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Concluding Thoughts

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Fifteen plus years into the 'emotional turn' in the study of contentious politics, the question is no longer 'do emotions matter' but rather 'do emotions ever *not* matter?' Or, stated positively, can we grasp the phenomena that we group together under the name of collective political action without paying attention to feelings, emotions, affect? As others have argued, the factors that social movement scholars deem important for mobilisation – e.g. political opportunities, organisations, frames – have force precisely because of the feelings that they elicit, stir up, amplify, or dampen.[1] We turn towards emotion, then, in order to understand the workings of the key concepts in the field. In addition, we need to explore feelings because they often are a primary catalyst or hindrance to political mobilisation, attenuating the role of other factors. Then there are the many other aspects of collective political action, beyond the question of mobilisation per se, where emotions play important roles, from ideological struggles to alliance formation to activist rituals to collective identity formation to community building. So, again, are emotions ever unimportant, are they ever a simply trivial aspect of what happens in and around contentious politics? Historians of emotion might take the argument further. If, as Rosenwein argues,

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[1] Jeff Goodwin and Steven Pfaff, 'Emotion Work in High-Risk Social Movements: Managing Fear in the US and East German Civil Rights Movements', in Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, eds, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 282–302, here 283. See also James M Jasper, 'The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements', *Sociological Forum*, 13 (1998), 397–424, here 399, 408ff; Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 'Return of the Repressed: The Fall and Rise of Emotions in Social Movement Theory', *Mobilization*, 5 (2000), 65–84, here 74; Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 'Introduction: Why Emotions Matter', in Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, eds, *Passionate Politics*, 1–24; Ron Aminzade, and Doug McAdam, 'Emotions and Contentious Politics', in Ron Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell Jr., Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, eds, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2001), 14–50, here 17.

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'emotions are about things judged important to us',[2] if emotions are indications of what matters, of what is valued and devalued, how can scholars interested in *any* aspect of social life *not* consider emotions?

Even so, some scholars seem apprehensive, surprisingly evident even in some of the early works that launched the turn toward emotion in the study of contentious politics, as I have argued elsewhere.[3] But if the spectre of irrationality haunted some of this scholarship, spurring anxious reassurances that 'the emotions most relevant to politics . . . fall toward the more constructed, cognitive end' of a 'dimension' at the other end of which are more automatic bodily responses,[4] the authors in this special journal issue seem less inclined to tame emotion conceptually and in fact eager to place the bodily dimension of political emotion front and centre. They arrive at no consensus about how to characterise that bodily dimension, but they do not shy away from it. More on that, momentarily.

Another concern about a turn toward emotions, whether in the field of contentious politics specifically or in studies of social life more broadly, derives from a still common rendering of emotions as individual, interior, biological, natural and hence asocial. But attention to the bodily, visceral, felt dimensions of social life does not require privileging the 'natural' over the 'social' or 'cultural', nor the 'micro' over the 'macro', but rather helps us to unravel those persistent, hard-to-shake binaries. Categories like micro and macro, for example, lose their coherence as soon as we consider that the power of social formations such as capitalism, liberal democracy, a particular family form or racial order or sex/gender regime derives from the ways in which they are variably felt, experienced and lived. Because the macro is embodied at the level of the micro, it seems most productive to explore sites of contact where 'structures' and 'agents' affect and are affected, making, unmaking and remaking one another in a manner that blurs and reconfigures boundaries.

One way to approach the thorny ontological questions that arise as soon as social scientists and historians start talking about emotions – Are they natural or cultural/social? Are they neurophysiological phenomena, a natural substrate that is then shaped by culture, or are they constituted whole hog through discourse and naming, or . . . what? – is to take seriously the motion in emotion, including its

[2] Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns', *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 237–65, here 251.

[3] Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Deborah B. Gould, 'On Affect and Protest', in Ann Cvetkovich, Ann Reynolds and Janet Staiger, eds *Political Emotions: Affect and the Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 18–44.

[4] Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 'Introduction', 13; Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 'Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements', in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 413–32, here 418; James Jasper, 'Motivation and Emotion', in R. E. Goodin and C. Tilly, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 157–71. Monique Scheer suggests that some historians of emotions have had a similar anxiety: 'Historians have been drawn to the cognitivist approach because it removed the stigma attached to emotion as something less than cognition.' Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History?): A Bourdieuian Approach To Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory*, 51 (2012), 193–220, here 195.

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etymological roots in civil unrest and public commotion but also the sense of being moved, being affected. This notion of being moved alludes to contact with a world made up of all sorts of bodies that affect: human and non-human organisms, material-discursive assemblages, stuff. That is to say, the motion in emotion suggests contact, which suggests sociality (in an expansive, non-human-centric sense), which brings us back to affecting and being affected by, and becoming in and through those relations. Haraway argues that relation is the smallest unit of being.[5] Rather than presupposing a world of independent, self-contained entities, then, any rendering of emotions must leave the 'metaphysics of individualism' where emotions are understood as 'properties of individual persons'[6] and instead allow emotions to materialise – come to have determinate qualities and thus a 'nature', as well as import and effects – through sociality in that broad sense, that is, through contact, encounter, relation, entanglement, being with, doing with, becoming with. That is not to say that the 'matter' of emotions does not matter but simply that their matter is neither given nor fixed but rather takes shape and has import through relation.[7] Even more, it is precisely these capacities to be moved, to be affected and to affect in turn – capacities shared by human and non-human organisms and by inanimate matter, albeit in different ways – that is the *sine qua non* for anything to happen, for change to occur, for historians to have anything to study.

With this relational and affective rendering of emotions in mind, I would read the mutiny by the French 82nd Infantry Brigade in 1917 differently from Zientek (in this issue), whose account highlights the role played by the neurophysiological and emotional consequences of the mutineers' alcohol consumption. I focus on his argument because I agree we should take body-brain chemistry seriously but would like to suggest we do so in a manner that helps to unravel the nature/culture, natural/social binaries even while allowing matter to matter. Arguing that neuroscientific research can help historians think through important questions, Zientek aligns himself with those neuroscientists who contend that humans have some 'basic emotions' which have 'discrete and dedicated neural correlates in the subcortex' and are largely 'alinguistic' and 'cross-cultural'. This perspective posits that because of this shared neural architecture, 'two people should experience the same basic emotion in the same way', although Zientek later qualifies this claim when he writes that basic emotions are not experienced 'outside historical context' and that 'the basic affective experience of anger may be relatively consistent from person to person, but the *social experience* of this affective experience is not' (p. 508), emphasis his). As in other instances when an author argues for the import of both 'nature' and 'culture' or 'the social', I feel myself pulled first in one direction and

[5] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 165. Developmental biologist Scott Gilbert puts it this way: 'We were "never" individuals', cited in Haraway, *Species*, 32, from a personal correspondence she had with Gilbert.

[6] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 57.

[7] See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004). She and many other cultural theorists understand emotions in a similarly relational manner.

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then the other, faced with the pre-eminence of the one only to be reminded about the actual primacy of the other. In the end, my sense is that 'nature' and 'culture' or 'the social' remain distinct, discrete realms, and the social constructionist in me is left with the question of whether the bodily, the biological, the physiological matters, that is, whether matter really matters given the power of context – historical, social, cultural – to shape processes and outcomes. In other words, is matter always and only 'dumb' matter, acted upon rather than itself acting, and if so, why include it in historical accounts? On the other hand, if the physiological/biological does matter, that is, if it does exert force and shape social life, would we not again find ourselves heading down a biological determinist path? Can the bodily matter in ways that are non-determinist and non-reductionist?

Again, I agree with Zientek that we need to take biochemistry and the bodily dimensions of emotions seriously, but the language of 'basic emotions' misleads. It suggests that certain emotions are natural and given, as if they are fully formed entities residing inside individuals, specifically in a region of the brain, ever at the ready to spring into action. A relational perspective challenges that naturalness, givenness, and fixity, instead understanding feelings as coming into being through contact with the world, through relation. Such an approach allows us to break out of a nature/culture dualism, favouring instead a co-evolutionary perspective that helps to muddy those very categories.

To clarify, let me continue with a different reading of the mutiny. Rather than presuming as Zientek does that each of us has a set of 'basic emotions' – a presumption, I would venture, that holds onto the hope for a predictive social science – let's set emotions in motion and consider how they might have materialised in this instance and played the important role that they evidently did. Rather than seeing emotions as ready-made, a relational perspective understands them as potentiality that materialises through sociality, understood broadly. In this historical instance, following Zientek's account, sociality meant the meeting and mixing of alcohol, body-brain chemistry, and a lot of other historically and contextually specific factors that perhaps included combat fatigue, despair over recent high casualties, strong fellow feeling, political radicalisation that prompted greater willingness to defy authority, anxiety among growing numbers of soldiers that the hour for returning to the trenches was drawing near, a snowball effect as hundreds of additional soldiers indicated their willingness to defy authority even after the first two protests were stymied, norms that directed rage toward their superiors rather than, for example, toward one another. Let me be clear: I am drawing from Zientek's account and then suggesting other factors not for reasons of empirical accuracy – I have not done the research! – but rather as a way to suggest that the determining factor in this case, and in any case, can be neither 'nature' nor 'culture' alone but rather what I am calling contact or encounter, a meeting of multiple factors and the playing out of their interactions.

Emotions in this rendering are not pregiven natural substances that reside inside individuals and have fixed, determinate properties but instead are material effects of ongoing sociality, effects that enter the mix and, through ongoing relation, continue to affect and to be affected. Emotions, then, are causally important in this instance of

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contentious politics not as an enactment of a pregiven element of brain chemistry as determined by alcohol consumption but rather in the mix of ongoing world-making that occurs through affecting and being affected. Put differently, and I think Zientek and I might agree on this point, alcohol and its biochemical effects in soldiers' bodies were 'actants' in this history – that is, drawing from Latour, they 'modif[ied] a state of affairs by making a difference'[8] – but there were multiple additional actants in the mix as well and together they all created conditions that made the soldiers' mutiny possible.

However understood, it does seem we are at a point where we can argue that emotion is important in all aspects of contentious politics. As scholars in this special journal issue demonstrate, emotions affect the timing of collective action as well as outcomes (Zientek), play a role in the activation and sustaining of networks and alliances (Romanos), and contribute to internal divisions (Romanos); activists appeal to people's emotions in order to mobilise support and engage in other emotional practices that create feelings of belonging, strength for the struggle, solidarity and other feelings vital for collective political action (Traïni, Romanos, Papadogiannis); activists construct alternative emotional universes and create contexts for the expression of counter-feelings that protest the rationalism and bad feelings of modern life (Fürst, Häberlen and Smith).

As I noted earlier and as Häberlen and Spinney state in the Introduction, the scholars in this special issue, unlike some of their historian predecessors, argue against a sole focus on discourses and for attention to the body as well. A relational approach makes it all 'matter.' Consider, for example, the case that Häberlen and Smith delineate. During the 1970s, West German radical activist discourses and practices that described and enacted the bad feelings under capitalism helped to create, to materialise, those very bodily feelings. But of course naming and enacting fear, frustration, loneliness and alienation do not *in themselves* create those feelings. The material-discursive conditions in and through which people live under capitalism – the ways in which work, time, social relations, living are organised and interpreted – create the possibility for such namings and performances, and make them resonate and take hold, or not. In a relational rendering, 'conditions of capitalism' are actants in the relational mix, affecting (and being affected), helping to create the bad feelings the leftist radicals described.

I want to stay with alienation and other bad feelings a bit longer, and to conclude with the following thoughts about future research. In line with the historian's pre-eminent question of change over time, it is important to explore the practices that bring particular constellations of feelings and ideas and norms about them into being, reproduce them, and sometimes transform them. That sort of investigation is necessary whether we call these constellations 'emotional regimes', 'emotional communities', or 'emotional habituses'.[9] Important as well, especially for the study

[8] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

[9] William M Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Gould, *Moving Politics*.

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of contentious politics, is the question of how these emotional regimes, communities, habituses affect collective political action and *inaction*. Those constellations help to create senses of political possibility and impossibility and thereby help to materialise the political environment, potentialities for activist engagement, and prospects for social change. That is, in helping to shape feelings of collective potentiality but also of political inefficacy, pessimism, and resignation, they establish political-affective terrains that themselves affect political (in)action.

The activists that Häberlen and Smith describe seem well aware of the need to navigate these complex political-affective terrains, to unmake and remake them in a manner that recognises many people's bad feelings and tries to plumb their political potential. Activists today face an equally difficult political-affective terrain considering that in advanced capitalist societies abstract forces shape daily lives and can generate sentiments of powerlessness; social problems frequently overwhelm; politics has been delegated to 'leaders' and 'experts'; the status quo is naturalised and spaces for public discussion of alternatives seem eviscerated; and cynicism about what is and what else might be is widespread. As we continue in our efforts to illuminate the role of emotions in contentious politics, we might zoom out a bit to think about these emotional terrains of activism, both historically and in the present moment, as a way to think about the force of emotion and the prospects for social change.

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