

EPILOGUE POLITICAL IMPRESSIONS FROM EUROPE

Julio Seoane

University of Valencia. Spain.

Psicología Política has an international character, both in the membership of its editorial board and in the geographical diversity of the contributing authors. This diversity is one of the reasons that this monograph number is entirely in English, unusual because it has appeared heretofore in Castilian Spanish (its main circulation area is Spain and Latin America). But the main reason is that the monograph concerns a tragic event that happened in USA, with wide international repercussions, and that the main contributors are North American psychologists. Thus, the editors decided to maintain the works and investigations that compose this number in their original English.

But another, more subtle reason exists. The international impact of 9/11 was experienced originally in English, it is true, but it affected in different ways many other cultures and nations, and was expressed in a multiple languages. The psychological and political impressions of those who lived near ground zero are different from the reactions of those that felt the tragedy indirectly, from thousands of miles distant, through the mass media. Also different from those at ground zero are the impressions that were felt by people in other countries and in other continents. We know perfectly well that the shocks to those at ground zero zone produced a series of expansible and concentric waves with very diverse and peculiar repercussions, although frequently equally tragic. The political impacts of 9/11 are expressed and managed in many languages; on this occasion, the journal decided that its presentation would be in English.

As this special number of the journal shows, we have studies about emotions and the attitudes before and after the event and about analyses of the style and content of the discourses of various political leaders. There are

also sociological surveys about the opinions of the citizens of many countries. But it is more difficult to know the psychological and political impressions of people while the events are taking place. Perhaps it would be necessary to analyze videos of the television commentators during their live narration of the events, to examine their expressions, their comments, the spontaneous structure of their speech, and the changes that they manifested along the crucial hours. But it would also be necessary to compare the different channels and countries to understand the psychological differences between cultures and continents. Meanwhile, we Europeans have left only our personal experiences of that day and the later consequences.

Here in Spain, many of us felt that day as much under attack as those New Yorkers who were hearing the news. The magnitude of the event and its political meaning were so perplexing that our memory was inoperative--the impressions were formed on-line as the information was arriving¹. At times, the memory of some science fiction movie was activated, futurist scenes of political disasters that were quickly rejected as senseless and imaginative. In spite of the long list of terrorist acts that happened in recent decades, no memory was comparable. In all probability there are differences in the experience faced by the inhabitants of different countries, but the experience of those first moments made us all more similar.

As an example, we reproduce some data of the polls that were carried out among the Spanish population soon after the terrorist act of 9/11.

<i>Do you believe that the western countries feel now more, the same or less united that before the attacks? And most of the countries of the world, in general?</i>		
	%	%
	<i>Western countries.</i>	<i>Countries of the world</i>
Much together	59	50
Same together	29	33
Less together	3	7
Don't know	9	10
(Total)	(2499)	(2499)

Source: data reproduced the poll carried out by the CIS "La opinión en los barómetros de 2001: el atentado terrorista del 11 de septiembre. Boletín 27, 2001

In what measure are you are concerned by the events that are happening now and for what can happen?	
	%
Very concerned	17
Quite concerned	56
A little concerned	21
Not concerned	5
Don't know	1
(Total)	(2499)

Source: data reproduced of the poll carried out by the CIS "La opinión en los barómetros de 2001: el atentado terrorista del 11 de septiembre. Boletín 27, 2001

With how much interest it follow the news on this topic and the events that are developing?	
	%
With a lot of interest	27
With enough interest	55
With little interest	15
Without any interest	3
Indifferent (*)	1
(Total)	(2499)

Source: data reproduced of the poll carried out by the CIS "La opinión en los barómetros de 2001: el atentado terrorista del 11 de septiembre. Boletín 27, 2001

The days and months after 9/11 presented differences. The processing of information no longer had the characteristics of the on-line models, now opinions are formed on the basis of memory, people's impressions have a cultural basis and the divergences are more remarkable. Many of us didn't understand that 9/11 could have as a logical consequence a war in Afghanistan and even less another war in Iraq, although others accepted it as ine-

vitable. The time that lapsed between the terrorist act and the political consequences was sufficient to change the psychological scenario: From the rapid formation of impressions, we pass quickly to the management of political impressions. Now the differences between the historical memory of Europe and North America became more important.

As an example, we reproduce the next table of the survey that was carried out by Gallup in September 2002.

<i>Does it approve or disapprove the military action of USA in Afghanistan?</i>					
%					
	Canada	<i>Great Britain</i>	Italy	Spain	USA
Approve	68	57	42	26	83
Disapprove	28	36	45	50	13
Don't know	5	8	13	24	4

Source: data reproduced of the survey carried out by Gallup (survey to 507 Spanish beyond 18 years, carried out from the 2 to September 4 2002.)

It has been said that terrorist acts, threat and use of violence, play a basic role in that the victims and the other sectors of the affected population are active elements in the relationship between the State and the terrorist organization. But it is also certain that cultural differences arise in the interpretation of the symbolic character of the threat, and in the emotional activation and psychological reaction of public opinion, as well as in its effect on the government and subsequent politics². The sociological surveys carried out during the months following 9/11 revealed differences in public opinion among the different countries, but few psychological studies exist on the differences in attitudes, value structures and cognitive processing among the different cultures.

Perhaps this will be work for a new phase in political psychology. A discipline that set out in the 70's, incited by the clash of the grand ideologies which began to totter two decades after World War II. Later it evolved in the 80's toward the search of a civic culture, interpreted as the appropriate attitudes and beliefs for the maintenance and development of the western democracies. After languishing In the 90's, it turned its gaze toward the social and experimental roots that were in the major part of its origins. Now, having passed over 2000 and being impacted by the frontier

of 9/11, the discipline must confront the processes of coexistence among different communities, political traditions, religions and cultures.

Political Psychology, as a discipline, has to investigate new processes of intercultural negotiation to minimize the violent clashes. Also it should generate new models of social coexistence to potentiate the best results from this intercultural dialogue. In sum, this is the moment for setting a new agenda for Political Psychology, an agenda that takes into account the urgencies of a new international situation.

To that new agenda this monograph issue is a contribution, among many others that are appearing. It begins with the principle of attempting to understand some basic aspects of the new world situation after 9/11 as perceived from our current origin. It is a good example of the work that we should carry out in the immediate future. For that reason, we have to congratulate ourselves, as well as to thank the good will and the effort carried out by all.

¹ En Kathleen M. McGraw (2003) we encounter an interesting comparison of on-line models and memory-based processing.

² For example, Garzón et al. (1988) in her analysis of the political violence

Note: Julio Seoane is Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Valencia, Spain. At the present time he is “General Director of Universities” in the Valencian Community. His interests are in beliefs, attitudes and values within the field of political psychology. His writings include two handbook: *Psicología Política* and *Creencias, actitudes y valores*. His address is: Avda. Blasco Ibáñez 21, 46010-Valencia, Spain. E-mail: seoane@uv.es.