Emotions in Politics

The Affect Dimension in Political Tension

Edited by

Nicolas Demertzis
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Emotions in Politics

The Affect Dimension in Political Tension

Edited by

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Prompted by interdisciplinary work on emotions, this book critically addresses the politics-emotions nexus at both a mass and an individual level with a specific focus on cases of political tension. Substantive areas of interest include transitions to post-communism, the ‘Arab Spring’, the Greek crisis and nationalist and xenophobic practices in different EU countries. In addition, the book is concerned with the variety of ways emotions shape, and are shaped by, social movement actors, the contested nature of civil society and public opinion, the potential protest created by humiliation and shame and the management of emotions practiced by key figures in international politics.

Had this book been published a decade or so ago, the authors would have found themselves in the position of having to justify their conceptualizations to most of the academic community. Scholarly political analysis had, for a long time, underemphasized the role of affect in civic action and the organization of public power. Although politics, be it democratic or not, is by definition explicitly emotional, ‘emotions-proof’ political sociological research, reflective of a ‘non-emotions period of sociology’ (Barbalet, 1998, p. 19), dominated for many decades. The marginalization of emotions in political analysis was to a large degree owed to: (a) the stripping of the dimension of passion from the political because it was associated with romantic and utopian conceptions unrelated to the modern public sphere as well as because of the more or less instrumental and neutral-procedural conception of politics, a popular view at the end of the 1960s as well as today (Habermas, 1970; Mouffe, 2000); (b) the supremacy of ‘interest’ as opposed to ‘passion’ as an explaining factor of political action, already in effect from the middle of the 18th century (Hirschman, 1977); (c) the dominance for many years of the rational choice paradigm across a
very large number of political science departments in the United States and Europe, in the context of which emotions are either conceived as irrational elements or are taken as objective traits which do not affect the actor’s, by definition, ‘rational’ thinking (Barbalet, 1998, p. 29ff; Williams, 2001, pp. 15–16).

This book signals an understanding that ‘emotions-proof’ research can no longer be sustained. The development of the sociology of emotions on both sides of the Atlantic, the growing body of political neuroscience research and the attention given by political psychologists to the affective dimension of political thinking, opinion and action, steer us away from the dominance of behaviourism and cognitivism. The demarcation between emotion and reason in analysing politics is a thing of the past.

The subfield of the sociology of emotions seems to be on its way to becoming a ‘normal’ paradigm. In 1986 a special section on the sociology of emotions was set up within the American Sociological Association. The European Sociological Association has had its own Research Network on Emotions since 2004 (http://socemot.com/) which has been growing at a fast and steady pace. This is symptomatic of a much wider ‘turn’ towards emotions which has taken place in the entirety of social studies and humanities over the last two decades or so (Clough and Halley, 2007). Evidence of this emotional or affective turn or movement can be found within philosophy (Solomon, 2003, 2004; Nussbaum, 2001; Knuuttila, 2004), social theory (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010), psychology (Lewis and Haviland-Jones, 2004), geography (Davidson et al., 2005), history (Reddy, 2009), economic sociology (Pixley, 2002, 2012; Berezin, 2009; Haussoun, 2005), law (Cropanzano et al., 2011), organization (Sieben and Wettegren, 2010; Fineman, 2008) and media (Ben-Ze’ev, 2004; Demertzis, 2009, 2011) among others. In a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary manner, this turn has been signalled in the handbook edited by Davidson et al. (2003).

Despite this growth in the sociology of emotions as a generic field of study, a robust political sociology of emotions has not yet been established. Academics have only recently come to realize the importance of affect as a microfoundation of political action and macro-political institutionalization, and the necessity of studying the politics–emotion nexus in a rigorous way. Nevertheless, although the term ‘political sociology of emotions’ is rarely used (Berezin, 2002; Demertzis, 2006) one could viably argue that a number of scholars have already carved out a space for the advent of this subfield (Goodwin et al., 2001; Ost, 2004; Flam and King, 2005; Clarke et al., 2006). Moreover, political
psychology (or more accurately political psychologies, as there is no single and unified field) could not be excluded from this turn. The establishment of political psychology as a subdiscipline *qua* the International Society of Political Psychology founded in 1978, in itself reflects this affective turn. Remarkable contributions have forged a compelling discussion and analysis of the politics–emotions nexus, including the seminal handbook of Sears *et al.* (2003), as well as, *inter alia*, the work of Marcus (2002), Redlawsk (2006), Neuman *et al.* (2007) and Capelos (2002).

The political sociology of emotions and emotions-driven political psychology are two different perspectives of the politics–emotion analytical nexus. Broadly speaking, the political sociology of emotions perspective employs historical, cultural and socio-psychological conceptualizations and sets its conclusions on a more or less macro level. The political psychology of emotion as well as the political neuroscience of emotion point to a more individual-level analysis of the processes of opinionation and electoral choice, and the micro-analytical level. It would not be too much to say that these two perspectives have been growing past each other by developing their own theoretical repertoires and research agendas. Inspired by the published work of the members of the Research Network on the Sociology of Emotions (Hopkins *et al.*, 2009; Sieben and Wettegren, 2010; Holmes and Greco, 2011), this book aims to bring the two perspectives together.

Our aim in presenting these two orientations is not premised on the introduction of a common, overarching theoretical framework, nor should one seek here some kind of unitary conceptual ground. It might be true that, as a response to pluralistic hyper-differentiation, a general trend in social studies and humanities toward de-differentiation and disciplinary coalescence has emerged (Crook *et al.,* 1992, pp. 197–239). Yet, this trend is not to be deemed as the desire for a ‘grand design’ of the Social – or the Political for that matter. In this respect, what this book purports to do is to offer complementary theoretical and methodological accounts of the impetus of affect during political tensions and transitional periods. This is all the more crucial as the current socio-economic crisis in many European countries leads to contentious political actions which in most cases are, to a considerable degree, emotionally driven. Nevertheless, over and above the understanding of the affective dimensions of political tensions, any account of the emotions-politics nexus is destined to linger over two perennial and cognate issues: the very notion of emotion, on one hand, and the micro–macro link, on the other.
Emotion terms: Lost in translation?

Since 1884, William James’s question ‘what is an emotion?’ has haunted any single endeavour to theorize emotion, be it of a philosophical, sociological or psychological nature. Despite the ‘emotionology’ of our times, a generally accepted definition of emotion and a universally accepted typology are not currently available. With regards only to the psychological literature as the original source of systematic conceptualization of emotion in modern times, in their much-quoted article Paul Kleinginna and Anne Kleinginna (1981) pointed to 92 different terms related to emotion, which they classified into 11 categories based on the dominant characteristic each time attributed to ‘emotion’ (affective, cognitive, external motivational stimuli, physiological, expressive, disruptive, adaptive, multi-aspect, restrictive, motivational and sceptical). Nor is there, from the social neuroscience perspective, a ‘satisfactory common thread available that draws the myriad cultural emotional differentiations into one definitional basket’ (Franks, 2006, p. 60). As this definitional problem jumps from the psychological to the sociological literature, Turner and Stets (2005, p. 2), together with a host of other scholars, are hesitant to offer any precise definition (Elster, 1999, p. 241; Barbalet, 1998, p. 26; Ben-Ze’ev, 2000, p. 12; Turner and Stets, 2005, p. 2).

Despite Paul Griffiths’ proposal that the category ‘emotion’ be eliminated from the academic vocabulary (Griffiths, 1997, pp. 14, 241–2), it seems that among a good many sociologists there exists a consensus over the assumption that emotions per se are not of autonomic and innate biological nature but mediate between physiological reactions and cultural norms. According to a ‘mild’ constructionist approach, it could be claimed that while emotions are not reducible to biology, not everything is a construction or is constructible with regard to emotions. Beyond the biological substratum which simply cannot be denied, emotions themselves are extremely plastic, subject to historical variability (Thoits, 1989, p. 319; Rosenwein, 2001, p. 231). Whether approached as an intrapersonal state, process, cultural construct, phenomenon, subjective experience, syndrome or disposition, emotion is thought to be composed of five elements: (1) activation of key body systems and action readiness towards something, (2) appraisal of situational stimuli, relational contexts and objects, (3) overt, free or inhibited, expression through facial, vocal and paralinguistic movement, (4) culturally provided linguistic labels of one or more of the first three elements, (5) socially constructed rules on which emotions should be experienced and expressed (Thoits, 1989, p. 318; Gordon, 1990, pp. 147, 151–2;
Introduction

Turner and Stets, 2005, p. 9; Sieben and Wettegren, 2010). Despite there being no consensus on how they are related to each other, all five elements need not be present simultaneously for an emotion to exist or to be recognized by others. Nor is it necessary that all these elements are consciously experienced. In this respect, emotion can be viewed as a ‘multi-component phenomenon’ (Frijda, 2004a, p. 60) and as an ‘open system’ (Gordon, 1981).

As in the psychology of emotions, particular theoretical directions in the sociology of emotions prioritize different research agendas with regards to the aforementioned elements (Frijda, 2004a). For instance, affect control theory singles out affective appraisal, interaction theories centre on cultural norms, labelling and emotional culture, whereas ritual theories give prominence to the expression of emotional states and processes. A possible way out of the definitional labyrinth is to differentiate between ‘emotion’ as a large, generic category remaining at a higher level of abstraction, and specific emotions like fear, joy, hatred, resentment, hope, shame, pride and so on. As amorphous as it may be, emotion in the singular is a thought category or a hypothetical construct which provides in perspective a common thread among the internal shadings of emotions (in the plural) which are actually experienced by people (Barbalet, 1998, pp. 26, 80) and ‘merge endlessly into each other’ (James, 1931/1890, p. 448). A further question is raised as to whether or not a generic notion of emotion would be of ‘common’ or ‘typical’ character. Even if a generic concept of emotion is described by the five components referred to above, it is unclear if its property is ‘common’ or ‘typical’. In the first case one would risk ‘over-inclusivity’ (Dixon, 2003, pp. 244–7) and/or a definitional over-extension (Sartori, 1984) which could render the notion redundant. The second implies a warrant denotative understanding through which one may determine the referents of the concept and lessen equivocation. There is no simple way to differentiate between a ‘common’ and ‘typical’ conceptualization of emotion.

Although overtly or covertly the contributors to this volume agree over valence, combination, hierarchy and duration as properties characterizing the mode of existence of emotions, there is no unanimity as to the definitional criteria of ‘emotion’, and the cognate notions of ‘affect’ and ‘sentiment’, using ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ interchangeably. Thomas Scheff and Dennis Smith deal with specific emotions such as grief, shame, humiliation, revenge, resentment, anger, fear and sorrow and the ways these emotions are elicited in pressing political situations. Jack Barbalet and Nicolas Demertzis are interested more in the anatomy
of fear as a distinct emotion rather than an overall definitional clarification of emotional semantics in general. Similarly, in their contributions Catarina Kinnvall and Barry Richards steer clear from conceptual or taxonomic concerns with regards to ‘emotion’.

Contrariwise, in their analysis Bettina Davou and Nicolas Demertzis refer to several definitional traits of emotion emphasizing the link between emotion, motivation and action. Along the tenets of the sociology of collective action, Wendy Pearlman is careful enough to distinguish ‘affects’ – her major concept – from sentiments, moods and reflex emotions. Affects are deemed as lasting evaluative orientations toward objects, ideas or persons, what several psychologists would name ‘feelings’ or ‘emotions’. In contrast, George Marcus systematically refers to ‘affect’ as a general subconscious category vis-a-vis cognition which appears to be the functional equivalent of ‘automatic’ versus ‘extended’ appraisal employed by appraisal theorists of emotion. Measuring the bidirectional link between emotional and cognitive considerations in political decision-making, in a strict psychological way Tereza Capelos defines emotion as a brief, distinct physical and mental reaction to stimuli consequential for the individual’s goals. In her analysis she groups negative emotions into two broad categories, ‘aversive affectivity’ and ‘anxious affectivity’. Analysing social movements, Steven Saxonberg regards emotion as a sort of social relation, adopting a macrosociological perspective, while van Troost, van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, based on appraisal theories of emotions, distinguish emotions from ‘mere’ feelings or moods by their relation to a specific object or idea. Finally, Jonathan Heaney approaches emotion in an apophatic manner, namely he argues as to what emotion is not.

The micro–macro mediation

That the individual is the locus of emotions and that few would doubt emotions have a biological basis has led psychologists and sociologists to assume that any analysis of affective phenomena necessarily remains at the micro level. In this respect, emotions are supposed to provide the ‘microfoundation’ of politics. Yet, this is not actually the case because, if anything, the constitution of emotion is not reducible to simple biological processes as individuals are always embedded in social contexts. Variably but crucially, these contexts determine ‘which emotions are likely to be expressed when and where, on what grounds and for what reasons, by what modes of expression, by whom’ (Kemper, 2004, p. 46).
They do not emanate within the individual as much as between the individuals and ‘the interaction between individuals and their social situations’ (Barbalet, 1998, p. 67). The likelihood is that only a stronghold ‘organismic’ conceptualization of emotions would place and lock them at the micro level but such a conceptualization is more or less obsolete. From an evolutionary psychological standpoint, emotions make for the ‘deep sociality’ of humans since they function as the main mode of communication among our immediate ancestors (Turner and Stets, 2005, p. 263). Also, from a non-evolutionary psychological viewpoint, emotions are processes which establish, maintain, change or terminate the relation between the person and the environment, providing the infrastructure for social life while ‘the plans they prompt are largely plans that involve others’ (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996, p. 122, 124, 130). Finally, from a psycho-philosophical perspective, ‘emotions are a very important glue that links us to others’ (Ben-Ze’ev, 2000, p. 23).

So far, so good. Yet one might still claim that, as essentially individual properties, emotions connect rather than articulate our microworlds and macroworlds. That instead of coalescing these two worlds, emotions bring together the microworld and macroworld as two pre-constituted self-contained entities. One might press the point further and argue that the macrostructure is ultimately invisible, and is in fact an aggregate of microstructures and therefore emotions are exhausted at the individual level. In the first case the micro–macro clash remains unchallenged while in the second we are faced with a strong solipsistic constructivism. Most importantly, though, either case is not plausible due to two reasons. First, at the epistemological level, the sharp micro–macro distinction loses force because microtheories invariably involve some assumptions about the macrocontext where interaction occurs and vice versa (Münch and Smelser, 1987, p. 357). Second, as an analytical perspective, methodological dualism should be distinguished from philosophical or ontological dualism. Methodological dualism, in our case the micro–macro distinction in understanding the ‘emotional man’, is an analytic tool that helps us ‘to view the same social processes or social practices both from the point of view of actors and from that of systems’ (Mouzelis, 2008, pp. 226–7). Philosophical dualism assumes a radical and essentialist externality between structure and action, emotion and reason, body and mind. Whereas the first stands for a division of academic labour, the second entails a deep theoretical schism.

If methodological and philosophical dualism are not conflated then the micro–macro distinction becomes one of scale and ration (Ellis, 1999, p. 34). The confrontation between microreality and macreality