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Emotional Communication and Participation in Politics

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1. Objectives of the thematic issue

Ten years after the article by Berry Richards which highlighted the emotional deficit in political communication (Richards, 2010), affects seem to be the holy grail for scholars who are dealing with media, election campaigns, and public discourse studies. Scholarly interest in emotions and political talks has increased over the past decade, with particular attention to the strategic and institutional ways in which emotions in politics are used and disseminated (Crigler and Just, 2012; Hissu and Beck, 2018; Jutel, 2017; Moss et al., 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). There is a wide academic consensus on the emotive component of politics, and few would question that feelings and sentiments have effects on political communication and participation. It is even argued that we are witnessing the emotional turn in researching political discourses where there is a strong focus on the role of emotions in producing, processing, and responding to political information (Hoggett and Thompson, 2012; Lukas et al., 2019a; 2019b; Verbalyte, 2018; Zhang and Clark, 2018). Such an emotional turn certainly illuminates many details otherwise obscure related to political communication and political participation, and it does so with the aid of data-driven and empirically informed analyses. The impact of emotions may be indirect, changing the societal context within which political interactions take place, or direct, affecting the content, the style and the modalities of communications and the forms of political engagement (Brader et al., 2011; Cho, 2013; Kühne and Schemer, 2015). The upsurge in the study of emotion in political messages is accompanied by the hope of further knowledge acquisition concerning the motivations behind political participation (see Barnes, 2012) and voting behaviours (see for example Brader, 2006; Hoon and Kwak, 2014; Weber, 2013).

Works concentrating on the discourse-emotion-participation nexus have in recent years been among the most promising developments in the field of social media, online politics, and audience research. Yet scholars have to deal with the problem: how can affects in politics be investigated through political discourse and political participation? On the individual level, our feelings are deeply subjective and so internal that we often cannot even express them. Emotions can rise and fall instinctually, but we must not forget about the cognitive and collective dimension such like language. On the collective level, the communication of emotion requires language which provides a common and shared vocabulary of expressing our emotional state of mind (see Koschut et al., 2017; Loseke, 2009; Loseke and Kusenbach, 2008; Tudor 2003). Having said that, we argue that there is a need to map out the socially and culturally shaped, verbal and non-verbal linguistic toolkit of the emotive political communication.

Our aim is to contribute to the literature by providing insights into the expressive aspects of emotions with microanalyses which focus on the everyday social interactions and single case studies that attempt to explore the multimodality in political communication. This is why we have put together this thematic issue of Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics (EEJSP) entitled 'Emotional Communication and Participation in Politics' to shed some light on the affective aspects of political communication and participation. There is a great deal of heterogeneity among the articles of the collection concerning the research design, methods, case selection, and country-focus. However, one mission unites them: making sense of the various ways how feelings work through political discourses and campaign communication with less normative, but still in-depth and nuanced knowledge on the emotions and political engagement. The Thematic Issue does not discard the rational paradigm. Quite the opposite: we are convinced that the elements of rational and emotive paradigms need to be merged to acquire knowledge about political communication and participation. The purpose of this editorial note is two-fold. First, it places emotions into political and election campaign communication research and summarizes the knowledge from previous studies. Second, it offers a short overview of the contribution of the Thematic Issue.

2. Lessons from previous studies: emotions in political communication

The vast majority of the literature focuses on the strategic use of emotion to mobilize public support (Brader et al., 2008; Castella et al., 2009; Kaid and Johnston, 2001; Peters et al., 2012). It is noted that politicians have always used emotional appeals strategically, as Aristotle recognized in his analysis of rhetoric. The so-called 'fear/anger appeal' is, for example, a well-established technique of political advertising (Huddy et al., 2007; Ridout and Searles, 2011), while the feeling of hope was the main message in first presidential campaign of Barack Obama (Yates, 2019). However, the relationship between internal subjective experience and external expression of emotions is problematic (Bericat, 2016; Brody, 1999; von Scheve, 2012). The emotional expression cannot be reduced to the mere manifestation of an internal state, as expression, oriented toward communication with another, emerges in the context of socio-political interaction (Marinetti et al., 2011: 32; Thoits, 1996). To put it simply, if a politician says that he/she is angry, it does not necessarily mean that it refers to one's mental state. In other words, external manifestations might have an emotion-expressive function, but also a socio-political communicative dimension (Marinetti et al., 2011: 32).

Despite the long history of emotional appeals in politics, one branch of the literature considers the affects as rather undesirable in a healthy democracy. Emotions are often described as a potential threat that can sway the 'unsophisticated masses to an undesirable end' (Miller, 2011: 525). Normative political decision-making models, for example deliberation, implicitly pit reason against emotion, painting emotion as a less valuable and unwelcomed element of political behaviour. From this perspective, emotion was denigrated as representing

a major obstacle which prevents citizens from fulfilling their civic duties (Marcus, 2002; Marcus et al., 2000; Erisen, 2018: 49).

2.1 Populism and emotive communication in politics

Populism studies represent an influential academic area of concern which discusses the detrimental consequences of the increasing visibility of the negative emotional expressions in politics (Wodak, 2015; Aalberg et al., 2017; Block and Negrine, 2017; Wirz, 2018). Negativity seems to be deeply rooted in populism's conflictual logic *'in which there are only friends and foes'* (Mudde, 2004: 544): emotions plays key role in increasing outgroup hostility which has been manifest in various discursive forms (e.g. anti-Semitism, anti-Romani sentiments, homophobic notions, xenophobia, see Gerő et al., 2017). Radical right-wing populist politicians are frequently criticized for using aggressive, offensive, and anxiety-fuelled rhetoric to gain media attention and electoral success. The style of populist politicians, it is argued, *'emphasizes agitation'* (Heinisch, 2003: 94), often by introducing *'a more negative, hardened tone to the debate'* (Immerzeel and Pickup 2015: 350) and *'intentionally provoking scandals'* (Schmuck et al., 2017: 88). Trump's campaign is depicted by *'unique vitriol of its rhetoric'* (Eiermann 2016: 34). While the left-wing populism in Spain and Italy is characterized by *'carnivalesque attacks'* (MacMillan, 2017) against the elite. Much academic reflection on populism and feelings has emerged from the perspective of *'emotive political sociology'* (Demertzis, 2006: 104) or *'sociology of emotions'* (Bericat, 2016), which seeks to find the human fundaments of populism. In doing so, a few attempts (e.g. Demertzis, 2006; Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Capelos and Katsanidou, 2018) point at the role of complex emotions such as nostalgia, angst, helplessness, hatred, vindictiveness, anger, indignation, envy, resentment and resentment that are strongly connected to the electoral success of populist parties. Based on these observations, one might argue that individual sentiments could be a driving force for favouring populist messages and voting for populist parties. But there is more in this literature: it hints that nostalgic culture, the rise of victim mentality and anxious times may increase the volume of emotive reception of policy issues and populist actors may capitalize on that *'zeitgeist'* through the deliberate expression of anger (Nguyen, 2019; Taş, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018).

2.2 Psycho-sociological foundations of emotive communication in politics

The display of emotion in politics is relevant beyond populism scholarship as well (Albertson and Gadarian, 2015; Verbalyte, 2018; Theocharis et al., 2020). While tremendous efforts have been devoted to the affect effects in political communication (see for examples Lipsitz, 2018; Marquart et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2017), less attention has been paid to the varieties of emotional expressions that are used in political communication. When studying emotions from the perspective of political communication and participation, researchers face several challenges.

On the theoretical level, scholars need to reflect on the political psychological accounts in the relationship between emotions and political actions. A fast-growing research interest in political affectivity orientates our attention onto the political psychology literature. Before exploring the affective dimension of political communication and engagement, it is important to clarify what we measure. Colloquial language routinely uses feelings and emotions interchangeably, but for academic purposed it is useful to separate them (von Scheve, 2018). Some reflections from the social science perspective have engaged in the task of conceptual clarification. It is argued that feelings are mostly bodily reactions that are activated through neurotransmitters and hormones released by the brain, while emotions are the conscious manifestation of sentiments (Crawford, 2014; Hutchinson and Bleiker, 2014). In this strict sense, feelings (e.g. bodily experience) are hard, if not impossible, to detect by focusing on the mental process such as communication and political participation. Emotions are however defined as socially and culturally constructed self-related, episodic, and categorical phenomena that involve cognitive and bodily processes. Four recurring features of emotion are prevalent in the literature: (1) cognitive appraisals; (2) physiological arousal; (3) the labeling of this response with cultural concepts; and (4) the culturally moderated expression of feeling associated with these responses (Wisecup et al., 2006). Looking at three influential classical theorists, Thoits (1989: 318) conceives of emotions as consisting of cognitive appraisals and changes in physiological or bodily sensations, Hochschild (1979: 551) defines emotion 'as bodily cooperation with an image, a thought, a memory – cooperation of which the individual is aware', and Kemper (1987: 263) suggests that emotions are 'autonomic-motoric-cognitive states'. TenHouten (2007: 3) provides an account of these differences, suggesting that emotions are reflections of a person's relationship with the environment regarding one's welfare and potential actions and behaviours to secure this welfare. He also proposes that emotions need to be understood at different levels, in particular, the 'biological and evolutionary', the 'mental and the psychological', and 'the social and the cultural' levels (TenHouten, 2007: 8).

Hochschild draws attention to the observation that our emotions must be aligned with the norms and expectations that are found in every social setting. Each setting, each definition of the situation, will require different kinds of emotional responses and thus feeling management. Hochschild calls these scripts for emotions feeling rules: 'Feeling rules are what guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges' (Hochschild, 1983: 56). These feeling rules are social norms that tell us what to feel, when to feel, where to feel, how long to feel, and how strong our emotions can be. Some elements of the feeling rules have been explored through the lens of display norms. Emotional expression norms in a social group account for how individuals are expected to communicate their emotions (Moons et al., 2009; Leonard et al., 2011). Such rules train people to automatically modify elicited emotional reactions according to context-specific demand characteristics (Matsumoto and Juang, 2013). These rules, guided in part by cultural values related to inherent social structures and interpersonal relationships, are important for the

preservation of social order; the generation of culturally appropriate emotional responding; and the facilitation of social functioning (Matsumoto and Juang, 2013). Emotions therefore can be considered as a moral judgment about proper behavior (Eisenber, 2000) and it is claimed that our socialization orient our mentality of adequate emotional expressions in a given situation (Kitzmann, 2012). Social conventions, institutionally and intersubjectively, have a strong impact on the person's emotional status. These rules and regulations are important on the collective level also: they contribute to establishing and maintaining social ties among group members (Stets and Turner, 2008).

The conceptualization of emotions divides the political psychology into distinctive fractions (Redlawsk and Pierce, 2017). Erisen (2018: 51–54) observes three main theoretical traditions: appraisal theories, valence approach and neural process theories. For scholars of political behaviour and communication, all the three paradigms offer fruitful grounds to carry out empirical analysis. Appraisal theory is very useful in politics since it postulates that emotions evoke distinct behavioural outcomes: fear for example leads to two actions – fight or flight (Wagner and Morisi, 2019). People who fear might support politicans who are communicate care and instant solutions for the chaotic times and worrisome issues (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). Furthermore, politicians might promote emotionally charged crisis narratives to manipulate the 'ontological insecurity' of the voters (Homolar and Scholtz, 2019). Conceptually, the valence theory distinguishes between negative and positive emotions which is originated from the basic human motivational systems of approach and avoidance. Those who feel positive about an event, issue, or political candidate are more likely to be attracted by the target and wish to approach it. And the other way around, those who feel negative wish to avoid it, aiming to protect themselves from potential negative outcomes. Thus, the division of negative and positive feelings (and their expressions) help is to determine someone's evaluation of political parties, topics and events (Lodge and Taber, 2005) It suggests that political behaviour can be explained by bipolar emotional judgements and such judgements can be measured by classifying expressions as positive or negative sentiment (Sniderman et al., 1991). Neural process theories are considered advanced versions the valence approach, since they highlight that negativity and positivity range from low to high according to the emotions felt (Marcus, 2013).

So far, most studies on the emotive aspects of the political messages dominantly deal with the aid of the discrete emotion analysis or valence-based approach (Crigler and Just, 2012, for review). Discrete emotion analyses dominantly focus on anger, anxiety and fear in political talks, we however have limited knowledge of the communicative characters of complex emotions such as outrage and disappointment. However, valence-based approaches assume that emotional expressions are either positive or negative and they measure the proportion of each category in different political contexts (Briesemeister et al., 2012; Himelboim et al., 2014; Soroka et al., 2015).

On the methodological level, the valence model offers a solid analytical background with high chances of replicability and comparability for political communication studies. More specifically, the positive-negative classification is

good at identifying direct expressions. One of the most established techniques is the so-called dictionary-based sentiment analysis which is a big data approach to measuring the feeling that a text conveys to the reader.[1] In the simplest case, sentiment has a binary classification: positive or negative, but it can be extended to multiple dimensions (Haselmayer and Jenny, 2017). Another approach for sentiment analysis is the supervised learning technique which is broadly used for emotion classification purposes (Petchler and González-Bailón, 2015). In this advanced method, model or learner is first trained with some sample data which have already been assigned to the categories, and then the model is tested by providing some sample data as input to the model for doing classification based on the prior training given to it. Automated sentiment analysis is a useful tool to investigate the general and particular public sentiment or attitude within a big dataset, although critics point out several weaknesses of the method (Settle, 2020). Computer programs for example have difficulties recognizing certain linguistic feautres like sarcasm and irony, negations, jokes, and exaggerations, just to mention the most problematic issue (D'Andrea et al, 2015).

2.3 Emotions in political discourses

Scholars are constantly looking for new interpretative and nuanced measurements of emotions in politics. To do so, one may rely on the works of Hutchison and Bleiker (2017) and Katriel (2015) which shed light on the discursive nature of emotions: they propagate that the emotions are, at least partly, constituted through the discourses that condition us to how to express of feelings. Methodologically speaking, they argue that interactions and discourses offer good material to investigate the politics of emotions to study the external manifestation of emotions.

Emotion display norms and practises are the best to be identified through language and other tools of communication within different contexts. Koschut (2017) proposes a comprehensive conceptual framework to explore emotions through discourse. Based on the linguistic features, he distinguishes three possible ways to interpret the emotional expressions in the communication flow. Tracing the *emotional terms* covers the activity to collect and analyse the direct references to an emotional state of mind. It requires a lexical and semantic collection of emotive nouns, verbs, and adjectives which is usually available for each language. Nowadays, emotive terms can be relatively easily collected and analyzed by various computational methods. Koschut however argues that we should move beyond the manifest emotional utterances since certain words are not in the dictionary of emotions, but still are loaded with emotion. Focusing on the *emotional connotations*, the examination can investigate the associated or secondary meaning of an expression which implies the emotional attitude of the speaker. The classic example is the freedom fighter versus terrorist word choice:

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[1] Learn About Dictionary-Based Sentiment Analysis in Python With Data From the Economic News Article Tone Dataset (2016). Available at
https://methods.sagepub.com/base/download/DatasetStudentGuide/dictionary-based-sentiment-analysis-in-econnews-2016-python Accessed on June 30, 2020.

the previous is associated with pride and sympathy, while the latter indicates the anger or fear of the communicator. However, it must be mentioned that in the real world discussions have many ambiguous connotations and sometimes it is rather challenging to differentiate between neutral and emotionally loaded tones. Thus, connotations vary across contexts, cultures, situations, but more interestingly, and yet to be scientifically discovered, they may change rapidly. As one can observe this in the discursive metamorphosis of the use of 'migrant' and 'refugee'. A decade ago, both were legal *termini technici* and neutral ways to describe the legal situation of individuals who left their home countries to live in another one. After the summer of 2015 when high numbers of people arrived in the EU mainly fleeing the war in Syria, but also from other countries in Africa and Asia, the connotation was modified: someone who uses the term 'migrant' is widely understood as evoking negativity and hostility towards the group of people who have recently come to the country, while the label of 'refugee' signalizes the positive, supportive and compassionate emotional status of the speaker (see Taylor, 2015). The neutral and objective use of the words 'migrant' and 'refugee' seems to be disappearing in the public discourse, but still, the researcher can never be sure about the emotional predisposition of the speaker. If we just think about the name choice of the Humanitarian Organizations called 'Migration Aid' which would be certainly misleading if one can code them as hostile emotional expression towards the asylum seekers.

Koschut (2017) also introduces the category of *emotional metaphors* which includes not only figurative speech, but comparisons and analogies as well. People often use metaphors to illustrate their emotional state (see also Kövecses, 2003): light is usually connected to hope, dark is often referred in connection with sadness, and heaven is the metaphor of inner peace and harmony while hell is used to depict a painful situation or suffering, etc. Comparisons and analogies are also quite telling from that point of view. If someone calls Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, dictator, it is plausible to assume that the speaker has a negative feeling towards him. Although Koschut concentrates on the verbal emotive metaphors, comparisons, and analogies, it is not too difficult to integrate the visualizes (still images, moving pictures, artworks, symbols, even clothing, and hairstyle) and other modalities (pitch and loudness of sound, for example) in the conceptual framework. Hitler's toothbrush moustache, for example, is one of the most powerful symbols representing dictatorship and is often used in mocked-up defamatory, disapproval and caricature images of politicians (see Fam and Doer, 2015). Facebook users who create and share a caricature of a politician with toothbrush moustache presumably dislike that politician. Visualities are proven to be a carrier of emotive messages and they are quite an effective tool in consumption-related behaviour (Winkielman and Gogulushku, 2018), while the political relevance is yet to be discovered.

Last but not least, it is necessary to discuss the potentiality in researching emotive communication in politics. This approach may contribute to the general academic endeavour of studying emotions in three main ways at least. First, one of the main advantages of content or discourse analysis is that they are the nonobtrusive methods that allow us to collect data without creating artificial

situations unlike surveys, experiments, and structured interviews. This is especially valuable since it increases the chances to observe the real-life emotional practices in political speech. These findings are useful to our ontological and epistemological knowledge of emotions. Second, the examination of the expressivity in public discourse reveals a new level of the power struggle: a successful politician, who has embodied the emotional rules and expression norms of politics, strategically deploys emotions in the pursuit of power. Emotional competence becomes increasingly important in the habitus of professional politicians and emotion can be viewed as a form of power operating within the political field (see Heaney, 2019). From that perspective, one should pose the following research questions: what can be considered as an acceptable or an unacceptable way of expressing agreements and disagreements in politics?; what are the sanctions of any norm violations?; how are new practices institutionalized and internalized?; who sets the norms of political communication and behaviour?; etc. Third, it provides insights into the realm of collective emotions. As von Scheve and Salmela point out (2014), through interactions in social media and political rallies individuals were able to synchronize their thoughts and emotions, stimulating a sense of social belonging and shared beliefs.

Investigating emotive expressions brings us closer to understanding the means, mechanisms, functions and the instrumentalism of emotions, that is, emotionalization in politics. Also, it sheds some light on the political triggers of emotional responses (included violent actions) which becomes more and more relevant in the age of victimhood culture.

3. Overview of the contributions of the thematic issue

This Thematic Issue cannot cover the full spectrum of the discursive approach of emotions in politics, rather it represents a step in the long and bumpy road to discovering the affective dimension of political communication and participation. With this in mind, the present special issue collects contributions from the disciplines of media and political communication, sociology and anthropology to highlight the various circumstances that enable and stimulate the pursuit of emotional political speech in Europe. To understand the discursive pragmatics of emotions it is useful to distinguish between the strategic use of affective display and instinctive, spontaneous, unplanned affective communication (Janney and Arndt, 1992). The first and the second article of the Thematic Issue illustrates the way how political actors instrumentalize the emotions in their discourse, while the third article is a case study which investigates rural citizens' emotive language.

The first article explores a political advertising campaign in Cyprus. The study focuses on Niyazi Kızılyürek, who was a candidate for the 2019 European Parliament election with the left-wing Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL). Adopting a multi-method of visual and qualitative content analysis to fifty-five ads, the analysis uncovers the emotive character of the campaign language. It is found that Kızılyürek's political stance which favours a solution to the Cyprus problem based on federation with Greek Cypriots is reflected in each ad. Also, data suggest that issue-based ads that underline political issues in the

country were preferred to image-based ads that highlight the personal qualities of the candidate. When it comes to the affective dimension, the article demonstrates that both emotional appeals, associated with feelings such as hope and enthusiasm, and logical appeals, which tend to promote rational information processed by the conscious mind, were employed in the ads, and the overall tone of the ads was positive in nature, while negative emotions were completely avoided in this campaign.

The second article also offers a case study on emotional messages during the 2019 European Parliament (EP) election in Lithuania. To do so, the paper applies the 5W Lasswell model to assess campaign materials from the printed media and social networks. The findings confirm that the emotional messages dominated the communication of the political groups with their voters. It shows an extremely broad spectrum of the political messages arousing emotions: the politicians' messages to the voters overwhelmingly appealed to the European context to address the domestic agendas which exploited emotional aspects of domestic political discourses in Lithuania and the EU perception in the country.

The third article deals with the question of incivility and emotions by providing an ethnographic analysis of rural inhabitants' style when they are talking about politics. During interviews, especially these polyphonic, the author observed accompanying emotions such as raised voices, faces bloodshot with irritation, lively gestures, irony, and sometimes vulgar language and swearing. Anger, resentment, anxiety, fear, contempt, hostility, and even hatred were unmistakable signals of emotional involvement in political matters and engagement in the debate about the common good and public affairs. The study discusses the tension between incivility and political engagement by highlighting that impoliteness has a great mobilizing potential for populist parties in Poland.

In the fourth article, this section of the Thematic Issue zooms out from the emotional aspects of political communication and participation. This study investigates whether social media usage reinforces or weakens the willingness to become involved in a demonstration or other offline political activity. Numerous studies have already attempted to measure this effect, although with contradictory findings related to the direction and extent of the effect. This connection has been explored by synthesizing recent empirical political science papers. For this purpose, the article compares their results by using Bayesian Updating – a tool to compare studies regardless of their methodology or data collection method. This data analysis method is also insensitive to the operationalization of either the dependent or the explanatory variables. The results demonstrate that online political activity has a significant positive effect on offline political activity, based on the studies examined, even though some studies reported insignificant connections.

In the last section, this Thematic Issue provides three book reviews. First, we offer a critical overview of the collected edition entitled *Thirty years of political campaigning in Central and Eastern Europe* (edited by Otto Eibl and Miloš Gregor). Then, the content of the monograph *Emotions, Media and Politics* (by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen) is discussed from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, Emily Syndor's volume on political incivility (titled *Disrespectful*

Democracy: The Psychology of Political Incivility) is presented as one of the most influential contributions to the understanding of the role and effects of emotions in political engagement.

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