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Introduction: Political Emotions and Ideological Performance

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This special issue, 'Political Emotions and Ideological Performance', emerges out of a series of workshops of the same name, held in 2020 and hosted by the Macquarie University node of the Australian Research Council Centre for the History of Emotions (CHE@MQ), with funding support from the Macquarie University Faculty of Arts. The idea for both the workshops and this special issue emerged in late 2019 out of conversations revealing the surprising number of CHE@MQ members who were currently undertaking research on political extremism, political violence and ideological identity formation. Because the node was only established in 2019, and its members hail from a wide range of disciplines, many had not yet had an opportunity to collaborate, but all were keen to learn from one another's disciplinary approaches to the intersection of politics, ideology and emotion. The resulting collection of essays situates itself at the nexus of theoretical-textual research on emotions and data-driven sociological research, offering a novel consideration of political emotions: it explores how emotions sustain ideologies, as well as how they generate, and are generated by, political engagement.

Despite the range of disciplines represented, all concur with Sara Ahmed's almost commonsense contention that '[a]ttention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become invested in particular structures' of political life.¹ These essays demonstrate that examining emotions deepens our understanding of the subjective investment in such political formations as nations and authoritarian regimes. Emotions research also illuminates political

1 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 21.

actions ranging from terrorism to protest (both violent and peaceful) and ideological processes such as radicalisation and identity formation. Although emotions were once regarded as the failure of the rationality deemed to be at the heart of political life, these essays take as axiomatic Michael Freeden's characterisation of emotions as 'power conduits' which 'excite and propel' political visions forward.²

One thing the workshop brought to light was the asynchronous development of emotions research across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Humanities scholars with backgrounds in philosophy, literature and history have for over a decade been able to draw on a burgeoning bibliography of critical studies on emotion; this volume brings that emotions scholarship to bear on texts that respond to, and shape, the political conditions of their production and reception. Those scholars working in areas such as security studies, however, need to search beyond their field for critical frameworks and vocabularies to interpret their rich empirical datasets of extremist activity, and to move beyond identifying patterns of engagement to grasp the emotional pull of extremist politics. By introducing emotions scholarship alongside their sophisticated data use, they can bring critical precision to a more intuitive understanding of the operation of feeling in political activism, resistance and extremism. As a symptom of this asynchronous development, the essays in this issue vary in the directness of their engagement with the critical scholarship on emotions as historical, social and experiential phenomena. But together they bear out sociologist Mabel Berezin's description of emotions as 'the non-cognitive core of politics'.³ The deeply emotive core of politics and ideology has also been highly visible, regrettably, in the seemingly endless convulsions of the global political sphere in the twenty-first century.

The title 'Political Emotions and Ideological Performance' is intentionally capacious. First of all, 'political emotions' signals the wide scope of political formations covered in this issue, which range from nation and empire down to radical cells. It also accommodates the wide spectrum of emotional states that galvanise political activity. On the negative end of the spectrum, our contributors write about grief, anger, shame, trauma and fear; at the positive end, they explore resilience, camaraderie, hope and love. In some cases, apparently opposing emotions are found together: nationalist emotions, for instance, oscillate between fear and hope, while protest can be equally composed of anger and resilience. The phrase 'Ideological Performance' has two resonances.

2 Michael Freeden, 'Editorial: Emotions, Ideology and Politics,' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18, no. 1 (2013): 1–10 (2).

3 Mabel Berezin, 'Secure States: Toward a Political Sociology of Emotions,' in *Emotions and Sociology*, ed. J. Barbalet (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 33–52.

At the most literal level, it alludes to the fact that many of the instances of political emotions examined here are performance-based, encompassing YouTube videos, documentaries, feature films, music and role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons. But it also recognises the deeply performative aspect of political emotions; that is, the way that these emotional expressions do not just reflect interior moods or affective states, but are performances in that they create emotional intensities and moods. These moods and emotions in turn generate change, and form communities that have their own established emotional habits. This understanding of emotions as dynamic, transformative, and performative is captured in William Reddy's influential concept of 'emotives', which posits that emotional expressions create, change or intensify the emotions they represent, often with real-world impacts.⁴ Each of the essays in its own way demonstrates that political emotions, far from being reactive, shape our world on both large and intimate scales.

We would like to acknowledge the goodwill and emotional resilience of our contributors, whose processes of reading, writing, speaking and revising have all taken place against the challenging backdrop of pandemic – a circumstance that has everywhere generated intense feelings of fear and anxiety, as well as more nebulous moods of isolation and uncertainty. The inability to meet in person led us to change our original one-day symposium into a roomier series of Zoom meetings across four days. What began as exigency ended up a luxury, made up of company, discussion and shared enquiry. The joy amid the gloom was a welcome respite. Our reviewers and editors, too, provided the contributors with advice whilst working under circumstances well beyond the usual challenges of academic life, and we thank them for this. Collegiality is a vital social emotion among scholars, and we receive it with gratitude.

1 The Essays

Emerging from diverse bodies of scholarly knowledge and mediums of investigation, the essays set out the capacity of emotions to generate political ideological performances that often in turn become associated with real-world violence. A number of these essays are drawn from disciplines where the study of emotions has been misaligned or silenced. This is particularly the case for the opening essay by Debra Smith, 'Passionate Belief: Ideology, Emotion and Terrorist Action'. Smith's essay is situated in terrorism studies, a discipline that maintains a deep discomfort with the study of emotions. Drawing on her

4 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 105.

ethnographic fieldwork with members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army she examines the interplay between the emotion of hope, ideology and acts of political violence. Her work highlights the transformative possibilities the study of emotions provides both as a form of methodological enquiry in and of itself, and in relation to its performative capacities (through the emotion of hope), exploring how these may help generate behavioural inclinations towards the pursuit of an ideological violent agenda.

This transformative dimension of emotion, at both an individual and collective level, is a recurring theme for this collection. In his essay, 'Re-enactment and Traumatic Memory: Cinematic Ethics in *The Look of Silence* and *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*', Robert Sinnerbrink outlines how the medium of documentary cinema creates an 'ambiguous space of encounter between perpetrators and witnesses' where complex and often extremely uncomfortable emotions can facilitate transformative social engagement with the long-term traumatic consequences of politically motivated violence. The medium of documentary films and emotions is explored further in Tom Murray's essay, 'Emotions, Activism and Documentary Storytelling: A Biographical Production-Based Case Study'. Similar to Smith's account, Murray weaves together his own experiences as the documentary film-maker, with a framing of the narrative structures employed in the telling of Douglas Grant's life to demonstrate how such mediums can become 'emotionally suggestive cultural productions'. Murray's essay highlights the theme of positive emotions, detailing the possibilities of social and political change that emerge out of the intersection between emotional temporality, tragedy and hope within these cultural productions. All three of these essays highlight the blurring of positive and negative emotions in relation to the performances of political ideology and violence, where hope encourages commitments to ideologies of violence while fear and anxiety may foster resilience. This complexity is mirrored in the next essay, by Lise Waldek, entitled 'The Fission of the Forbidden: The Popularity of Video Content in an Online Right-Wing Extremist Environment'. Here Waldek suggests that the resonance of YouTube with right-wing extremist communities draws not only on the technological affordances of the platform but its development into a dynamic cultural system. Within this system, emotions intersect with sociality and technology to generate opportunities for right-wing extremist communities to engage and recruit audiences. This capacity of emotions to facilitate the performance of political ideologies is explored in another context in Louise D'Arcens's essay 'Temporal Emotions and Historical Vulnerability: Music as a Vehicle of Ideology in *Cold War* and *Peste Noire*'. Examining the Polish film *Cold War* and the music of the French nationalist black metal band Peste Noire, D'Arcens articulates music's 'capacity to solicit temporal emotions', connecting imaginings of pasts, presents and

futures for purposes of political ideological performance. D'Arcens examines how expressions of apparent vulnerability in the music shape and reaffirm the violent political ideologies of white supremacy. This intersection between emotions and historical narratives within political performances is further examined in Sharon Crozier-De Rosa's essay 'Anger, Resentment and Historical Narratives in Protest Politics: The Case of Early Twentieth-Century Irish Women's Intersectional Movements'. Crozier-De Rosa investigates Irish women's use of historical narratives to legitimise their resentment and to shape their engagement in nationalist politics. The emotions of sadness and, by consequence, anger emerge in the realm of feminist politics, where historical narratives themselves have failed to help these women fulfil their political aims. The penultimate essay, by Max Harwood, 'Living Death: Imagined History and the Tarrant Manifesto', returns to the themes of negative emotions, in particular the ideas articulated by D'Arcens. The paper frames the manifestos written by Brenton Tarrant (the perpetrator of the Christchurch terrorist attack) and Anders Breivik (the perpetrator of the Oslo and Utøya terrorist attacks) as cultural artefacts of digital white nationalism. Harwood goes on to highlight the connectivity between the negative emotion of hate, the imagined past, present and future of replacement theory ideologies and the performance of extreme acts of horrific violence. Emotions have the power for incredible destruction. The final essay in this collection returns, however, to the regenerative capacity of emotions detailed by Sinnerbrink, demonstrating the endless possibilities emotions have for new positive imaginings of political ideology and violence. In his essay 'Contesting the Political: Productive Violence, Prosocial Behaviour Change and "Play"', Peter Rogers uses the artifice of tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) and their emerging cultures to examine how violence and play intersect to generate opportunities for prosocial forms of political engagement. In the safe spaces of TRPGs and the phenomenon of play, the relationships between emotion, political subjectivity and political action can be explored and its transformative potentialities investigated. The essay reminds us of the innate creativity and dynamism embedded within emotions, and the critical role these have in shaping the performances of political ideologies and violence.

We hope, finally, that this special issue will enrich current emotions scholarship by underlining the real-life implications of understanding how emotions and politics intersect. By identifying political emotions and performances in both large-scale political activity and in creative practices ranging from filmmaking and music to the humble act of playing games, we can better understand how subjective and social selfhood meet, and what experiences and actions – ranging from peaceful to violent – are generated by that meeting.