

Passionate Politics

Emotions and Social Movements

Edited by

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and Francesca Polletta

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To all those who have pursued social justice with passion

man Empire. It has become increasingly apparent to religious scholars that Christianity emerged from a plethora of early Christian movements, along with a variety of Jewish, Hellenistic, and other cults. Segal, 1986; Fowden 1986; Mack 1995.

6. It is possible that at times of widespread interest in religious movements the size of the pool of supporters (the religious equivalent of a “conscience constituency”) may expand. Competition is not necessarily over slices of a constant pie; the pie can grow some of the time, when a set of movements generates heightened emotional focus and thus expands the attention space. But just as political conscience constituencies are intrinsically ephemeral, so too religious movements have a limited window in time in which to compete over the newly available membership. The basic competitive problem continues to exist, even if there is an accordion-like expansion of the recruitment pool at some moments.

7. Diani 1995 analyzes evidence on these overlapping networks in the case of Italian movements.

8. As James Jasper points out (personal communication), a variety of audiences may be targeted by particular kinds of movements, including the state, nonstate targets, mobilizable local supporters, as well as a broad range of bystanders. The battle to reach the larger and more distant of these audiences is considerably a battle over attention space in the mass media.

9. There was also a certain amount of direct spin-off from “new age” social networks; southern California rock musicians started the Calvary Chapel movement, which burgeoned into core new Christian movements such as the Vineyard, the Harvest Crusade, the Promise Keepers, and the Toronto Blessing.

10. S. Payne (1995: 150–64) and Fritzsche (1998: 134) list a variety of populist authoritarian contenders in Germany of the post-WWI period: the Germanenorden, the Thule Society, the Freikorps, the Stahlhelm, and other paramilitaries, numerous youth groups including the Jungdeutscher Orden, the National Bolsheviks, and the German National People’s Party, as well as rightist factions inside the moderate parties. There was also a leftist movement inside the SA (the Nazis’ own paramilitary) under Ernst Roehm, which overlapped in part with left-wing movement constituencies and which was not fully absorbed until Hitler carried out a round of assassinations in June 1934.

11. See also Kuran 1995, on why the volatility of tipping points makes it impossible for actors to predict just when a regime transition will occur; for a micro-situational application of tipping points to the coordination of applause and booing in crowds, see Clayman 1993.

12. Thus Fritzsche 1998 presents evidence that the experience of Germans in the massive crowds of July 1914 agitating for war during the international crisis following the Sarajevo assassination left an emotional memory of national solidarity which was called upon repeatedly by the Nazi mobilizations ten to twenty years later.

Chapter Two

Putting Emotions in Their Place

Craig Calhoun

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a number of sociologists took up the struggle to bring emotions into serious consideration within our discipline. Some came from the symbolic interactionist community which, despite a certain cognitivism suggested by the very label “symbolic,” has always been more attentive to emotions than most of sociology. Others drew on other traditions in social psychology—field theory, for example, and studies of frustration and aggression in intergroup relations. Still others tried to find an importable psychology, often in psychoanalysis (even while it was losing something of its foothold in psychology departments), also in other traditions including newer lines of work in physiological psychology and neurology. Still others turned to efforts to grasp emotions in cultural studies, in feminism, and in various branches of aesthetic analysis. All of these potentially inform the revitalization of sociology by attention to emotions.

Some sociologists have managed not only to borrow effectively but to advance interdisciplinary inquiry into the emotions, maintaining a foothold on each side of the border between psychology and sociology.¹ Nonetheless, wide-reaching though efforts in the sociology of emotions have been, they have not yet deeply transformed sociological theory in a general way, nor have they reshaped many subfields of the discipline. Instead, the sociology of emotions has gained a certain recognition as a

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There seems little doubt about the importance of emotions to movement participation and to the shaping of collective action and specific events. Alas, there is equally little doubt about the minimal place accorded emotions in the leading theories within the field. Emotions were banished from the study of social movements, to a very large extent, in reaction against a tradition of collective behavior analysis that ran from Le Bon through Turner and Killian and Neil Smelser.³ This older tradition approached collective behavior mainly from the outside, as something that irrational others engaged in. When attention turned to movements (not merely episodes) and to struggles with which analysts had sympathy (and in which they might engage themselves), the perspective changed. The argument that we should think in terms of collective action (not just behavior) marked that shift of perspective, opening up an internal analysis of something that “people like us” might do. It was seen as rational in the sense of reasonable, self-aware product of choice as well as (more narrowly) strategic, interest-based, calculated in terms of efficient means to an end. The new framing of the problem also suggested a redefinition of the range of appropriate objects of study. Under the label “collective action,” social scientists grouped protests together with trade struggles, the insurgencies of labor together with the attempts of capitalists to control prices.⁴ Even more, the study of social movements—enduring, concerted action, often carefully planned and supported by substantial formal organization—encouraged an opposition to explanations of specific events of collective behavior as explicable by socio-psychological processes. With the bathwater of some very serious biases, the baby of emotions was commonly thrown out. It is hard to get emotions back into the field partly because they were not merely neutrally absent from it but expelled in an intellectual rebellion that helped to give the field its definition.

At the same time, I would like us to recall how old an issue in social science we are addressing. Certainly, as I suggested above, we cannot understand this issue (and the resistance to thinking it through, and certain of the odd formulations that have resulted) without seeing how it builds on problematic foundations, such as mind/body dualism. Already basic for Plato, this dualism takes a distinctively influential form in Epicurus’s teachings that we must treat our bodies as external in much the same way we treat other people, farm animals, and volcanoes. What is internal is clearly mind. Augustine opened up the space of this interior to the self, but continued the emphasis on control over body—and emo-

tions. On top of this come distinctions like rational/irrational, motive/action, individual/social. The point is simply that we cannot start into the effort to think emotions better without grappling with the heritage that has produced the very idea of emotions—and the distinction of these from reason. The tradition of reasoning which we inherit, in other words, has been built in part by putting emotions in a specific and contained place. This has been resisted, by Romantics, Freudians, mystics, and post-modernists. But it has not been escaped. It thus structures how we approach our more specific problem of providing a place for emotions in the study of social movements.

Most contributors to this volume have tacitly situated their attempts to bring emotions back in as either a challenge or an amendment to the reigning conventional wisdoms of political process theory, resource mobilization, and rational choice. Of course, approaches are not identical, but what they share in common is a more or less instrumental approach to questions of collective action. Instrumental thinking is dominant in the field because of the specific post-1960s struggles that have defined it, but it exists and has the intellectual power it has because of a much longer history linking reason to control (including control over emotions).

Some presenters have simply wished to amend such an instrumental approach by suggesting that among the things movement organizers need to manage, among the tactics for mobilization they may employ, among the strategies they may use against their enemies, emotions and their manipulation ought to figure more prominently. Others have seen attention to emotions as more of a challenge to instrumental approaches. At least tacitly, they have suggested that emotions alert us to different ways in which movement participants are motivated, achieve solidarity with each other, and shape their actions.

Bedeveling this discussion is a tendency to see emotions as somehow “irrational,” either explicitly or simply implicitly because of the opposition to “rationalistic” analytic approaches. We would do well to remember that passions figured quite strongly alongside interests in the founding of modern utilitarianism and instrumental political analysis.⁵ Frank Dobbin (see chap. 4 of this volume) mentions Hirschman’s analysis of the rhetorical shift by which passions were for many analysts and whole disciplines such as economics transmuted into interests. But for Machiavelli, Hobbes, and even Bentham, passions remained directly and in their own right a focus of attention. They saw human action as shaped fundamentally by passions, they saw a need to tame and organize passions, they saw passions shaping the otherwise inexplicable source of differences in