarios. Rampton advises that any analysis of the phatic should remain mindful of the "specific social relations, interactional histories, and institutional regimes" (2015: 86) it is embedded in.

Varis and Blommaert (2015) described meme sharing as an act of ‘phatic communion’ in which the function to share overtakes the semiotic meaning and functional appropriation of memes. The latter are not irrelevant but near to infinite within the meme-sharing collective (ibid: 43). Nevertheless, when considering the phatic nature of memes, we cannot overlook that by re-posting a meme on your profile you embrace it as part of your social media identity. This signifies an expression of a stance towards the indexed experiences, image aesthetics, and/or values (see e.g. Miller et al. 2016; Miller 2016; Wang 2016). We must distinguish communication some scholars classify as phatic, as meme-sharing, from meaningless humming. Memes are culturally and ideologically guided in choice, even if the images, sentences, or other ideas conveyed by them are interchangeable within the same genre. Phatic visual images on social media are interchangeable in precise content, yet they abide by cultural norms, often relate to local meanings, and speak to a certain ‘kind’ of people. Keeping in mind the previously made distinctions within the category of the phatic (see 4.3), I wish to compare the culturally informed logics and functions of phatic visual image sharing on social media at my fieldsites.

Posts with “inspirational” and “advisory” content were an incredibly popular meme genre at my Bolivian fieldsite. Those included general life advice and encouragements that underscored the difficulties of life but focused on overcoming them (im 4.6), religious posts reminding of the need for faith and the presence of God and Jesus (im 4.7) and stories with morals. At school, moral and motivational citations were hung up as posters in classrooms; some teachers began their lessons with a reading and discussion of a short text from fable compilation books. Such a form of life reflexivity was thus immanent in the students’ everyday lives beyond social media. Their quotidian nature and interchangeability of inter-genre content make it a culturally specific phatic ritual akin to blessings in Brazil discussed by Aaron Ansell (2017). I got a hunch about the phatic character of life reflexivity during a class in which a student commented on the morale of a story he clearly had not paid attention to. When the teacher asked what he learned from the story, he responded, “We need to love ourselves, love God.” The anecdote had been all about perseverance in our goals and empathy towards others, but the teacher approved of his response without a hint of hesitation: “Good, good Marcelo.” The story might as well have been about self-love or faith in God. Such anecdotes and their condensed meme versions form a culturally constituted community bond that is not directly linked to tradition or ceremonial ritual but is enacted through phatic custom. To partake in it, Marcelo had to follow its sheer form and did not have to carefully attend to the referential dimension of the interaction.



Im. 4.6. Valentina's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status.
Text: It is in moments of greatest darkness where we have the opportunity for our light to shine with greatest intensity.



Im. 4.7. A post re-shared on Betty's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall
Text: Youth needs God.

A uniform reason the Bolivian students gave for sharing inspirational posts was a desire for others to see things they considered to be wise, hoping that their friends and contacts would read them and feel positively influenced by them. In a similar fashion, teens in Bolivia claimed they share funny memes on their Facebook profiles to make others laugh and brighten up the day of their social network – a reason metapragmatically reflected on in im. 4.8. Some of the memes intended to “put a smile on” the face of somebody having a “shitty day” acquire their jocularity through local meaning. A series of memes juxtaposing outer images of real Zona Sur sites with an imagined luxurious interior was one such meme genre (im. 4.9). Similar posts suggest Zona Sur youth hold a distanced stance towards their relative lack of wealth in comparison to other countries and neighbourhoods. Generally, I witnessed no feelings of embarrassment at their living standard or attempts to hide their non-fancy neighbourhood from their photo sharing activities. Digital comments on lack of prosperity were either jocular (im. 4.10) or self-approving (im. 4.11).



Im. 4.8. A post re-shared on Rodrigo's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall. Captions: Do you know why I share so many memes?"; "Because maybe somebody has a sh1t day"; "And with my bullshit I can put a smile on their face".



Im. 4.9. A post re-shared on Ivan's (Colegio Alalay student) Facebook wall. Text: For those who do not know the library-plane of Suecia (one of the main Zona Sur street's), this is how it looks inside friends.



Im. 4.10. A post re-shared on Jorge's Facebook wall. Caption: More economical. Image Text (left to right): Germany, U.S.A, China, my country.

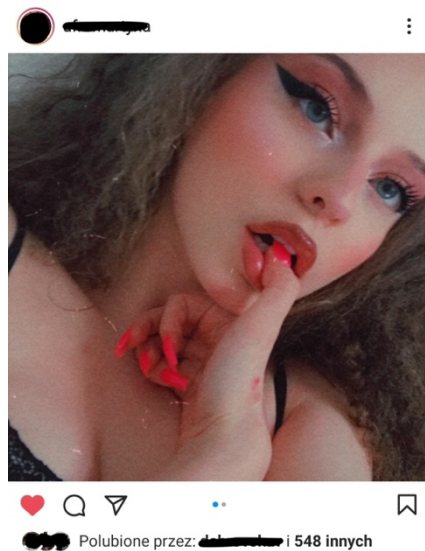


Im. 4.11. A post re-shared on Rodrigo's Facebook wall. Text: Without luxuries but really happy. This is how many of us grew up. Right corner: marvellous years.

Meme-sharing on social media is phatic in purpose and consequence and, for the most part, engages the audience's phatic attention but it also contributes to the (re)production of culturally charged practice. Memes held culturally saturated and locally circumscribed phatic qualities. They functioned as a way for the Zona Sur community to foster affective communion in striving for the best despite socio-economic obstacles. Reflexive and funny meme sharing was a form of "phatic labour" (Elyachar 2010) in working towards a "pleasant atmosphere" (Malinowski 1923: 16) within the Zona Sur online community. Zona Sur adolescents cultivated phatic bonds with their network that were opaque and undetermined in distribution but were "a tie of social sentiment or another" prompted by "the mere need for companionship" (Malinowski 1923: 315-316) and reinforced by the images' indexical identity marking.

Memos were not very popular among teenagers at Liceum Gawiecki.¹⁰⁵ Other forms of digital 'phatic communion' dominated their social media activities. Polish Instagram accounts tended to represent idealised versions of life and the self. A typical Warsaw teen on Instagram would want to flaunt their best physical and lifestyle appearance. The "sexy selfie" genre was the most popular kind of visual image shared by Polish teens (see im 4.12). Teenagers often called my attention to it themselves and openly admitted that they strive for their Instagram to show the "best" side of them. When I asked Iga, a final-year student, about her social media practices, she first pointed out and stressed the care she takes for every post to look impeccable: "I pay great attention to looking ideal in every photo, for everything to be cool. I am very sensitive to it". Diana repeated Iga's point about diligence and meticulousness in post-making. She was proud of her public profile and liked to keep it "aesthetic" – for the photos to be interesting to the viewer, coherent, and "matching" in colour. Diana characterised female Instagram posts and statuses as perfected physical images with "no stretch marks, no acne, no cellulite, beautiful faces with beautiful make-up" and a reflection of "pseudo-ideal lives".

¹⁰⁵ This does not mean that Polish teens did not post memes at all but that they were not a significant genre on personal profiles, unless strongly linked to student views or interests. For example, Diana often posted feminist memes, which marked her ideological identity.



Im. 4.12. Post on Diana's public Instagram.

The photos present on Polish Instagram often exhibited my interlocutors with fancy cocktails, beach views with palm trees, and other visual motifs semiotically valued as indications of 'paradise' and 'poshness' (Im. 4.13; 4.14).¹⁰⁶ 18th birthday parties were filled with glitter, fancy dresses, and lavish cakes, providing a particularly apt occasion for showcasing one's glamour (Im. 4.15). Speaking for herself and her friends, Diana highlighted that seeing others' polished posts does not negatively affect their self-esteem, for they are perfectly aware of their selective and utopian nature.¹⁰⁷ This links to a point made by Yves Citton: "it has become obvious to large sections of the younger generations that everything we look at today is always-already mediatized by simulacra" (2017: 164). Such awareness does not preclude youth from conscious participation in this 'as if' reality and from paying attention to their digital self-appearance.

¹⁰⁶ Smith (2018) theorises the visual motifs present in Western Instagram tourist photography — the tropical exotic, promontory — witness and fantasised assimilation as reproductive of colonial perceptions of the 'other' as available for consumption and possession. The motif of the 'tropical exotic' which "fixates on empty, dehistoricised scenes of 'paradise'" (ibid: 179) was particularly prevalent on Warsaw youth's Instagram profiles and clashes with the culturally appreciative education and travel form promoted by the school (see Ch.2).

¹⁰⁷ Diana did, nevertheless, recognise idealisation as a danger for younger girls less familiar with the use of photoshop and filters. Her popularity may have also blinded her to the vulnerability of students who are less popular, economically precarious or with negative self-schemas. For studies linking self-schemas and types of social media engagement with effects on self-esteem and mental health see Khoo et al. 2023; Ozimek & Bierhoff 2019; Steinsbeck et al. 2021.



Im. 4.13. A post on Iga's Instagram. A photo from her vacation in Mexico.



Im. 4.14. A post on Diana's public Instagram. A photo from vacation in Mexico part of a photo post series tagged "Mexico photo dump".



Im. 4.15. Ola's (Liceum Gawiecki student) Instagram status. Ola's 18th Birthday Party.

In the culture of digital phaticity, there must be some sort of content that flows through the network. Sexy selfies and fancy photos are prime candidates in a context in which physical appearance and material wealth are important and cared for in the offline context. Similar visual motifs index a belonging to Warsaw's post-transition affluent and cosmopolitan European middle class. Highlighting affluence and glamour should be understood within Poland's place as a latecomer to the European consumer revolution, which spread across Western Europe in the post-World War II period (see Zalewska 2013). Poland's ambiguous geographical positionality between East and West Europe and inclination towards identification with the latter continue to cause insecurities and the strive for the recognition of Poland as part of the 'West'.¹⁰⁸ For example, a German teacher complained to me that students were wary of taking part in the student exchange programme because they feared their homes will be considered inadequate by the German standards of their visiting contemporaries.

¹⁰⁸ See Janion (2003) for a historical analysis of Poland's ambiguous placement and the favouring of links to the West over Eastern Slavic roots within Polish intellectual thought and literature.

Expressions of suffering were a common occurrence on teenage Bolivian profiles but a very infrequent one on Polish social media. As Iga explained to me when I inquired about this absence, “people don’t want to look at suffering; (...) they don’t want to look at happiness either. I don’t really know what they want to look at...but definitely not at suffering.” More broadly, Iga is of the opinion that one should not show their real life on Instagram or the Internet as a whole because of the risks of having one’s weaknesses exploited by others. The fact that Iga does not believe that people are particularly interested in looking at the photos she shares, yet still shares them, signals their primary role as visual a filler for online phaticity. They are an elaborate and semiotically rich way of saying ‘hi’ to each other. Unlike Bolivian memes, photos of the self are not shared with the intention of brightening somebody’s day or providing them with potentially useful advice. They, nevertheless, constitute the material infrastructure for the travel of laudatory phaticity and support.

Polish idealised social media identities became intertwined with phatic sociality practices between friends. “Pretty”, “Sexy”, “hot”, “beautiful”, “sweet”, “cute”, 🔥, ❤️, 🥰 emojis and other adjectives attesting to a person’s beauty and attractiveness were frequently used in comments, made by other teen girls, underneath girls’ selfies and other photos. Girlfriends could also jokingly ask the girl in the photo to marry them, call her their *żonka* (Pl. wifey) and publicly set up “dates” with each other. Diana was surprised to hear that amongst my friendship group we did not give much recognition of each other’s posts beyond likes – “really it is like obligatory, when I see a girlfriend’s post I comment immediately. It is you know *pussy power* (phrase uttered in English)”. The practice of liking and commenting under each other’s photos is a way of supporting one’s friends and acquaintances by recognising the effort taken into showcasing the ideal self and mutual boosting of self-confidence. It is a form of phatic labour that helps maintain the status of ‘girlfriends’ between girls. Closer friends furthered their Instagram phatic connections by re-sharing friends’ statuses as one’s own stories, including them within their self-centred profile space, and sometimes adding flattering comments on top of it, e.g., “beautiful, the best, love ya ❤️”. Such digital acknowledgements constitute a more targeted form of public phaticity and require reciprocal engagements of phatic attention.

When phatic posts ceased to be tied to personal social media profiles, they became less about the self and more about the common experiences of Gawiecki students. This was, for example, the case with the Instagram profile *sleepingpeopleatgawiecki*, where students sent photos of people sleeping at the school to be posted as statuses, or the page *shoesfromgawiecki*, where students shared

photos of their footwear. Once, a question about one's favourite item from the supermarket "Kowalski", based right outside school grounds, was sent to the school's Spotted Instagram (see 4.5). Many people engaged with the post, sending in photos of their favourite food and drink items. Shopping at the "Kowalski" supermarket and feeling exhausted were typical of the whole school community, marking them as common denominators of school life and effective prompts to foster phatic communion and companionship between students. Networked phaticity channels coalesce with a myriad of meaningful content flowing through them, buttressing connection and cultivating "phatic communion" in culturally indexed settings. In the last section of this chapter, I will further my analysis of the way phatic channels serve as a scaffold for the flow of meaningful information by focusing on the way they support the circulation of content, which cracks through the normative confines of offline communication.

4.5. Intimate Information Sharing & Shopping

Ephemeral statuses with snippets of the everyday are examples of digital 'extimacy', or the expansion of information otherwise reserved for close contacts to broader audiences. The re-configuration of intimacy on social media has been extensively discussed, spotlighting new forms of public intimacy, online dating practices, and the negotiation of interactions with contacts of various degrees of present and past proximity (Gershon 2010; Hjorth et al. 2012; Lambert 2013; Lin & Utz 2016; Niranjana & Lee 2022). In this last section, I show how the attentional affordances of decorporalisation and anonymity bring digital extimacy to a new level by easing the display of potentially unsettling knowledge or views and the exchange of private information between acquaintances. This is because students at my fieldsites made use of different attentional patterns in the cognitive configuration of public social media sociality in comparison to offline interactions. On social media, the material presence of the 'other' is uncertain and remains in the 'background' of attention, allowing for less self-consciousness and more courage than during face-to-face interactions.

Students sometimes shared ready-made prompts that upheld networks of public phaticity to convey deeply emotional personal feelings. Ivan Mamani was a seventeen-year-old of Indigenous Quechua origins at the time of my fieldwork. Ivan follows and posts content from many "inspirational" quote pages¹⁰⁹ that cater to the phatic infrastructure of life reflexivity, including "frases de la vida" (Sp. life phrases), "citas literarias" (Sp. literary quotes), "amante de frases" (Sp.

¹⁰⁹ Word style, case and kerning in Facebook page names are original.

lover of phrases). Some of the pages Ivan follows on his profile, such as “d e p r e s I ó n” (Sp. depression), “t r i s t e z a” (Sp. sadness), or “COSAS SAD” (Sp. sad things), post melancholic and sorrowful phrases, memes, and advice for dealing with heartbreak and the blues, providing substance for representing the more bitter moments in life (e.g. im. 4.16, 4.17). Ivan told me he resorts to them when he feels sad because of “love, family problems, or feeling lonely”. Getting his feelings “out there” helped him feel better, and he would often elicit responses from compassionate friends.



Im. 4.16. A post re-shared on Ivan's Facebook wall. Text: Physically and emotionally I am at my worst moment @EstoySad (I am sad).



Im. 4.17. A post re-shared on Ivan's Facebook wall . Text: It is courageous to smile when you are fallen to pieces inside. Comment: Friend: But it does not help to say it all the time call. Ivan's Reply: Yeah, yeah I exhibited myself a lot, right.

Malaise was an accepted sight on Zona Sur adolescent media feeds but was still bound by normative limits that Ivan's posts moved beyond. Firstly, Ivan re-shared posts written as direct first-person statements, including references to suicidal thoughts, aside from the more common posts referring to 'general life sadness'. Secondly, his 'sad posts' were numerous and appeared on his Facebook wall over continuous depressive periods. After a few days of re-sharing purely dismal posts, one of his friends commented underneath a sad meme, hinting that he is posting too much depressive content (im. 4.16). Ivan admitted that he “exhibited himself a lot already” in his reply to that comment and even decreased his ‘sad meme’ sharing activity thereafter. The affordance of decorporalised interaction (Hopkins 2016: 5), resulting from the lack of bodily co-presence, aids

teenagers like Ivan in their information-sharing pursuits. Decorporalisation facilitates posting emotional information because it shifts attention away from the people behind digital networks.

What psychologists refer to as the priming effect concerns the way things within our sensory field can affect our thoughts and actions. In one such often-cited priming experiment (Bateson 2006), casually referred to as the “The Honesty Box” study, the amount of payment for drinks and snacks in an office was measured according to the picture hung above the box – flowers or eyes. On average, eyes received three times more payment. When we sense the surveillance of others, we are more sensitive to the possibility of being judged. Ivan was not overly concerned with the ambient presence of others in his network before his friend brought his attention to it. The affordance of decorporalisation works in both directions. It facilitates getting one’s feelings out there by masking not only the presence of the audience but also of the self. Intercorporeality constraints in digital interactions can favour certain forms of sociality because they decrease “physical vulnerability” (Osler & Zahavi 2023: 1137) and the perception of direct surveillance. O’Shiel claims that the transcendent space of the digital creates an “indirect” and “non-immediate” perceptual gap “that allows one to modify very basic elements of one’s self, the world, others, and even one’s values” (2022: 136).

Diverting the network’s attention away from the self was particularly important when teens wanted to explore or subtly align themselves with an unpopular or morally questionable stance. In principle, Colegio Alalay girls adhered to the corporeal normative of female modesty in their social media use. The boys, on the other hand, frequently posted memes in reference to both male and female sexuality. Female self-regulation and concealment of sexuality must be understood within the deeply rooted societal context of *machismo* (Sp. male chauvinism), which shames and blames women for alleged sexual frivolity or even attracting male attention (Kimball 2023). *Machismo* regulates reproductive and courting experiences of females, but also males, who do not always fit the stereotype of a possessive, unfaithful, and often violent macho but can nevertheless be societally portrayed as such.¹¹⁰

Rather than acting as a clear-cut reproduction of the desiring macho male standard, the memes re-posted by young males at Colegio Alalay presented a more intricate image. They attested to the societal status-quo in some cases, for example, when sharing videos of boys grabbing girls by their

¹¹⁰ For example, see Heckert (2017) on the experiences of abandonment and exclusion from care of Bolivian males living with HIV.

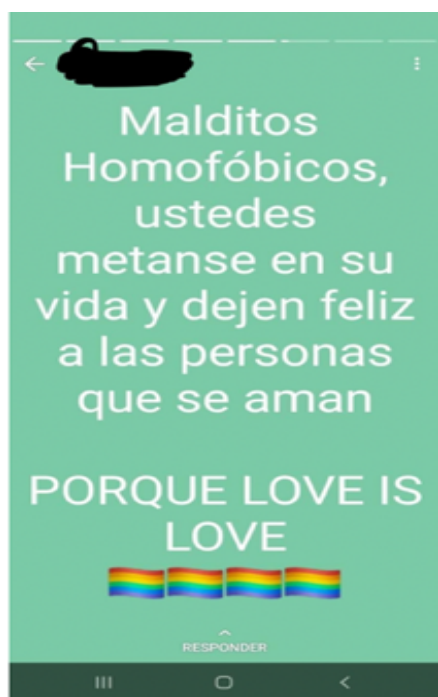
bottoms or breasts and imitating sex moves, or still images of girls represented as objects of desire. Other images and videos inverted this convention by positing females as promiscuous or sexually assertive, even aggressive, against the male's wishes.¹¹¹ Girls virtually 'laughed at' and 'liked' those images, signalling that their sexual desire is a socially repressed yet recognised feeling, rather than an alien or morally rejected one. The affordances of social media brought to public attention the possibility of female sexual assertiveness. A girl could subtly respond to a suggestive image with a 'like' or the even more popular and ambiguous 'laugh' response, leaving their interpretation of the memes open. A like amongst many can escape the network's attention, allowing the girls to publicly endorse the possibility of pushing societal boundaries.

Members of the BTS fandom group "Army" at Colegio Alalay further digitally challenged accepted sexuality norms in Cochabamba's Zona Sur. Through affective connections with the celebrities, BTS fan girls readjusted their own moral stance with regards to non-normative sexual orientations and sought to impact their local communities accordingly by denouncing homophobic behaviours and celebrating LGBTQ in public WhatsApp statuses (e.g. im. 4.18, 4.19). During an interview at Abigail's place, Abigail and Jimena told me that, even though BTS members did not confirm any claims with regards to their sexuality, reading the circulating rumours and aversive comments in response to the band boys' potential non-heteronormativity angered them. They found the boys' music, arduous journey to fame, and social work (such as involvement with the United Nations) inspiring and admirable, regardless of their sexuality and became defenders of LGBTQ rights in line with the stance of BTS boys' and the majority of Army fandom.

Such a pro-LGBTQ stance was unusual among Zona Sur youth, who largely considered queerness to be "unnatural" in conformity with their Christian religious beliefs and interpretations of the Bible. This included very close friends of Abigail and Jimena with whom they did not openly speak about LGBTQ rights during face-to-face interactions but who looked at their WhatsApp statuses. The presence of non-normative opinions in digital acquaintance networks could act as a prompt towards reflexivity, backed by high esteem or affective attachment towards the person presenting them. Esther, who is close friends with Abigail and Jimena, was visibly conflicted when I asked her opinion on LGBTQ rights, retaliating the normative stance of queerness as somehow "unnatural (...) and going against God's will" but simultaneously highlighting that she is not homophobic and respects everyone for who they are, suggesting an

¹¹¹ I abstained from including sexually charged images given their potentially sensitive nature.

ongoing tension in her schema of the ‘queer’, which seeks to accommodate Esther’s religious conviction and her friends’ opinion. The attentional affordances of asynchrony and decorporalisation in the cognitive architecture of social media environments can gradually contribute to changes in the prevalent collective schemas and world imaginaries (see Ch.1).



Im. 4.18. Jimena’s WhatsApp status.
Text: Damn homophobics, get involved in your own life and leave people loving each other happy. BECAUSE LOVE IS LOVE.



Im. 4.19. Jimena’s WhatsApp status.

The affordance of decorporalisation and facility of ready-made prompts not only challenged social norms but also allowed for more acquiescence in personal inquiry exchanges between friends and acquaintances than everyday offline interactions. Teenagers who spend time together want to know about each other. This proved as true in the ever-densely inhabited Warsaw suburbs as in the hilly pampas of Cochabamba. Zona Sur adolescents shared intimate personal information digitally through ephemeral dare chains circulated as WhatsApp statuses. At Liceum Gawiecki, the affordance of anonymity facilitated both the disclosure of feelings and the creation of new phatic connections through the use of the school’s Instagram Spotted page.

The popularity of ephemeral WhatsApp statuses among Colegio Alalay students and the affordance of decorporalisation favoured the appearance of ‘status dare prompts’ – dares posted as public statuses anybody could accept by replying to the status. They worked to ‘spice up’ the content within phatic interactions and put intimate private information at the centre of interaction,

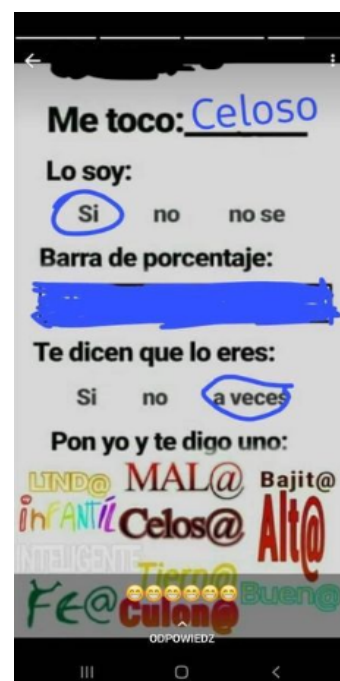
all the while retaining a phatic nature of exchange. They invited the network to respond to them and receive ready-made intimate questions to be answered in private or a virtual post challenge to complete (im. 4.20, 4.21). In each case, as part of the dare, the status would have to be re-shared by the person responding to it so that it continues to circulate through the network. Virtual status challenges could include putting up a requested image as a status. You could be asked to post a photo of an ex-partner, a crush, or share a fact about yourself, as in the following example of a teenager confessing to being jealous (im. 4.22).



Im. 4.20. Omar's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp Status.
Text: Respond (lit.put) "I" and everything stays in private.



Im. 4.21. Rommel's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status .
Text: I will give you 19 traumatic questions Those that do not respond will be blocked. Do you dare?
Respond (lit.put)"I".



Im. 4.22. Letizia's (Colegio Alalay student) WhatsApp status.
Text: I was given (lit. It touched me): Jealous
I become (lit.am) [jealous]: yes, no, I don't know, percentage bar (to fill)
They tell you are [jealous]: yes, no, at times
Respond (lit. put) I and I will tell you one: pretty, bad, short, childish, jealous, tall, intelligent, gentle, good, ugly, big-assed.

Questions, sent and answered privately after accepting a dare, ranged from a few to about 20, and asked about one's personal life with different degrees of intimacy and focus. Some centred around past and present romantic relations (e.g., first or current crush, first kiss, etc.). Others concentrated on perceived personal character traits (e.g., are you jealous, trustworthy, funny, intelligent? etc.).

Below is a set of exemplary questions I received, which mostly targeted feelings towards the person whose dare status I responded to:

1. Who is the first person who saw your status? (Name) 🙄
2. Would you be my boyfriend/girlfriend? 💕
3. What are you scared of? 🙊
4. Do you fancy me? 😳
5. Are you a virgin? 🍷
6. Would you go out with me? 😊
7. Would you kiss me? 🔥
8. Would you steal a kiss from me?
9. What do you like about me?
10. Am I pretty 😏?

The choice of WhatsApp statuses rather than the equally ephemeral Facebook stories for most dare circulation was not incidental. WhatsApp's public audience constitutes contacts teenagers must have exchanged numbers with suggesting them to be in closer and/or recurrent relations (e.g. school companions) but not necessarily intimate ones. Adolescents at Colegio Alalay in Cochabamba already knew a lot about each other given the small school size, high percentage of students living locally, and multi-child family enrolment. In this context, dare circulation could be interpreted as a way for the youth to get intimate information unlikely to surface in a regular conversation; it was a virtual form of the popular "truth or dare" game played with a spinning bottle. The corporeal co-presence during the original offline version of the game, I sometimes took part in at parties, meant that some questions and dares were more likely to be kept out of the possible repertoire or answered insincerely.

Accepting a virtual dare presupposed preparation to answer any kind of question. Teenagers, nevertheless, confessed that they tended to leave out or responded elusively to questions they felt were too uncomfortable for them. They could give an indirect or playful answer, for example, put a photo of their best friend or a celebrity they fancy as their school crush. The possibility of engaging in elusiveness or humorous responses in the digital 'truth or dare' game underscores its quality as an essentially phatic interaction. The dare chains were a prime example of a phatic system that conveys information while retaining its primary purpose of relationship building and creating

communication channels. By engaging phatic attention and pulling the focus away from the content, which was often taken with a pinch of salt, they paradoxically facilitated the flow of truthful intimate information. Personally, I learned a lot about student friendship networks, family affairs, and romantic relationships in such dare chains, which also served as conversation openers. Students admitted they responded to dares out of boredom or curiosity, knowing they could evade questions or challenges they did not wish to take on. Still, they did end up sharing truthful information in most cases and learn new information about their peers in the exchange process. Responses were driven by boredom and the urge to connect rather than the intention to learn specific details, but once set in motion, participants could find themselves exchanging information beyond the realm of “pleasant atmosphere of polite, social intercourse” (Malinowski 1923: 316).

In the 2020/2021 academic school year, Liceum Gawiecki had over 1000 students in 30 different classes coming from various parts of Warsaw and the surrounding villages. Finding out even the most basic personal details of one's crush or other person of interest through in person gossip channels without drawing too much attention to oneself in the process would hence seem like a daunting task. This is where the Instagram Gawiecki Spotted account came to the rescue. Run by anonymous admins who received anonymous ‘tells’ via the site tellonym.com and then posted them on the Instagram page. The original idea behind Spotted was for students to inquire about other students that caught their attention at school, hence ‘Spotted’. Students asked about people they had a crush on or would like to become friends with (im. 4.23). Diana was popular amongst her peers at the school, and people often inquired about her when she first arrived. She told me that if somebody asked who you are, asked about your Instagram, or made a comment about you, you would receive new followers; among them likely the anonymous person who made the initial inquiry.



Im. 4.23. A post on Liceum Gawiecki's Spotted Instagram page. Text translations parallel to text box.

Spotted's anonymity facilitated the extension of one's online and offline phatic network. The main purpose of the inquiries was include people within one's network of digital phaticity rather than establish contact with one's person of interest. The phatic nature of personal inquiries was caricatured in a tell, which purposely left out the spotted person's features: "Hey! Did any of you see a girl with this and that, and you know. haha she had something, you know, and all right? and please help me find her!!!". Students were unlikely to follow up on their inquiries in-person, although tells could lead to some form of acquiescence for offline interaction. One boy who was labelled very handsome in an anonymous tell on Spotted personally invited somebody to come and reach out in person, emphasising that 'he does not bite'. Similarly, a tell written in the name of a girl who received numerous tells complimenting her appearance and asking her out asked her admirers to come up to her in-person "like normal people".

The Instagram Spotted page had become a form of general school discussion board, which includes commentaries, sales, and announcement tells. Students used Spotted to express annoyance at happenings at the school or offer support to those in need of it. As in the example of a 'tell' from a student who witnessed somebody being bullied for their sexual orientation and felt the need to encourage students to reach out to people if they are tormented by somebody (im. 4.24). One of the Spotted admins confided in me that students sometimes sent private messages

to the Spotted Instagram account from their personal Instagram, pouring out their despair to the anonymous admins. Spotted could serve as an outlet for expressing emotions and beginning a conversation about issues one may be embarrassed to speak about in person.



Im. 4.24. A post on Liceum Gawiecki's Spotted Instagram page.

Text: If somebody at school is tormenting you because of your orientation (I noticed such a situation) write about it to spotted whether somebody could help. There are a lot of straight-thinking people here who will gladly help to sort things out with such demagogues, harassment is shitty and such things need to be straightened out.

The same affordances and phatic channels that bring connection and support can cause divisions and aversion when animosity flows through them. Digital intimacies of school peer groups are fraught with “contradictory desires” (Bertland 1998: 285) and incite both the most “caring and aggressive” (ibid) aspects of human closeness. A common Spotted occurrence at the start of the academic year involved looking down upon and chastising the behaviour of the newly arrived first-year students. One ‘tell’ criticised them for crowding near the bathrooms, calling them “half-brains”. Another requested they “stop acting like the school elite” and “stay away”. A first-year sent a ‘tell’ in response to all the negative comments about new students: “how can I not be scared of older classes if they write such things about first-years?” Anonymity provides the possibility to reach out for information and express feelings without fear of gossip and embarrassment. This possibility applies to affective stances of both positive and negative valence.

During my time observing the Spotted page, a drama erupted over derogatory comments towards a teacher. It divided the school community between her critics and supporters. Some tells considered her a “shitty” and “soulless” teacher who was wasting people’s time by giving too much homework. Others defended her as acting in the students’ best interests and blamed the students’

laziness for their inability to cope. At some point during the drama, the Spotted admins began commenting with fun facts about turtles to disassociate themselves and pull attention away from the debate about the teacher. A video post, which used an ‘actor’ student to dramatise a long tell¹¹², finally managed to pull the school community away from the drama and back to phaticity. The tell was a rant from a student who found the whole debate “tiresome”. It emphasised spotted as a place to “take a break from school routine” and partake in the “boring but somewhat engaging” exchange of posts – a worthy tag for much social media sociality at my fieldsites. It ended with the sender treating the community to “a nice and mundane question”: “What was your favourite dream?”. The video was reproduced 872 times and received a very “engaged” response from the student community, with an above-average 141 likes, 14 comments, and a few comment replies that praised the words as “strong” or “beautiful”. Nobody, however, responded to the dream question. The post’s objective, after all, was not to obtain information but to bring attention back to connection.

4.6. Conclusion

The attentional affordances of smartphones and social media applications favour the expansion of phatic infrastructures onto large-scale digital networks. Social media is ideally catering to the various needs to share and receive intimate information about each other. It allows users to simultaneously get close but keep distance and invites an extension of intimacy and private information to distanced audiences – a phenomenon I call ‘extimacy’. Adolescent social media users at my fieldsites utilised social media affordances to establish tactics for navigating the opportunities, challenges, and tensions that arise with increased connectivity and the ambient presence of connections made at different times and places. Those uses were modulated by and worked in response to the cultural, material, and emotional conditions of teen life.

The asynchronous and decorporalised nature of digital sociality drove my interlocutors’ attention away from the ambient presence of others, favouring emotional disinhibition in post sharing and more daring information exchanges than were customary during face-to-face interactions. Students at Liceum Gawiecki additionally relied on the affordance of anonymity given stricter norms with regards to public disclosure and emotionality and less opportunity for coincidental phatic interaction between school peers. Asynchrony and decorporalisation also favoured the

¹¹² Whether the student portrayed in the video was indeed an actor, the person who originally sent the tell, or the admin himself was a hot topic of discussion in the comment underneath the video.

development of an attentional stance called disassociated vigilance. Disassociated vigilance allowed my interlocutors to monitor abundant amounts of stimuli, while selectively attending to informational content and retaining a focus on connection. Posts circulating via phatic communication channels can act as indexes, implicating cultural group affiliations. “Inspirational” memes shared by Zona Sur teenagers and the fancy photos of Liceum Gawiecki students are examples of culturally circumscribed phatic post genres. Digital sociality networks at my fieldsites invited posts brimming with cultural meaning while remaining phatic in purpose and consequence. The next chapter returns to the classroom to consider cases of attentional success and failure in the cognitive constellation of a lesson. Although in the analysis I will set aside the topic of digital sociality, it remains a part of the wider ecology of attention in the classroom when students look at their phones during class.

Chapter Five: Attentional Success: Joint Attention and Teacher Authority in the Classroom

“The professors were not priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge. After all, they were only middleman handling wares they had become so accustomed to they were oblivious to them. (...) the whole thing seemed sham, spurious; spurious Gothic arches, spurious peace, spurious Latinity, spurious dignity of France, spurious naïveté of Chaucer. It was a second hand dealer’s shop and one bought equipment for an examination.”

D.H Lawrence (1915: 297)

5.1. Attentional Success

On the first day back from the summer holidays there was a spirit of drabness in Wilmer’s Spanish bilingual class at Liceum Gawiecki and it was not just because of the impending autumn looming in the clouds. The students felt little enthusiasm to be back at school and knew they had a challenging and laborious year ahead with *matura* examinations coming up in the spring. At first, Wilmer only put more gloom on everybody’s faces by commenting from the start that for most students there was little point in trying to meet the *matura* extended examination requirement with Spanish because the exam level was too high for them. Looking around the room Wilmer understood that before beginning with the language activities the class ideally required some cheering up, so he proposed in Spanish: “We will sing. Do you feel like it?”. A few of the students responded with an insipid “nooo” but the teacher ignored them and asked everybody to stand up: “You do not remember much Spanish because of the holidays, so we will sing in a different language. Come on everybody, stand up and fold your hands ‘like Italians’”(refers to touching the tip of your thumb with the tips of one’s other four fingers of the same hand).

Not every student got up immediately. Some students required additional encouragement and expressed discontent by sighing or rolling their eyes as they lazily rose from their chairs. One girl, with a particularly languid expression, had to have her hands folded by the teacher. When everybody was standing up with their hands folded, Wilmer went to the whiteboard and pulled his hand up exclaiming ‘Oh’. He proceeded to write on the whiteboard with concomitant demonstrations of bodily movements:

Oh (pull both hands up) A (pull both hands down)- le (hands up) - le (hands down)

A-le-le ti-ka ton-ga (same as above alternating with each syllable)

A ma-sa ma-sa ma-sa (make a hand movement of screwing in a lightbulb)

Oh a lo-e a lo e-a lo-a (wiggle your butt and hands as you descend into a crouch)

I later found it was a children's song of supposed African origin.¹¹³ Wilmer chose four students to demonstrate the song line by line with the class repeating after them. Afterwards, we sang the song all together, gradually opening our hands to "hold more energy" in them. We then paired up to dance and hold energy in couples and then in small groups. Everybody laughed as the teacher and some of the boys theatrically wiggled their bottoms. By the end, even the girl with the languid face smiled. Wilmer, who was of Bolivian origin and first came to Poland to study on a scholarship, had a short posture, dark skin colour, and a plump face with no facial hair and small oval shaped eyeglasses. He taught Spanish at Liceum Gawiecki since 2007 was known among the students and staff for his sense of humour and appreciation of a good laugh. His lessons were exceptional, though. Most of their time at school, students at Liceum Gawiecki sat at their desks, either listening to (or ignoring) teacher monologues or working on textbook exercises. Few teachers tried to teach unconventionally, and the ones that did often failed to spark the students' interest unless they offered them a grade for extra-curricular activities. Even then, however, success was not guaranteed.

This chapter argues that teachers achieve attentional success in the classroom through the human cognitive skill of joint attention and mutual correspondence. By attentional success, I mean the ability of both the teacher and student to pay attention to each other and establish a productive learning situation, which depends on inciting prolonged attention, beyond the spur of the moment. Yves Citton described the classroom as an attentional "microcosm" (2017: 18) using it as a prime example of a "microeconomy of joint attention" (ibid), underpinned by the principle of reciprocity, striving for affective harmonisation, and the need for improvisation practices. I was struck by the affinity between Citton's description of effective joint attention and the degree of attentional success at my fieldsites. As students and teachers navigate the classroom attention-scape they join attention and share experiences, establishing, to borrow Ingold's understanding of the term, "correspondence" – "it is in attending to one another, as they go along together, that beings correspond" (2017: 26). Mutual correspondence is not something teachers and students can simply decide upon and easily obtain, despite the best of intentions.

¹¹³ I could not pin down the song's precise origins. The song is popular among scout groups.

Joint attention happens when one is conscious of the attention of others and orients one's attention accordingly. Research on joint attention has been mostly confined to the fields of developmental psychology and evolutionary anthropology, focusing on infant-caregiver interactions (see e.g. Haviland 2020; Mundy & Newell 2007; Tomasello 1995). In their first year of life, infants learn to follow other people's gaze (Scaife & Bruner 1975). Tomasello (1995) underscored joint attention as an important milestone in the development of social cognition in which an infant learns about the intentionality of others. Joint attention is similarly crucial to the acquisition of symbolic meaning and culture, which begins to take place during interpersonal engagements of infants and caregivers with their surrounding environment (Adamson & McArthur 1995). Given its importance for the development of culture and sociality, it is all the more puzzling that joint attention has received little attention in anthropology beyond its evolutionary concerns. This chapter seeks to address this gap by considering the importance of joint attention in the development of affective relationships and effective learning scenarios between students and teachers in the classroom.

Teacher authority and charisma are part of the broader attentional ecology of the school influenced by the expansion of digital technologies, teachers' working conditions, and curriculum requirements. Teachers must compete with what William Mazzarella described as the "mana of mass society" – "the mana (the concept of a vital energy of effective powers with origins in Oceanic cultures) that infuses an urban crowd, or even, differently modulated, a television audience or an Internet public" (2017: 2). Durkheim believed society's mana-like vital power to be at once "a physical force and a moral power" (1995 [1912]: 192). Teachers like Wilmer capture this duality by successfully balancing out class sociability and a sense of togetherness with authority, attainment of student attention, and respect. They manage to make lessons an enjoyable experience and 'get things done' without losing the students' esteem, a rare occurrence at my field school in Warsaw and one facing a looming risk of diminishment in the much smaller neighbourhood school of Colegio Alalay. In this chapter, I wish to focus on the clash between contemporary urban youths' attentional status quo and attentional demands of schooling. To act on this attentional divergence, teachers require sufficient motivation and room for adjustments to the lesson plan to spur student interest and 'catch' their increasingly fleeting and dispersed attention.

Teachers at both my fieldsites spoke of a decline in student interest, deference, and attention in class, which are often seen in light of a broader crisis of the digital attention economy. Without negating the force of contemporary digital technologies' attentional pull, I wish to flip the focus

of the discussion and question why school lessons do not gain much student attention. Lesson structure and sociality have a bearing on student motivation and attentional strategies during class. Those strategies are closely tied to the production of teacher authority in the classroom. Hence, this chapter contributes novel contexts to ethnographic literature on the social construction of teacher authority, building on findings that underscore the tensions involved in managing authority, while juggling a variety of student needs and social demands (Grant 1988; Hemmings 2003; Metz 1978; Pace 2003a, 2003b; Pace & Hemmings 2006). I carry forward Pace's (2003a) insights on the hybridity of teacher authority, which entails multiple, often contradictory, approaches towards the attainment of student cooperation. At my fieldsites, some form of authority was essential for attentional effectiveness but not always sufficient, hence my recourse to the concept of mutual correspondence and the significance of prior work of reciprocal attention.

Attentional success varied by learning situation and demonstrated distinct patterns at my two fieldsites, based on differences in their broader attentional ecology. At both my fieldsites, teachers struggled to retain student attention. In Poland, in general, the perceived loss of authority and sense of purpose demotivated teachers, reducing their energy and effort, which further demotivated students in a vicious circle. In Bolivia, teachers felt more esteemed, and in many aspects they were. However, at times, by clinging to a traditional conception of authority, teachers failed to establish attentional reciprocity and tune in with student needs, losing student attention and self-sabotaging their authority and status in the students' eyes.

This chapter scrutinises classroom-based correspondence as an embodied process of attentional practice, underpinned by ideological, affective, structural, and bureaucratic factors. Hence, it pulls together elements of the attentional nexus introduced in the previous chapters. In what follows, I will discuss attentional failures and success in the classroom, beginning with the attentional void of the online classroom, moving through attentional deficiencies of the offline classroom space, and ending on instances of attentional success, characterised by teaching 'the human way'. I then contextualise joint attention in practices of everyday sociality and the institutional character of the school. They establish the possibilities and limits for achieving mutual correspondence and upholding motivation in the classroom, shedding light on the differences between teachers' source of authority, vocational fatigue, and emotional response to student in(attention).

5.2. Attentional Failures

“When we sit and just write and write those notes it is monotonous and *człowiek* (Pl. the human) gets tired...” Kinga

On a typical school day Kinga, a soon-to-graduate student at Liceum Gawiecki, living in the outskirts of Warsaw, would wake up at 6 a.m. She would then carry out a series of activities she grouped using the single lingo term “*ogarnąć się*” (Pl. pull yourself together) when recounting her day to me. Those activities included showering, dressing up, putting on make-up, packing her bag, and grabbing a bite before leaving for the train to Warsaw. Once in the city, she would take the bus to school. At the school, she would find hundreds of other students in the corridor and ‘hang out and chat’ between lessons. After school, she would either hang around in the city or head straight home, once again by first taking the bus, then the train. After returning home, she would eat something and ‘roam around’ for a while. She would then sit down to do her homework and advance with *matura* preparations she described being “up to date” with.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Kinga’s typical day looked very different. Her morning commute now consisted of moving from her bed to the desk inside her room. On a routine pandemic morning, some of her school colleagues would not make this move at all and tune in to the lesson from the comfort of their beds. Kinga would sit at her desk and in between her lessons use the bathroom, make some tea, and grab a cookie before heading back to her desk. Online lessons were shortened from 45 to 30 minutes to allow for breaks from the screen, although lessons usually ran over, and students often stayed behind to talk to the teacher. Such monotony left Kinga with little motivation to continue to sit at her desk and do more work after school. After lessons, she only did the bare minimum required of her for the next day, “falling behind” with *matura* preparations. “There are no changes. When we went to school, more things happened; we were less lethargic; had more energy” she told me speaking in first person plural, highlighting the shared nature of the difficulties faced during online study among her peers.

Happenings on a regular school day acted as ‘positive stimuli’ upholding Kinga’s study motivation and concentration in class and after-school. Such stimuli can be distinguished from ‘negative distractors’ that became more pronounced during lockdown. Kinga added that “when we sit at home everything distracts us, something out the window, a sister’s or mother’s call – there are a lot of similar distractors”. She did not just attend class with her mind but with her whole

body, so when the body got bored (from sitting still) so did her mind, becoming more easily distracted. Her experience underscores that attention is always embodied, and that “attending to and with one’s body in surroundings” (Csordas 1993: 138) is an inherent aspect of attentional practice.

For Kinga, her academic progress changed dramatically with lockdown and the switch to online learning. When we spoke in the wintertime of 2021, Kinga was afraid of the spring exams and was not sure how the last stretch of her at home exam preparations would go. Another student, Olek, who draws and paints after school, told me that he would become too distracted by the art in the room. He would take a glance at a picture during class and lose track of time as he thought about improving it. Sometimes, he would only come to realise his deviation in focus after around 15 minutes – half of an online class. That said, Kinga’s and Olek’s experience of stimuli and distraction does not necessarily imply that online learning was always more distracting than classroom-based lessons. Some students found it easier to focus during online learning given the lack of peer-prompted distraction and ‘pressure’ to socialise during class.

Attention to and with one’s body considers the “embodied presence of others” (Csordas: *ibid*). How exactly the presence of others, or the lack thereof, influences learning depends on one’s relationship to and behaviour of the people in question. Still, it is not without reason that most students considered the presence of others in a class a more favourable learning environment, some even labelling online learning on a par with “no learning” at all. Insights on embodiment and intracorporeal interaction online also provide potential reasons behind attentional failures in the online class. Much of the analysis in the previous chapter concerned the effects of decorporalisation and ambient presence on attention and interaction on social media. Group video calls do, of course, include synchronous forms of body-to-body interaction on the screens but limit “our ability to achieve bodily resonance and synchrony” (Osler & Zahavi 2023: 1131) because of the difficulties in telling the direction of another’s bodily movement and gaze, assuming the cameras are on in the first place.

In a physical classroom, students are more strongly interpellated by the teacher’s presence in the Althusserian understanding of the term and will not as easily look away, especially when called upon.¹¹⁴ Coupled with class saturation and monotony, online lessons broke student-teacher

¹¹⁴ Althusser (2014 [1970]) spoke of interpellation as the hail that self-constitutes people as social subjects. In the case of my fieldsites, as high-school students.

reciprocity of sight and attention. When not directly looked at, even the more habitually attentive students felt little obligation to look back or even pretend they were listening. In the physical classroom, a student had to pay some attention to the teacher's position, even if it were to effectively divert it by, for example, placing the phone they were peeking at out of the teacher's sight.

When online lessons first began, teachers in Poland tried to make cameras a requirement for attendance, yet students soon found that they could not, by law, be obliged to turn on their camera because of the possibility of image infringement rights. Many students at my Warsaw fieldsite saw online lessons as an opportunity to carry out non-class related activities and connected themselves only to appear present, whether it meant devoting time to their hobbies, focusing on subjects they took exams in, or playing videogames. Their presence at the lessons was phantom. Grzesiek, a usually outspoken, thin, smooth-tongued teenager with a stubble and glasses, told me he and his colleagues used online lessons as an opportunity for self-development. Instead of, as he put it, "wasting time at school" Grzesiek would benefit from phantom participation by brushing up his foreign language skills, watching university lectures, and reading books – "not the 100-year-old schoolbooks nobody actually reads."

In the offline classroom space teachers would often scan the room and quiz students they either made eye contact with or caught looking at their phones. Online, personal callouts most often only took place once the teacher received no volunteer response to a question. In the example below, the teacher was asking about a Warren Buffet investment quote during an entrepreneurship lesson: "Be careful when others are greedy and be greedy when others are careful."

Pani Brodka asked the class, "Can we apply this to the current world situation?"

(5 second silence)

"Anybody?"

(3 second silence)

"Maybe Igor? Igor?"

(3 second silence)

"I will put you down as absent if you will not say anything."

(5 second silence after which Pani Brodka began answering the question herself, only to be interrupted by Igor mid first sentence)

Igor: "I am here, I am here!"

This time, lesson time ran out, saving the teacher from hearing the dreaded “what was the question again?” routinely asked by a phantom participant ‘attentionally’ re-entering the virtual classroom. Some phantom class participants would report technical issues to avoid being called out. This irritated the teachers or deepened their despair at the impossibility of acting upon the shield of malfunctioning technology. Others would rely on classmates informing them via social media that the teacher is asking for them.

Students in Cochabamba also practiced online phantom participation. A typical online social sciences lesson consisted of the teacher speaking and calling out reluctant or absent students to answer a question or present homework:

Profe Eugenia: “Which group is ready? - group 1?”

(3 second silence)

“There is nobody from group 1?”

(2 second silence)

“Group 2?”

(2 second silence)

“Group 3?”

Ines: “We are missing two people profe.”

Profe Eugenia: “Ok, send them a message to join the classroom. Meanwhile, group 4?”

Veronica: “We arranged things, but I think they didn't do it.”

The homework in question concerned enacting a scene about violence. Each group was assigned a different type of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. As the teacher became more irritated and threatened to give everybody failing marks, one student from group 2 decided to save the situation and improvise a scene on the spot. Nevertheless, his connection was so poor that nobody could hear him well. “Look for a better connection,” the teacher advised.

As we watched him walk around his Zona Sur neighbourhood searching for a better connection, Veronica from group 4 scribbled down a script. She then got in touch with her group via WhatsApp, asking them to enter the Google Meets classroom and read the script she sent them.

Profe Eugenia: “Oh. I see Pedro and Angelica have entered the class. Are you ready to present then?”

Veronica: “Yes profe, we are preparing ourselves.”

Profe Eugenia: “Let us wait a few more minutes then.”

The class waited for about 3 minutes, after which the teacher hurried the group up and they began to enact their scene. When it was Pedro's turn to speak silence once again ensued. Oblivious to the ongoing flow of the script and his role in it he had to be called upon three times: twice by his group and once by the teacher, before finally reading out his part. Teacher monologues and questions launched into the virtual void marked the everyday reality of online lessons I took part in during fieldwork, no matter whether the students were Warsaw or Cochabamba-based.

A virtual setting, however, does not automatically lead to ruptures in joint attention. Pagis and Tal (2022) explored the shift of group meditation sessions in Israel from physical to online settings, noting that rather than obliterating feelings of togetherness and co-presence, virtual sessions enhanced the attention participants gave to the presence of others and their own appearance. The direct eye contact of other participants offered by video-enabled meetings can make for a much stronger attentional pull than in a traditional classroom setting in which not everybody is in sight. Hence, the effects of online settings on attention and intracorporeal interaction should not be assumed but analysed in relation to the specifics of the participants and context.

Attentional synchrony in multi-participant online learning environments requires active cooperation and particularly high levels of student motivation because of the lack of direct teacher vigilance. Virtual classrooms at my fieldsites were characterised by an asynchronous distribution of attention and task allocation across students facilitating the avoidance of schoolwork and attention in class. This was visible in the way in which students relied on attentionally present others in the class to inform them if the teacher asks for them. Since students enjoyed and cared about different subjects they could selectively attend to those classes, aiding phantom participants in their attentional evasion and switch roles during classes they did not wish to attend to. Similar division of tasks took place in the distribution of homework. At Liceum Gawiecki, it would be sent completed by a self-assigned student to a group chat on Facebook Messenger. Students told me that they could rely on someone to pass on the completed homework, despite no official assignation. At Colegio Alalay, homework had to be completed in personal notebooks and photos of it sent to the teacher via WhatsApp, so it was more difficult to evade but students copied content from each other and before the COVID-19 pandemic would sometimes write or draw in each other's notebooks. In the cognitive configuration of the classroom, others served as "cognitive artifacts" (Hutchins 1999: 126) in the goal towards decreasing overall student workload.

In Cochabamba, technical issues during online lessons were so commonplace they did not need to be reported. Students had no obligation to turn on their cameras with an understanding that video traffic consumes a lot of mobile data. It took a few months after the announcement of the first lockdown in March 2020 for the online lessons to commence at all. Before late June 2020, teachers would send ad-hoc assignments to students on WhatsApp. For most students, it was economically unfeasible to connect to Zoom or Google Meets. In the following academic year, special packages for the use of videocall applications were introduced by main mobile providers. However, even after their introduction students skipped online lessons. Some students connected to class from the market and paid ‘dispersed’ attention to the lesson, simultaneously attending customers.

The lack of student engagement during online lessons was not a novelty but a pre-existing issue teachers faced during physical lessons. The monotony that negatively affected Kinga’s attentional capabilities at home was not only an issue inside the online classroom. When bored in the physical classroom, students at both my fieldsites also, more or less subtly, resorted to phantom participation. They would look at their phones, complete homework for other subjects, draw in their notebooks, or lie with their head on the desk overtly signalling boredom and disinterest. Dawid did not enjoy lessons during which a teacher talked, and the class had to “sit and write”, regardless of being at school or at home. He found them “dull” and consequently did not learn much. He believed he would take away much more from subjects like history or Polish if there was more space for discussion. This is why he was most absorbed in language learning: “there is more speaking...I need to say something sometimes...it catches my attention...influences my knowledge...my interest in the lesson.” His attentiveness and interest in a subject were also influenced by the teacher’s effort to diversify lesson activities. He recalled that he was much more interested in history in middle school because of a “cool teacher” who recorded songs on YouTube to facilitate date learning and carried out group projects. “We need more teachers like that”, Dawid announced, ending his reminiscence.

A teacher’s traditional outlook on authority could further discourage students from active engagement in the lesson and subject content. Once I witnessed Marek, the ‘troublemaker’ of the Spanish bilingual class, asking for permission to leave a lesson 5 minutes early to arrive on time for his football training. Pani Storczyk, a senior history teacher at Gawiecki, rejected his request, adding that “all extra activities, work...training... should be arranged for after lesson time.” The students did not agree with her that lesson time is necessarily prime. One of the girls defended

Marek by saying “But *proszę pani*¹¹⁵ just like you have a job, we have trainings”. Pani Storczyk did not engage with her argument and began complaining about the lack of manners and discipline of contemporary youth and contrasted them with the youth from “before,” who respected teachers and did not disturb. She instructed the class to pay attention: “You should be listening. Please hide your phones, backpacks behind you.” When the students ignored her, the teacher’s tone became more heated: “Backpacks behind you! Together with the phones!”. “I don’t have to...I can [put them away]”, Igor, a student sitting with Marek, replied. Once again, Pani Storczyk did not agree: “You can transfer to Wars (a high school for adults) where you will go once every two weeks and get the possibility to pass *matura* if you decide to come. Here, you must study.”

Pani Storczyk’s lack of flexibility was unfavourably interpreted by other students I met who had her as a teacher. Grzesiek remarked that his grades in history fell substantially since he started having lessons with her because he “closes himself off” and “does not feel like doing anything” when “everything must be serious and rigid”. The obligation to attend school clashed with the students’ sense of the autonomous self, as well as the stress put on preparedness for *matura* examinations. In this light, lessons, particularly in subjects one was not planning to sit the exams in, did not always feel like the most effective use of the students’ time. Pani Storczyk overlooked that for the students to pay attention to her, she had to pay attention to them. In her refusal to consider the importance of football training, she failed to take into account the students’ needs and broke the principle of attentional reciprocity. Such strict behaviour further made students feel less at ease to suggest more entertaining and engaging forms of pedagogic activity. Grzesiek suggested a presentation akin to the one he made during Pani Brodka’s lesson (see 5.3) would not have been possible with Pani Storczyk.

Obligation and rigidity seemed to have an equally negative effect on students’ attention in class at Colegio Alalay. This was certainly the case of Jaime, whom I saw as one of the more diligent students but who was not among the top scoring ones. During our interview, he explained to me that when a teacher yells ‘pay attention!’ he gets angry and pays attention “for the sake of it” and when the teacher doesn’t bother the class, he pays attention “normally”. He further elaborated that being compelled to do something only makes the task at hand more tough: “It makes it more difficult for me when I am forced, and I do not do it well.” When Profe Eugenia, teaching social science, first came to the school, Jaime thought that she might become one of his favourite

¹¹⁵ The typical way to formally address a person in Polish (lit. please Mrs).

teachers, but he changed his mind soon enough. “*Ya no me cae bien* (Sp. I do not like her anymore)”, he told me, “she scolded us for no reason the other day.”

Profe Eugenia frequently underscored the importance of teaching values during our conversations and retaliated it to the class. Her values, however, adhered to a traditional hierarchical model of respect and submissiveness towards authority. Not only did she frequently reprimand and raise her voice at the students, but she also ignored and belittled their points of view and opinions, shutting them off and calling them ‘ignorant’ when they disagreed with her, a detailed example of which appeared in Chapter 3 in my discussion of politics. Given her lack of understanding, the students did not always feel comfortable speaking to her about their problems, life goals, and quandaries. Like Pani Storczyk, Profe Eugenia did not enter into the dynamics of attentional reciprocity with her students, failing to establish mutual correspondence. Her authority was further put into question by refusing to acknowledge students who noticed her making errors when consulting materials online. For example, during a class on the European Union (EU), she vehemently stuck to her claim that Switzerland was part of the EU, despite students, who opened their phones on the EU Wikipedia page, correcting her. One student told me she learned that there was no point in correcting her. Instead of showing a ‘human’ face and admitting mistakes, the teacher never questioned her veracity or intellectual superiority over the student body.

Profe Eugenia and Pani Storczyk held a traditional conception of authority they considered to be inherent to their hierarchical position at the school. Weber (1964 [1925]) identified traditional authority as one of the three ideal types of authority, alongside legal-rational and charismatic authority. Traditional authority grants a person legitimacy based on their superiority in status, as backed by long-established traditions. Students acknowledged a teacher’s right to reward or punish them based on the appropriateness of their behaviour within the institutional framework, i.e. their legal-rational authority, but did not accept aggressive assertiveness or obey requests not required from them by law (e.g. turning cameras on during online lessons, putting backpacks behind). For the students at my fieldsites, teachers did not receive automatic legitimation and respect because of their role within the system. Thus, individual teachers’ schematic assumptions about their pedagogic authority sometimes diverged from the actual social construction of authority at the schools.

More progressive conceptualisations of teacher authority search for it in an educator’s professional knowledge and teaching capacity (see Hurn 1985). Sociologists have distinguished

professional authority as a yet distinct form of authority based on expertise and skill rather than bureaucracy or social position as such (Blau 1974; Parsons 1939). A teacher's professional claims to authority are based on their ability to realise educational objectives (Grant 1988; Pace 2003a). Contemporary ethnographic accounts point to the tensions and paradoxes of authority that ensue at the crossroads of ideological and interactional orders at the school (Hemmings 2006; Pace 2003a; 2003b; Mullooly & Varenne 2006). Teachers are prepared to forgo elements of authority in accordance with situational demands, as we got a glimpse of in the teacher's dilemmas posited by conflictive pedagogic orientations in Chapter 2. Since educational objectives are culturally grounded and differentially understood by actors at the school, the basis of a teacher's professional authority is inevitably contested. It is composed of a variety of elements, the salience of which will depend on the educational goal or scenario in question. The following section will scrutinise the basis of attentional success at the schools, including some of the elements which legitimise teacher authority.

5.3. Teaching the Human Way

“I remember this history and WOS teacher he was a wonderful human because telling us about history and society he gave us this information in such a normal *ludzki sposób* (Pl. human way)”

Izabela

The most common way to describe a good teacher by Polish students at Gawiecki was with reference to the human. A teacher would “explain things humanly” or “treat us like humans” etc. I refer to the conjunction of ‘human’ characteristics at school as teaching ‘the human way.’ Izabela’s middle school history and WOS teacher who taught “the normal human way”, or as you would say in Polish *w ludzki sposób*, did not just teach the class numerical dates of events and dry information on them but told stories and examples from life to facilitate the learning process. Teaching *w ludzki sposób*, however, did not only mean presenting material in an accessible and relatable manner. The approach has another side of the coin: treating students like fellow humans. Izabela recalls how you could approach the teacher and talk to him about issues unrelated to the lesson subject. She greatly appreciates when teachers “regardless of their obligations to teach ‘by the book’ subjects find the time to show us how life functions and the paths it can take”. Kinga, whose everyday struggles with online learning I have discussed above, told me she “really like[s] when teachers treat students like humans, not just like students”. She gave the example of her former mathematics teacher, who chatted with them about a variety of non-math-related topics

during break time, which influenced the “good impression” she had of him. Socialising with students beyond schoolwork positively influenced most student-teacher relations and frequent teaching staff rotation held repercussions on the student’s motivation and progress with the set material.

Kinga and her colleagues complained to me about the many changes in instructors their class faced in their last year of high school (in the subjects of physical education, biology, mathematics, and Polish). Kinga was particularly fond of their former Polish teacher, who was “nice and approachable” while remaining “strict and rigorous” – “not only did we lose a good teacher but a class teacher to a new one that is a cool, nice woman... but you know...during two years we have bonded with the other one, and the change was big.” Her classmate Aniela shared Kinga’s affection for their former teacher and claimed she may have even been the “best she ever had on her educational pathway”. As their class teacher, she was interested in their wellbeing. Aniela recalls that “when she saw that something was up, that someone’s got the blues, she always asked, took them aside during break time”. For Aniela, a teacher’s interest was “always a good sign” because it meant that “you can count on them”. The Polish teacher’s interest and positive encouragement made her believe in herself and greatly improve her Polish grades – a subject she simply assumed that she was weak in beforehand.

A human approach to catechism can also assuage the decline in Christian faith amid the ‘independence generation’s’ turn away from the Church and its teaching. Aniela recalled a catechist that used to teach her and talk about love, marriage, and everything God related in such a “wonderful way”: “not Church-like, she did not impose anything but spoke to us *w ludzki sposób*, like you should speak to people...I think many priests could learn a lot from her(...)you had the impression of coming to life lessons.” Aniela was excited to share with me her memories of teachers: “Oh my god, now that I talk about it, I got goosebumps; what great memories with those teachers; it is nice to bring them back.” Aniela’s description of her former religion teacher reminds me of Pani Różycka, the catechist at Gawiecki I introduced in Chapter 2. Pani Różycka’s pedagogic orientation followed Citton’s principles of joint attention. She paid attention to students, allowing them to disagree with her, as was often the case with regard to certain doctrines considered ‘outdated’ for present-day Catholic youth at Gawiecki (e.g. abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage). Furthermore, she affectively connected with them, following the flow of the moment and adjusting her lesson accordingly.

Pani Różycka's lessons did not seem to decrease in quality during online learning. They may have even gained in value, considering the conditions of lockdown and the pandemic. The class did inevitably cover less material, not only due to the shortened class time but also because they spent more time chatting about their days and to, as Pani Różycka once put it, "fulfill the human need for interaction". Online lessons also allowed the students to visually peek into Pani Różycka's private life. Pani Różycka did not blur or change her background, as did most teachers, allowing the students to see her study, inquire about the books behind her, and meet her early primary school-aged daughter, who sometimes barged in between her online lessons in need of something from her mother or simply to greet her. With few students attending non-obligatory religion, Pani Różycka's lessons had an intimate atmosphere favourable to the development of reciprocally attentive and caring relationships between her and her students.

Language classes possessed a similar propensity for the development of joint attention and the flowering of a tight-knit classroom by virtue of the small-size arrangement. Bilingual classes spent many hours learning a foreign language. Wilmer, whose Spanish lesson I opened this chapter with, even had his own classroom where he kept a kettle and cutlery. I would frequently spend the break sitting in his class, sipping on a cup of coffee, and talking to him, and other language teachers who would drop him a visit. Wilmer gave nicknames to many of his bilingual class students. For example, Diana was nicknamed his 'Secretary' because she sometimes helped him with completing bureaucracies in Polish and disseminated Spanish-related information to the class. A nickname could arise from Wilmer noticing a student eating a particular food product a lot ("Choco") or bumping into them at a particular place ("Carrefour" [the nearest big supermarket from the school]). The students did not find the nicknames out of place or embarrassing, but "sweet" and "funny". They felt rather comfortable while in Wilmer's class and sometimes made themselves coffee or tea. Once, when Diana asked whether they could make hot drinks Wilmer openly replied that they can but "only because you are my class". He differentiated the bilingual class he spent 6 hours weekly with from his other classes, even if he was not officially their class teacher.

Wilmer emphasised affective union and shared experiences between himself and his students. His classes were special and stood out in nature yet were "subtly integrated into the routines of everyday life" (Mazzarella 2017: 59). Wilmer and the bilingual class had certain rituals of placing specific songs, chants, or jokes as markers underlying chosen classroom events. Once I walked into the class to see Wilmer perform a happy march in place with papers in his hand and a grin on his face. "It is his favourite day of the month – *kartkówka* (Pl. short test)", Diana commented,

laughing. Before the test began, Wilmer asked the students whether they had revised for it. When the students declared they did not, as was most often the case, Wilmer put on the lead song of a kids' programme aired on Polish national television between 2000 and 2007 called "Jedyneczka" (Pl. little number one) in allusion to the failing grade they may receive. The students would then set up the tables for the *kartkówka* to its tune. Such 'entertainment' factors contributed to the exceptionality of Wilmer's lessons in conjunction with student familiarity. Without the latter, they could have been interpreted as 'childish' or 'boring' (see 5.4).

One of the best examples of attentional success and interpellation powers I witnessed in a larger classroom environment came not from a teacher but from a student at Liceum Gawiecki. Grzesiek was giving a presentation on nuclear power during a geography lesson with Pani Brodka, which took place offline when students briefly returned to the school. He commenced with an honest declaration of purpose and acquiescence: "As you all know, I am here in front of you for a simple reason: I wish to raise my grade and share with you something I was once interested in. To all of those not really interested, I have got no rancour; do as you wish discreetly." He proceeded to show and read the definition of nuclear energy from Wikipedia, commenting on it: "You don't get it; I don't get it.... because it is written in such a language." He then broke it down by explaining the chemical reactions in simpler terms. After finishing with the chemical formalities, upon the class's approval, Grzesiek recounted the story of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster: "The atmosphere was tight...the test of the reactor was meant to take place in the afternoon, but it was already 11 p.m. and everybody was waiting to go home...just like us...only English left and home!"

As Grzesiek recounted the events of the night leading up to the melting of the reactor core, almost everybody listened to their classmate, a rare sight during Pani Brodka's lessons, despite her efforts to diversify class activities (see 5.4). Grzesiek demonstrated an intuitive knowledge of the classroom principles of joint attention. He was making the material relatable, kept appropriate eye contact, and stood in 'affective communion' with the listening class, knowing and sharing their feelings about school as confining and futile in nature as a fellow student. Grzesiek's presentation was a one-off event the key to which was as he put it "a performance of sorts" with "casual speech" and "catchy phrases". According to Grzesiek, grasping student attention requires, scarce among teaching staff, "oratory skills" but also "breaking the Sir-pupil barrier" and "establishing forms of partnership". I believe the last to be particularly important when considering more recurrent attentional success as coupled with educational commitment.

Attentional reciprocity is not, however important, only a question of keeping the class interesting and fun. Wilmer, the Spanish teacher, was also aware of students' problems at and beyond school and observed their patterns of learning, providing them with extensive positive and negative feedback and advice for improvement rather than clear-cut numerical grades only. What is at stake with the attentional success of education is the efficacy of communication that is more about communion and care than mere information transfer (see Citton 2017: 18; Ingold 2018). Teachers need to, nevertheless, take into account the institutional demands of schooling when considering student care. Hemmings (2006) argued that commitment to communitarian care prevalent in an urban American high school with predominantly disadvantaged youth proved disabling for academic achievement and the cultivation of student character. In Wilmer's case, however, on-the-spot attentional success, academics, and care for the students were co-dependent and intertwined. His was an exceptional case at Liceum Gawiecki. Conditions for care and mutual correspondence between students and teachers were more easily achievable at my Zona Sur fieldsite.

At Colegio Alalay, many of the students were taught by the same teachers for many years. Such familiarity created a naturally intimate atmosphere, making certain aspects of teaching akin to the 'human way' referred to by Polish students more effortless. Most instructors saw it as their responsibility to attend to students' personal development and troubles beyond their subjects. Students considered them part of a close circle of people they care about and can trust. They celebrated the teachers' birthdays and spoke very fondly about most of them. "*La/lo queremos mucho*" (Sp. we care about her/him a lot) was a common component of student responses when asked about particular teachers.

Teachers used their familiarity with the students to relate academic exercises to real life examples and catch their attention. Profe Hugo, who taught physics and chemistry at Colegio Alalay, was a case in point. During his lessons, the students struck me as particularly focused on the schoolwork and responsive to the teacher, even if his subjects were not usually mentioned among students' favourites. While discussing Newton's laws, he used relatable examples and brought students from the class into them:

- I. "If nothing intervenes, if lost in his thoughts Omar (who often daydreams) won't be stopped by a wall (class laughs), everything will continue in uniform movement."

- II. “If you’re playing football and kick lightly, the ball will go lightly. If Elizabeth (the attacker on the girls’ football team) hits a ball angrily with all her force it will go fast and far but fall beyond the court.”
- III. “ Everything we do has an action and reaction. For example, if you speak badly about your brother, he will get mad. If you do not study and do not prepare yourself for evaluation, you will fail [the subject/year].”

Most teachers at Colegio Alalay possessed information about students beyond their academic achievements. Since the size of the school was small and there was no designated teacher’s room, teachers and students quickly learned about each other’s favourite activities and habits during the 15-minute breaktime between lessons. This visibly contrasts with my Polish fieldsite, where most teachers did not remember the names of all their students given their sheer quantity. Furthermore, breaks at Liceum Gawiecki were three times shorter and students usually had to move classrooms between lessons, leaving them with very little time to rest and socialise among themselves and with teachers. Teacher turnout was also greater making it less likely for the students to be taught by the same teachers in consecutive years.

Teachers at Colegio Alalay also made visible their non-teaching side during a designated *hora civica* (Sp. civic hour) at Colegio Alalay. During “Día del Estudiante” (Sp. Student’s Day), teachers were expected to perform for the students, inverting the typical roles assumed during other ‘civic hours’ in which teachers were audiences. The teacher performances during “Día del Estudiante” in 2019 included an American 90’s rap song by MC Hammer, a *cueca cochabambina*¹¹⁶, and the recitation of a poem. Students laughed and cheered as three male teachers jumped around in loose clothes, reversed baseball caps, and sunglasses to “Can’t Touch This” or when a female-male teacher pair chased each other through the courtyard tearing down pieces of each other’s clothing in the seductive game-dance typical of a Cochabambian *cueca*.

Entertainment was not an unequivocal and unitary path to authority but was complementary to efficiency in teaching. Students complained to me about teachers who spent most of their class time on the school patio or court with a *salchipapa* (pan-fried beef sausages and French fries), watching other classes play football or chatting away instead of teaching. They considered Profe Ignacio, the *asesor* of the promo 2020 and teacher of Visual Arts, as such. The majority of students enjoyed art and were fond of his lessons but believed he was not serious enough about teaching

¹¹⁶ The cueca is a rhythmic tap-based type of dance typical of South American with variations in regional style.

them and were thus more likely to disregard his opinions on pedagogic matters. While anger and obligation were not a way to gain student attention, treating teaching too loosely also led to losses in teacher authority.

Profe Fuentes, a mathematics teacher and promo 2019 *asesor*, was one of the most popular teachers representing the ‘right’ combination of rigour, friendliness, and understanding. If a student did not arrive on time, he would not let him into the classroom, although never scold or yell at him. I once chatted with two students who got ‘locked out’ of the class. They did not blame the teacher for it. Rather, they admitted they should take care to arrive on time. Profe Fuentes himself was never late, which could not be said about most teachers at Alalay. If late or absent, Profe Fuentes would commission the best-performing students to engage the class and explain material, granting them the right to annotate misbehaviour and discipline other students. Thus, he never allowed for the class to idly sit (or fool around) while waiting for the teacher. In my Polish field scenario, Profe Fuentes’s rules of organisation are unlikely to have been so favourably looked upon given the increased necessity for free time and high levels of teacher punctuality. The teacher’s attractiveness and attentional pull partially rests on the extraordinary qualities of his character within the status quo conditions of the school.

Keeping the students busy did not mean that Profe Fuentes only cared about advancing his subject material. When I interviewed him about his approach to teaching, he stressed that “not everything is mathematics; at times, there are other things more important than maths, you have to try and find the way”. According to Profe Fuentes, a teacher should be aware that their subject may not be the centre of a student’s world. Their priority should be making sure students grow up to be ‘good people’:

“I always tell the kids look I do not expect you to be great at maths... because lots of people do not know it...because it does not serve them in life. It serves them to be a good person and be good in something: football, biology, languages, or just be a good person... it is more or less like this.”

Profe Fuentes visibly supported students in issues unrelated to his subject. Notably, he served as the symbolic guardian of Isabel, a student alienated from her parents, and even took on the responsibility of becoming the Catholic godfather of her child.

Authority is not a dispositional property a teacher is in possession of or lacks but is negotiated and dynamically constituted in action. It is a quality arising from teacher-student interactions

(Mullooly & Varenne 2006; Pace 2003a). Thus, even the most respected teachers are unlikely to gain appeal and regard from every student at the school. Jaime told me he does not trust Profe Fuentes because the teacher once accused him of copying a piece of work he completed on his own. Zosia from the bilingual class at Gawiecki detested Wilmer. I once heard her complain to her friends during break time how she could not stand the sight of him and his “pretentious smile” that she caricatured saying “*jedyneczka*” (see above). She called him a “nice asshole” with whom you “cannot even fight” because “he never yells”. In the opinion of another student, the Polish teacher whom Kinga and Aniela liked so much was too attentive to non-academic student needs. The student in question preferred when teachers did not meddle with students’ private lives. The school is a site of a diversity of ideological positions and stakeholders (See Gellner 2015). The less consensus on educational priorities and values among the student population, the lower the likelihood of agreement on deference towards particular teachers. The personal qualities and teaching styles I described as favourable of attentional success drew the respect of most students within the school, based on the cultural and structural circumstances of my fieldsites but were not an unequivocal recipe for legitimate authority.

Classroom authority rarely manifests itself in its ideal types but more often than not consists of “hybridized enactments” (Pace 2003a: 1559) that draw on teaching expertise, bureaucratic accountability, and charisma. As derivatives of face-to-face interaction, authority relations at school are highly personal. They challenge Metz’s characterisation of authority as an “institutionalised (...) relationship of roles, not of persons” (1978: 27). To understand a teacher’s attentional pull, one must push beyond organizational backing connotative of authority-based relations. To borrow from Mazarella’s conceptualization of mana, classroom attentional success is equally more about an “intimate resonance” and “decisive moments of illumination, identification, desire, and such” (2017: 58,60) than about authority per se. Even so, the teacher’s superordinate positionality at the school forms part of the classroom’s attentional nexus. Attentional success in the classroom is dialogical and rests on the teacher’s ability to instigate combined forms of authority and human resonance, speaking to a variety of culturally and institutionally constituted educational and personal student needs. The next section will take a closer look at the broader social and structural conditions that shape attentional prioritisation in the classroom.

5.4. Sociality and Structural Conditions of Schooling

How much student attention teachers and their classes receive depends not just on the teachers themselves but also on institutional constraints as well as social approaches to schooling and

student sociality practices surrounding them. Some teachers could achieve basic levels of joint attention and authority with students yet failed to establish longer-term mutual correspondence. I end this chapter with the experiences of two such teachers at my Polish fieldsite to highlight how the ability to achieve mutual correspondence and attentional success can be visibly influenced by the school structure and student attitudes toward learning. Their cases, as contrasted with the average teacher's experience at *Colegio Alalay*, underscore that the potentiality of joint attention lies not only in the teacher's willingness but also their work conditions and the particularities of the student body.

At the time of my fieldwork, Pani Brodka was in her mid-50s and had been a teacher for 12 years. She put visible effort into her appearance, coming to work dressed in elegant dresses or suit sets with matching accessories, which were often complimented by her students and co-workers. Pani Brodka originally trained as an accountant but seeing her kids off and picking them up from school she felt "something inside...something like a calling...feeling that she needs to become a teacher". She taught geography, economics, and entrepreneurship at *Gawiecki*. Miss Brodka's lessons in the basics of entrepreneurship were generally appreciated by students because they included practical information about the market and citizen bureaucracy with direct applicability to real life situations. As Olga, who recently turned 18, told me during our interview, "at least I knew how to apply for an identity card, passport, and driving licence". She kept her "basics of entrepreneurship" notebook, convinced she would make use of it later in life, and feels it is the only school subject she truly benefited from. Pani Brodka also held a visible interest in and paid attention to her students. She was able to spot, and felt worried about, students whose engagement in class changed over time, like Grzesiek's decrease in participation during online lessons. She gained the trust of several students and sometimes stayed behind to advise them on personal issues after class time.

Despite the similarities between Pani Brodka and Wilmer or Pani Różycka, during my observations, the entrepreneurship teacher did not seem to fully master the art of teaching the 'human way' in her classroom. I argue that institutional and bureaucratic constraints contributed to such outcomes. They constituted a structural restraint on the development of mutual correspondence between Pani Brodka and her students. She taught a total of 18 different classes, each with around 30 students, making it practically impossible for her to keep track of all of them. It was not uncommon for her to forget a student's name and class or mistake classes while allocating tasks on Teams. As I learned from our brief chats on Teams in-between lessons, she

was visibly overworked, often staying until late at night to correct student assignments and carry out other bureaucratic work. Those tasks took attentional space that Pani Brodka could have devoted to students and class preparation. Teachers had to take on more lessons than required of their base salary either due to economic necessity or because there was simply not enough teaching staff to meet the student demand. Pani Brodka had recently trained to teach geography as a favour for the school headmaster who did not manage to hire a new geography teacher.

The teacher's profession is currently not among the most coveted jobs on the Polish market. Amazed at Grzesiek's presentation skills and his ability to keep the students attentive, Pani Brodka encouraged him to become a teacher: "You have got a talent! Maybe you should use it. You would not want to become a teacher? Who would you like to become?"

"I would like to earn a lot of money," Grzesiek replied.

"So not a teacher." Pani Brodka reacted with a hint of disappointment in her voice.

Teacher remuneration rates and work conditions are a hot topic within the Polish social media attentionscape. In 2019, Polish teachers staged the so far biggest national strike of the 21st century, demanding increases in the educational budget. Teacher demands were not met but the strike incited a nation-wide conversation about teachers' salaries and responsibilities. Risking oversimplification, we can speak of two main opinion camps regarding the social and economic positioning of teachers: one of which considers teachers to be grossly underpaid and overworked due to institutional and personal necessities to take extra hours; the other considers them to be in favourable work conditions given the amount of paid "vacation" time they get. The first camp sees the roots of educational inadequacies in underfunding and other structural constraints, while the second in teachers' laziness and low levels of competence.¹¹⁷ The non-competitive starting wage, low prospects for significant future increases, and relatively low prestige make a career in teaching an increasingly unpopular choice amongst recent university graduates, who would further require postgraduate pedagogical training to obtain a post at a public school. Lack of societal support for the teacher's cause and disappointment with the job further trigger teacher outflux from public schools into private institutions, tutoring, or a complete career change.

Teachers in Bolivia are also underpaid in comparison to similarly educated profession groups (Copana Paucara 2018) and stage frequent strikes and protests in demand of educational budget

¹¹⁷ I drew such conclusions based on observations of groups about education and conversations underneath education related posts on social media. The conversations underneath the economist's Tomasz Wyluda tweet comparing Lidl cashier and storage worker wages to teachers provide a good example of the two camps <https://twitter.com/tomaszwyluda/status/1590672082777829376> (accessed 20/11/2023).

increases. However, despite being grossly underfunded, the education sector remains an attractive career option for recent school graduates. A teaching post provides relative economic stability and social status. It ensures a monthly income, automatic salary ascent and the important for students at Colegio Alalay status of a professional (see Ch.2). Sitting exams to attend the *normal* (Sp. teacher's college) and become a teacher was a popular choice amongst students at Colegio Alalay when considering further education options, while none of the students I collaborated with at Liceum Gawiecki considered becoming an educator. Both Polish and Bolivian teachers are underpaid and overworked. Still, my fieldsites showed considerable differences in the social status of the teacher profession and flexibility at work. The number of teaching hours legally expected of a full-time teacher are the same in Poland and Bolivia. Nevertheless, I had the impression that teachers at Colegio Alalay were overall less fatigued and more motivated to work than those at Liceum Gawiecki. This may have been partially due to the lack of formal examinations, which gave teachers less responsibility over students' futures and more flexibility with the material they covered. Furthermore, administrative matters were frequently taken care of during class time. For example, teacher meetings took place during lessons. Most teachers also tended to dedicate particular class days to marking homework and exams instead of taking them home, as did the Polish teachers.

Efficient management of time and attention was not just an issue for teachers but also for students at Liceum Gawiecki. Rather than seeing it as helpful with their exam preparations, students saw school attendance as more of a hindrance, particularly when it came to subjects they did not wish to sit exams in. Students wishing to pass the school year and be allowed to sit *matura* examinations had to meet the attendance requirements. Students contrived ways to evade those requirements. For example, I heard students ask whether "justified absences" count towards the absence limit. One student straight on asked Pani Brodka during a pedagogic hour: "If I have 100 hours of absence (maximum permitted for graduating students) I go to the headmaster, and then what?" Pani Brodka replied, "I don't know; it depends on the headmaster." "Next time you speak with him, you can ask whether he thinks it is easy to study constantly till 11 pm with *korepetycje* (Pl. private tuition).", another student remarked sneeringly. Pani Brodka raised her eyebrows in bewilderment and signs of worry. "Why do you all have tutors? School does not give you anything?" she asked. "Exactly, exactly", a female student said under her breath, but loud enough for me to hear from the other side of the room. The crammed curriculum, inconsistencies between class lessons and exam requirements, and the resulting student and parent fears of exam failure push the Polish middle classes to opt for private individual extra afterschool lessons (Siadak 2009). Finding it difficult to keep focused during both school lessons and *korepetycje* afterschool, students

‘zone out’ during class lessons, further increasing the importance of private tuition as a significant source of subject learning and exam preparation in a vicious circle of exhaustion and inattention. Poland’s high-stake examinations and attentional expectations at school put a strain on student’s attentional resources, leading to fatigue and a vicious circle of de-motivation among the student and teacher school population.

Overburdened by bureaucracies and pupil numbers, teachers find it difficult to help students break from this circle and channel their attention towards themselves. “I am curious how you will write the upcoming test if you are on your phones all the time” Pani Brodka announced to the class. To mark her point, she then pointed towards a student sitting near the back of the room: “*Koleżanka* (Pl. female friend/colleague) here is not interested at all.” Agnieszka, the *koleżanka*, whose name Pani Brodka did not recall, looked up at the teacher, acknowledging she heard her comment, and without answering, looked back into her phone. I interpret her nonchalant behaviour as reclaiming the right to decide about the direction of her attention in the school’s attentional regime. She was paying attention, simply not to the teacher. Later on during the lesson, the girl was once again targeted by Pani Brodka with a question: “How much do you have to multiply by to receive the tax value?”

“Tax?” She looked up from her phone again, this time with a questioning voice.

“0.19” another student came to her rescue.

“Oh! Exactly by that!” the *koleżanka* cheerfully replied in a voice of theatrical realization, pointing towards the classmate that assisted her. In the scenario above, the teacher and student were momentarily joint in attention. For a brief moment, they achieved “affective communion” that is an “indispensable substrate of any communication” (Citton 2017: 91), even if this communion effectively communicated to the teacher the lack of student interest in her lesson. Teachers tried to exercise authority, but when faced with indifference en masse there was little they could do. The more senior teachers’ body language and tone of voice frequently signalled fatigue and disappointment. They recited the lesson content with little intonation and avoided eye contact with students to dodge the need to reprimand them for misbehaviour or inattention. They sighed or covered their face in their hands in defeat if students ignored them or felt compelled to repeat an admonition.

The dearth of student engagement visibly depleted the enthusiasm of a young teacher who joined Liceum Gawiecki during the time of my fieldwork. Pani Gaśik transferred from a primary school to Liceum Gawiecki in 2020, and taught biology, chemistry, and natural sciences. The last subject

was targeted as a complementary science course for humanities-focused classes and did not have a corresponding *matura* examination, allowing the teacher to be more flexible with class activities. Pani Gąsik's plump face donned a smile, and her eyes were lit with a spark absent from the demeanour of most of the other teachers her senior giving her a friendly and welcoming aura. Her natural sciences lessons were filled with games, quizzes, and arts-based assignments such as poster making or creative waste reuse. As part of the lessons on environmentalism, the students were once asked to find a new use for a piece of waste they could find at home. Another time, they were asked to create an outfit from reused materials for an ecological fashion show. The students, nevertheless, rarely put much effort into their work, completing it as you would say colloquially in Polish "*na odwal się*" (Pl. carelessly; lit. to piss off).

The very same activities that caused my Bolivian interlocutors' eyes to spark were looked upon by Polish students with indifference. Students at Alalay battled over planting flowers in the courtyard garden but when Pani Gąsik brought trees for her classes to plant none of the students volunteered to help. Crayons, ribbons, and patterned papers were important and valued materials among students at Colegio Alalay. They used them to lavishly decorate their notebooks and other schoolwork, devoting a considerable budget for their purchase. They became incorporated into the school's broader sociality practices. Student's exchanged supplies between each other to diversify their work so materials circulated the class space. A few of Pani Gąsik's high-school students, on the other hand, told me that by using arts and crafts in her teaching methods she was treating them like children and therefore rarely put much effort into them.

During a video-call interview we held Pani Gąsik suggested that the roots of student inattention and lack of motivation in class lie in societal overstimulation:

"Now kids have access to everything; nothing is interesting to them anymore. They constantly need something new, something wow; they are saturated by internet news; everything is normal for them; the world changes and they receive up-to-date information on it. Beforehand, when there was a projector or an interactive billboard, there was a 'wow'. Students saw such things for the first time at school ...now I feel I will need to create a virtual reality in the classroom to catch their interest."

A few months later when we caught up on Facebook messenger she confessed that she is "starting to lose heart for education": I am ceasing to see the sense in teaching, and I am so fed up with the system 😞."

Student boredom and disinterest towards lessons at school are far from a novelty, as has been duly documented by ethnographers of education well before mass mobile media (see McNeil 1986; Willis 2016 [1978]; Swindler 2013 [1979]). What differs are the reasons behind them and the conditions that shape their emergence. Boredom is a subjective interpretation of a situation rather than something inherent in an object or event (Conrad 1997: 473). It arises from the failure to meet socially derived expectations (ibid: 468). Westgate and Wilson (2018) proposed a theory of boredom, which includes a discussion of attentional resources, contextual factors, and goal congruency. In their account, boredom has many faces and can result from deficits in meaning, as well as overstimulation. Contemporary ethnographic research on boredom has sought to go against boredom's privileged status by emphasising its linkages to socio-economic marginalisation of youth communities (Jovicic 2021; Bengtsson; 2012). However, a confined focus on marginalisation risks neglecting the ways in which overstimulation and high availability can result in an exceptionally profound form of boredom that leaves one with little hope for anything interesting to ever happen.¹¹⁸

We should, however, be wary of taking Pani Gašik's assertion that nothing is interesting to the students anymore at face value. My Polish interlocutors were invested in a variety of after-school activities, including arts (drawing, theatre, music), sports (football, volleyball, athletics), and other subject matter interests they hoped to pursue professionally after school (nutrition, sexology). A student could repeatedly skip physical education lessons but devotedly attend after school football trainings and other sports practice. While societal overstimulation has likely added fuel to the momentum for student boredom and disinterest, those are further upheld by everyday sociality practice reaffirming them.

On average, students at Liceum Gawiecki had a rather lackadaisical approach to schooling and considered lessons negligible. Subtle signals that school knowledge is perceived as redundant popped up throughout my fieldwork at the school in the remarks students uttered during class time: "We are wasting time," "I am not sure why we are doing this," "I won't need this." Such sentiments were particularly commonplace with regards to information-heavy humanities subjects like history or Polish with a literature canon most students consider superannuated. Neoliberalisation of the schooling system (see Ch.2) further accentuated the pragmatic essence of formal education as a gateway towards the attainment of diplomas rather than a goal in itself. Still, even the potential for high scores at *matura* exams was not a strong motivator for classroom

¹¹⁸ See Goodstein (2005) for a philosophical treatise on boredom and modernity with a similar line of argumentation.

attention at Liceum Gawiecki. Few students aspired to earn a full-time place in one of the city's most prestigious public universities, many betting their future career success on entrepreneurial or artistic rather than academic skills. I do not claim such an approach to be representative of the full spectrum of urban middle classes in Poland. Gawiecki itself hosts a diverse student population who enrolled in the lower-ranked school for a variety of reasons I spelled out in the introduction to this thesis, not all of whom held a negative approach towards schooling.

At Liceum Gawiecki, the prevalence of disenchantment in the school system favoured a sociality of school failure among students, making lack of attention in class or playing truant accepted normative behaviours. Interactions in which students showed indifference, a lack of shame, and sometimes even pride in receiving low grades were common, even during lessons with teachers with a good reputation like Pan Robert, whose students tended to get relatively high scores on *matura* examinations. "Oh! I have got a 2 from that!" I once heard a student reply to Pan Robert questioning whether the class remembered a particular set of material. "We don't sell friends," I heard a different student say when he inquired to the class about a non-cooperative student's name. Some teachers returned graded tests in the order of scores, and the class would clap when it came to the failing grades. Colleagues would help each other by providing called-out deskmates with answers to teachers' questions looked up on mobiles in a brisk manner. Volunteering classmates for answers and activities for fun, a common practice at Colegio Alalay, was a rare sight.

The key place of sociality in the production of counter-school culture is evident in classical ethnographic accounts of education. For example, Paul Willis's working class 'lads' opposed teacher authority and school conformists 'the earlobes' by getting together and "having a laff" (2017 [1978]: 23). The 'lads' anti-school sociality was a deep-seated aspect of class relations that marked them in opposition to middle- and upper-class culture. At Gawiecki, the creation of a counter-school culture was linked to the decrease in the societal status of public schooling, the related belief in its inability to prepare them for adulthood, information-saturation, and monotony, which all contributed to the development of a sociality of inattention and demotivation.

Students at Colegio Alalay held a very different approach to schooling than their Warsaw contemporaries. The importance of becoming *profesionales* marks Bolivian school life. To repeat the key argument I made in Chapter 2, there exists a general assumption among students and teachers that you must study hard and do well in school in order to enter university and become a professional. A belief in schooling and the intention to attend to it, even if not always adhered to,

were nourished by the students through everyday sociality practices encouraging learning. During a visit to my apartment with the objective of practicing English, Rommel told me how he did not understand or like math a lot before Omar began explaining it to him: “He showed me it can be fun once you get it. The enthusiasm is kind of infectious.”

This was not the only time I heard learning described by the students in epidemiological terms. One day I arrived at a promo 2020 lesson to see Ana, who usually sat at the back, sitting in the front row. I asked her what motivated this change: “Well...those in the back row are lazy. It is very contagious” she explained. “What is contagious?” I asked for clarification. “Well...the laziness. If you sit there at the back, it infects you; if you sit at the front with those girls, *de una te da ganas de producir* (Sp. You immediately feel like working/lit. makes you want to produce).” Betty and Omar, who year-by-year received recognition for their top grades, sat together and encouraged each other to study. “She pinches me and says ‘attend!’ when I lose focus, and I do the same when I see her drift away”, Omar told me during an interview further commenting, “I missed her when she was absent; there was nobody to hit me and tell me I have got to do things!” Not everybody at Colegio Alalay was a school ‘nerd’. Drawing, listening to music, or streaming movies on one’s phone more often than not proved more attention-grabbing during lesson time. After school, for most students, other things took precedence too, be it football, playing Dota (a multiplayer online battle videogame) in Internet cafes, house chores, or paid labour. However, at Colegio Alalay there was, in contrast to the aura at Liceum Gawiecki, the will to attend school, which actualised itself when classmates inspired and supported each other in understanding materials and following intentions.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter analysed attentional practice in teacher-student relations, focusing on attentional success and attentional failures at the school. I argued that attentional success in the classroom, the power to channel student attention towards the lesson, has roots in the human propensity to join attention with others that can be harnessed towards the attainment of mutual correspondence and educational goals. Attentional reciprocity in the classroom occurs within a broader social ecology of attention, the characteristics of which can put constraints on or favour the development of longer-term mutual correspondence between students and teachers.

In urban Poland, the compulsory and restrictive nature of schooling was incompatible with the adolescents’ attentional management and priorities. The too-information-replete and exam-

centred curriculum not only hindered the teacher's potential for creative lessons but also limited students ability to pay attention in class. Much of the time, students were not simply distracted by their phones or peers in class but actively chose to divert their attention, attend superficially, or free-flowingly in an effort to retain focus only on subjects of most interest to them or on after-school activities. Student boredom is intimately bound to motivation, the paucity of which developed amid insufficient belief in schooling and sociality practices, discouraging engagement. This lack of engagement, coupled with bureaucratic constraints, low pay, and debatable social status, disheartened teachers. Students and teachers at my Warsaw fieldsite seemed stuck in a vicious circle of demotivation in which they depleted each other's enthusiasm.

There is no doubt that in Cochabamba the *mana* of mass society condensed on student phone screens and other attention-pulling triggers, including peers, homework due next period, or the newly arrived anthropologist sitting in the back, often took attentional precedence over the teacher speaking at the front and the class material. However, unlike many of the Polish students, almost none of them questioned the need to do well at school. They believed they should study in order to enter university and become *profesionales*. Teachers in Bolivia often got angry at the students but were never so visibly discouraged, likely because of the hope and motivation gained from pro-school student sociality and more intimate student-teacher relations.

In both field scenarios, teaching 'the human way' can be characterised as the ability to pass on lesson material in a relatable manner and personalised treatment of students and proved key to attentional success and the creation of productive learning scenarios. Both Colegio Alalay and Liceum Gawiecki were similarly challenged by the shift to online lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic because of its technological demands and limitations that put a strain on attentional reciprocity. Virtuality is not a determinate interruption to learning in itself but within the social attentional ecology of my fieldsites it curbed the achievement of attentional correspondence and affective communion, crucial for teaching 'the human way'.

Conclusion

“The cosmic *savoir vivre*
may keep silent on our subject,
still it makes a few demands:
occasional attention, one or two of Pascal’s thoughts,
and amazed participation in a game with rules unknown.”

Wisława Szymborska
from poem “Distraction”

6.1. Attentional Nexus and Practice

When opening this thesis, I introduced the public view of youth attention as the object of a social tug of war that pits traditional adult authority, such as the family or school, against the pull of new digital technologies. The fear is that the proliferation of possible attentional choices makes youth lost, distracted, and ultimately disinterested. Throughout the pages of this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate that such claims provide a very simplistic view of youth as attentional subjects. World history, past personal experiences, and on-the-spot circumstances all overlap in shaping the distribution and course of youth attention in cross-temporal configurations. Those configurations engage a variety of material and human cognitive artefacts and are embedded in a broader social ecology of attention, which I identified as a form of nexus. The attentional nexus of my fieldsites can be thought of as a game design on which attentional practice unfolds. Its platform circumscribes possible attentional moves but has no fixed rules and can be re-shaped in the process of gameplay. Throughout the pages of this thesis, I sought to shed light on the kinds of attentional strategies actors at my fieldsites made and the elements that influenced their practice depending on the cognitive configuration of attention in question, highlighting attention’s agentic and political character.

Chapters 1 and 2 focused on the formation and maintenance of attentional patterns at the collective level. Chapter 1 considered the historical constitution of elements that stood out as worthy of national mediatic and political attention and their relation to prevalent collective world imaginaries, highlighting national history as an important element of the attentional nexus. I discussed how past foreign occupations at my fieldsites are linked to cognitive associations that become conspicuous and open to ‘debate’ when threatened by novelty, making what I termed the

social attentionscape a good indicator of historical changes in the cognitive configuration of the nation-state. In Bolivia, the continuity of schematic associations of modernity with Western lifestyle and aesthetics exemplified the persistence of a “colonisation of imagination” (Quijano 2007: 169) that is challenged by the increased symbolic and political prominence of Indigeneity. In Poland, the memory of exploitation reverberates in the synthesis of Polishness with martyrdom and with Catholicism in remembrance of the Church’s integrative and emancipatory functions under the occupations, counteracted by European and liberal politics of belonging in the ascent post-1989. The second half of the chapter introduced the idea of the state as an attentional agent that selectively attends to goal befitting elements in the symbolic repertoire of the nation in legitimisation of political authority. The states’ attentional strategies consisted of handpicking historical events and aesthetic images in accordance with ideological and political objectives, as I accentuated with a discussion of national educational policies.

In Chapter 2, I sought to illustrate how historically informed cognitive inclinations and everyday pragmatic concerns materialise in the pedagogic routine of the school. The pedagogic orientation of belonging at Liceum Gawiecki championed an international mindset, freedom of thought, and tolerance towards others as means of fostering modern “European” citizens. Such efforts were nevertheless overshadowed by a present-oriented academic focus on examinations. I showed how teachers of externally examined subjects had very little scope for making modifications in their teaching according to personal preferences and convictions, bringing forth the significance of bureaucracy in the attentional nexus of pedagogic orientations at Liceum Gawiecki. At Colegio Alalay, the state’s focus on Indigeneity, or *pachamamismo* (Sp. Mother Earthism) as the school staff called it, was considered an ideological redundancy, which proved an obstacle to the desired pedagogic focus on the formation of university graduates or *profesionales* based on a valorisation of Western epistemic knowledge and aesthetics.

Together, chapters 1 and 2 showed the workings of collective attention at the level of the nation and the school, bringing forth the ruptures and linkages between the macro and micro scales of the politics of attention. The states’ ethos of resistance entered the school via curricular regulations in the form of Catholic-nationalist (Poland) and decolonising (Bolivia) pedagogics but was counteracted by teachers’ discrepant normative schemas of thought and action. The latter can be thwarted by strong bureaucratic obligations like the *matura* exam at Liceum Gawiecki or interact with state policies in unexpected ways, as in the concern with on-the-spot school community needs that unintentionally aligned much pedagogic practice at Colegio Alalay with governmental aims.

Chapter 3 works as a transition chapter in the thesis. It draws upon the findings on collective attention presented in Section I but marks an explicit turn to youth as the thesis's main protagonists. It presents an effort to understand their moral reasoning and its relation to electoral politics. The chapter introduced the affective dimension inherent in the political agency of attention, in which emotions highlight certain aspects of the environment as moral. I sought to illustrate how what I called 'moral emotional attention' works at the intersection of affective channelling, cognitive heuristics, and politics, stirring up historically accumulated sentiments and aggravating political antagonism.

In Poland, youth held moral sentiments that favoured personal choice as a superlative right. In restricting abortion rights and discriminating against the LGBTQ population, the government upset those sentiments, drawing youth attention and outrage to its actions. PIS's electorate, chiefly composed of the older, working-class, and countryside-based strata of the population, held stronger affective attachment to the Church as a moral authority and class resentment at urban elites for neglecting their interests during the post-1989 economic transformation. In Bolivia, the key moral emotional highlight of the protesting opposition were Evo Morales' undemocratic actions, which projected the probability of electoral fraud and paved the way for the awakening of racist sentiments. For students at Colegio Alalay, racism proved a strong moral emotional highlight, attracting more anger than Evo Morales's actions towards whom they held positive sentiment, even if they condemned some of his political choices and actions. In the Zona Sur neighbourhood, the 'right to work' was a less ambiguous moral emotional highlight, akin in strength to the Polish students 'right to decide', bringing out the influence of community-minded attention, which I analysed as part of the present-oriented pedagogic orientation of the school in Chapter 2.

The main takeaway point of Chapter 3 was that, as a crucial element of attentional management, affect is inherent to moral and political reasoning. The force and direction with which attention guides political decision-making are context-dependent and closely tied to the practices of everyday sociality. They are also entangled in the broader digital media landscape. Particularly among Zonas Sur youth, social media facilitated the circulation of political information targeting moral emotional highlights and aggravating political antagonism. Youth were not passive receptors of such information but worked to discipline their attention against their force, attuning themselves to the likely presence of misinformation. Politically charged posts circulated as part of a social media

architecture, the affordances of which not only favoured political antagonism but, as I showed in Chapter 4, scaffolded the formation of digital cognitive constellations of phatic relationship building.

Chapter 4 did not seek to undermine the addictive and attention-grabbing qualities of social media but refocused the discussion on the principally phatic nature of attention engaged by the sociality of new digital technologies. Phatic attention is oriented towards connection-making rather than the particularities of the circulating content. The affordances of social media facilitate the expansion of phatic relationship building in time and space, befitting the complex and geographically distributed social attentional ecology urban youth navigate. Drawing on Goffman, I described the attention youth devote to media scrolling as involving a state of disassociated vigilance. Such an attentional state permits an acknowledgement of the presence of familiar others whose posts may be on the screen right in front of us, but the reading of which is done as if “out of the furthest corner of whatever is serving for an eye” (Goffman 1971: 238). Hence, engaging less attentional resources than suggested by public fears.

The affordances of decorporalisation, ready-made prompts, asynchrony of interaction, anonymity, and portability facilitated the spread of personal information and phaticity to audiences of greater scope than conventionally included in offline interactions of a similar intimacy level, a phenomenon I called ‘extimacy’. By pulling attention away from the presence of others and their social surveillance, decorporalisation contributed to lowering levels of self-consciousness and promoting the circulation of more emotional and norm-defying information than typically permitted during face-to-face communication. Digital norm defiance, illustrated with the case of post circulation challenging accepted sexual behaviours, points towards the interconnectedness of digital attentional configurations and macrosocial change. Membership in global networks, like fandom groups, can instil alternative viewpoints and encourage youth to create and re-share digital sprouts that can germinate, leading to ideological dissonance and change in peer social circles, for example, increased acquiescence for non-heteronormative sexuality.

The connection-oriented attribute of posting and scrolling does not imply that the content of circulating information is meaningless. I described how ‘snaps’ or ‘posts’ can act as attentional pulls and move from the furthest corner to the centre of the attentional sunbeam when of increased significance to the viewer. Digital materials on social media also act as cultural indexes. There are marked differences in the types of posts that were most likely to surge on social media

profiles at my fieldsites, corroborating Laver's (1975) claims about the identity-marking facets of phatic communication. Furthermore, youth diverged in their use of attentional affordances of social media. Differences in digital feature use between my fieldsites resulted from variance in school infrastructure (large vs small), student demographics (neighbourhood vs. county residency), and from variations in cultural norms of communication.

Smartphones and their affordances are embedded in youth's broader ecology of attention, attesting to McLuhan's assertion that technological extensions of men "affect the whole psychic and social complex" (2001 [1964]: 4). The portability and omnipresence of smartphones at my fieldsites meant that the world of digital sociality described in Chapter 4 co-existed alongside other offline forms of sociality. It competed with in-person demands of collective performance and organisation at Colegio Alalay when students scrolled and chatted on social media instead of fully engaging in school community life. It likely weakened the drive for face-to-face interaction between students at Liceum Gawiecki, who continued to maintain social relations with acquaintances beyond the school space, and off-set much of the work of fostering school ties through phatic digital networks. Finally, at both my research sites, smartphones competed with teachers for student attention in class and beyond.

Teachers interpreted students scrolling through phones in the classroom setting as deficits in student attention and respect for the teacher. Looking at one's phone can, however, be re-interpreted as a form of attentional agency and resistance against the school's "disciplinary regime of attentiveness" (Crary 2001: 13). At Liceum Gawiecki, students tended to distribute attention to retain focus for selected subjects, afterschool tuition, and other extracurricular activities or non-academic hobbies. If attention evolved to help animal organisms effectively orient themselves in and interact with the environment (see Lev-Ari et al. 2022), then the contemporary multifarious and globalised human environment provides many directions that goal-oriented attention can take.

Student objectives can substantially differ from teachers past and present goals, contributing to attentional misalignment and misunderstanding. Goal compatibility favours the development of mutual attention and shared emotion. The goal-oriented attentional ecology of urban high schools is, however, highly actor-variable and context-dependent, complicating the development of joint attention between students and teachers.

Chapter 5 consolidated the place of elements of the attentional nexus discussed in the preceding chapters at my principal research site – the space of the classroom. To ensure effective implementation, top-down educational policies (Ch.1) not only need to ensure teacher compliance (Ch.2) but also face the challenge of gathering student attention. The degree of student attention is not solely dependent on their interest in the curricula content but also on the students' affective attachments to teachers and the school. Such attachments facilitated the achievement of attentional success and the development of mutual correspondence reliant upon joint and reciprocal attention between teachers and students. This is a difficult task, but proved less so at Colegio Alalay, where students and teachers interacted more. Unburdened by the duty to prepare students for state-examinations, teachers were also more likely to ask for student opinion and deviate or prolong conversations in accordance with the flow of interest.

The chapter further pointed to the interrelation between teacher and student motivation. At Liceum Gawiecki, the overburdened and disenchanted with school youth further demotivated the underpaid and overworked teachers with their lack of involvement in class, leading to a vicious cycle of demotivation. At Colegio Alalay, increased student motivation to do well and respect for schooling, regardless of actual rates of interest and success at school, correlated with greater teacher motivation and job satisfaction. As in the case of everyday pedagogic orientations (Ch.2) and political participation (Ch.3) sociality was key in guiding student attention in class. Just like the 'lads' in Willis's (2017 [1978]) classic "Learning to Labour" self-directed themselves to fail at school and get working-class jobs, a great proportion of students at Gawiecki consciously chose to do mediocre job at school. Low societal status of public schooling, work overburden, and little time for the fostering of affective attachments to the school space favoured the development of a sociality of 'distraction' and demotivation at school. At Colegio Alalay, students unanimously aspired to become higher education graduates or *profesionales* and valued the school as an academic preparation ground for future university enrolment, guided by global standards of aspiration and success.

6.2. Final Remarks & Further Investigations

In this thesis, I followed contemporary theorists who are neither content with "collapsing structure into agency" nor "seeking some retrograde return to structural approaches" (Peacock & Kao 2013: 3), suggesting engagement with human cognition as an effective propellant to escape the "dizzying circles" (ibid: 1) of structure-agency debates. I sided with Gatt (2013) in taking on attention as a means of exploring the context shifting nature of agency as it unfolds in relation to macro-scale

institutions. What her analysis, however, misses out on is that attention is not just a “vector” or “direction” but is a complex social, cognitive, and embodied phenomenon.

As a cognitive mediator of experience, attention sheds light on the relationship between individual people and social collectives and the processes behind the formation and transmission of cultural memory, including skills, beliefs, and values. It thus, serves as an efficient anthropological tool for social analysis, as testified by the work of Duranti & Throop (2015) and Gatt (2013). Attention can be a window onto a more profound understanding of social processes and phenomena at the core of the discipline of anthropology, such as globalisation, morality, communication, and politics. Cognitive processes, like attention, are also an intriguing object for ethnographic research, both as discursive constructs and as fundamental constituents of culture itself. So far, attention has mostly interested anthropologists as a social discursive or metacognitive construct (e.g. Cook 2023; Schull 2023; Pagis & Tal 2022; Pedersen et al. 2021). Similar studies bring valuable insights on the ways in which people think about attentional practice that beget questions about the relationship between metacognitive views of attention and the working of attention itself. For example, mindfulness is a form of culturally informed awareness training with realistic effects on the frequency and type of strategies humans make use of as attentional agents, influencing how we come to attend to our thoughts and everyday experiences (Cook 2023).

As a cultural process, attention moulds itself in response to the environment and social practice. It is susceptible to cognitive biases that work within social groups, institutions, and everyday interactions. The selectivity of attention at my fieldsites was guided by implicit associations that reinforced themselves through belief and confirmation biases, leading to stereotypical thinking linked to historically informed schemas and world imaginaries. Such cognitive associations were at work in the formulation of schemas of Indigeneity and the Church (see Ch.1) and informed pedagogic orientations (see Ch.2) at my fieldsites. They also contributed to affective channelling and prejudice against members of selected social strata, augmenting political divisions and conflicts (see Ch.3). Much of the strength of such cognitive associations and the likelihood of their crack or modification rests on a person’s pertinence to social circles and group affiliations; the less unanimity of opinion and experience in one’s immediate social environment, the greater the probability of cognitive dissonance and a wider scope of conceptual attention. The social and the cognitive work in tandem in structuring the direction, scope, and intensity of attentional engagement. Hence, their simultaneous consideration is required for a comprehensive overview

of the factors that shape the “nodes of dense interconnectivity” (Hutchins 2014: 45) in distributed attentional configurations.

The evident co-constitution of culture and cognition gestures towards the value of interdisciplinary collaborations in attention research. Insights from psychology do not discredit or de-value ethnographic accounts of attention and other cognitive processes. Quite the contrary, ethnography can complicate and situate experimental findings in cognitive psychology. Cognitive ethnographies have consistently challenged the ecological validity of lab-based research, attesting to the dependency of everyday human cognitive skills on their social and environmental context (e.g. Hutchins 1995; Lave 1988; Nersessian 2019; Paolisso 2002). Complementarily, anthropologists interested in cognitive processes would benefit from paying closer attention to lab-based findings. While laboratory settings are inevitably reductionist, the advanced technologies they make use of point towards aspects of cognition unpalpable to the ethnographic eye, including neural correlates, reaction times, and physiological responses. They also allow for a much higher degree of context reproducibility than is achievable via standard fieldwork methods, producing sets of data larger in scope, if not so much in detail, to base their conclusions on.

This thesis provided an overview of a number of perspectives and levels of analysis an anthropology of attention can take, including scrutinies of attentional distribution, state attention, joint attention, and schema-guided normative patterns of action and ideological thought. Attentional distributions can be studied at various scales, ranging from the nation (see Ch.1) to the classroom space (see Ch.5) and cognitive configurations that span across them, like social networks (see Ch.4). At the level of the nation, I showed how the state selectively attends to elements of the social attentionscape in crafting its public image and policies. In the space of the classroom, I discussed joint attention between students and teachers as a prerequisite for the achievement of attentional success and the development of productive learning scenarios. Our everyday interactions with other people influence the direction and scope of our attention and, with enough force or continuity, act to modify our normative attentional and ideological stance. Group pertinence holds affective and practical implications for our cognitive inclinations shaping teaching and learning practice, moral judgement, and political behaviour. For example, peer culture and perspectives on schooling contributed to the development of a sociality of attention (Colegio Alalay) and inattention (Liceum Gawiecki) in the classroom (see Ch.5). Peers can also act as cognitive artefacts and can even do so remotely, as I demonstrated in the case of attention off-loading in digitally mediated school-evading attentional distributions (see Ch.5).

Cognitive interactional dynamics are embedded in larger scale political institutions, structural conditions, and power relations in which interaction dynamics take place. Distributed cognition research will thus benefit from closer engagement with anthropological work on the globalisation of schooling and the interaction of global “universals” of education with local practices of socialisation. There is a lot of scope for investigation of the kinds of cognitive patterns that emerge in the ambience of “psychocultural globalisation” (Jung & Ahn 2021: 3). For example, a scrutiny of the way in which the internationalisation of pedagogical individualisation blends with or challenges local cultural models of education and sociality (see Hansen 2015; Jung 2021). Psychological and anthropological research on knowledge acquisition and enactment points to the socially and materially distributed character of various forms of mathematical reasoning (e.g. Giardino 2018; Lave 1988; Evans et al. 2011; Walen et al. 1999), reading acquisition (e.g. Cole & Engstrom 1993: 22 – 30; Palinesar & Brown 1984; Pontier & Gort 2016) and a variety of other learning and problem-solving tasks as carried out by experts and novices (e.g. Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987; Hillesund 2023; Pea 1993). Following Werscht (1998), I further emphasise that similar cognitive acts are linked to the cultural, historical, and institutional contexts of their occurrence.

Pedagogic orientations are linked to cross-national discourses and influence on the ground practices of skill and knowledge acquisition at school. The tensions inherent in the existence of multiple pedagogic orientations of the kind I described in Chapter 2 make the emerging cognitive configurations particularly unpredictable and subject to ethnographic questioning. At both my fieldsites, the institution of the school judged academic performance via an individual grade-based system influenced by global standards of meritocracy. Yet unlike students at Liceum Gawiecki, at Colegio Alalay, students were likely to co-direct one’s attention to learning and would meet up in person to complete, not only group work targeted, homework tasks. Such a learning structure was likely influenced by a sociality model of community belonging and stronger affective ties between the student population they cultivated during civic performances and event organisation. Still, there is much more to be said about the exact course of the cognitive enactment of specific activities such as arithmetic calculation, diagrammatic reasoning, reading, or presentation-making. A cognitive science research agenda that takes seriously the embeddedness of cognition needs to include ethnographic investigations and situate them within macro social processes.

Attention is simultaneously culturally and cognitively mediated. It is grounded in universal cognitive processes and predispositions and reliant on personal experiences and sensibilities yet

unfolds in a globally interconnected social realm that includes macro-scale institutions and power relations. Youth make use of attentional strategies in a world that puts constraints and makes demands but remains open to change, acting as cognitive agents in a globally expanding nexus of co-influence.

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