

Re-thinking Affective Experience and Popular Emotion: World War I and the Construction of Group Emotion in International Relations

Abstract

Research in International Relations (IR) frequently confronts claims about the emotions shared by members of a group. While much attention has been devoted to the potential for affective and emotional experience beyond the individual level, IR scholars have said less about the politics of invoking popular emotion. This article addresses that gap. Specifically, we argue that between individual—and even shared—affective experience on the one hand and group-based “popular emotion” on the other exists not mechanisms of aggregation but rather processes of framing, projection, and propagation that are deeply political. We distinguish between two tropes that commonly structure references to popular emotion: *communal emotion*, the idealized attribution of an authentic, unifying emotional response of “the people,” and *mass emotion*, a volatile and potentially dangerous mob-like reaction, but one also susceptible to manipulation. Using the outbreak of World War I as a launching pad, we demonstrate the political significance of popular emotion, including its enduring relevance for understanding contemporary populism.

Suggested running head: Re-thinking Popular Emotion

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From “ancient hatreds” to the “century of humiliation,” research in International Relations (IR) frequently confronts—and often recites—commonplace claims about shared emotions. Such claims also regularly feature in public assessments of collective political behavior. Most recently, shared anger and frustration have been used to explain the rise of nativism and other forms of right-wing populism (Hochschild 2016, Polakow-Suransky 2017). In an age of insecurity, the emotions of social, cultural, and political groups take on added political significance (Mishra 2017).

In this article we critically examine claims about “popular emotion”—*specific emotions purported to characterize a group*—to argue these are not innocent descriptors but products of often intensely political processes of framing, projection, and propagation. While allowing for the potential of shared affective experience, we remain skeptical of claims attributing unitary emotions to communities and other political groups. Certainly, there exist multiple pathways through which shared affective experience—or the appearance thereof—can emerge across individuals. But affective experience is multifaceted, diverse, and transient already at the individual level, and these qualities are further compounded in social environments. This complexity of affective experience differs from the simplistic, selective idealizations of shared emotional experience represented as popular emotions.

Our account thus treats popular emotion as a product of discourses that both construct coherence out of diversity and explicitly or implicitly pronounce political or ideological judgements upon their objects. We further posit that constructions of popular emotion to greater or lesser degree adhere to two common tropes: (1) *communal emotion*, the pure, noble, or righteous sentiments that ostensibly unify a community; and (2) *mass emotion*, the dangerous product of an irrational mob prone to panics, bursts of outrage, or other base impulses—susceptible to manipulation but also very volatile. These are not innocent descriptors of empirically observed emotions, but rather categories that alternately work to legitimize, delegitimize, essentialize, or idealize particular forms of group identity or political behavior. Our approach thus investigates not the causal effects of felt emotions on perceptions and outcomes (Small, Lerner, and Fischhoff 2006, Brader 2011, 2008), but rather the political transformation of affective experiences—which by nature are messy, diverse, and transient—into coherent, shared, popular emotions. We use the communal/mass distinction to show how these constructions more often than not reflect specific political and ideological values.

We illustrate the analytical value of this approach by examining a paradigmatic twentieth-century case of purported popular emotion: the “mood of 1914” and “war enthusiasm” on the eve of World War I. Drawing on recent historiography, we show how actual affective experience and expressed emotion was much more diverse and contradictory than previously claimed. We also show how the dominant tropes of popular emotion were manifest both in elite fears and tactics vis-à-vis potential mass reactions, as well as the ways in which popular responses were constructed at the time and retrospectively through historical narrative. The final section and conclusion step back from the Great War to consider the broader importance of interrogating the politics of mass and communal emotion—especially in an age of growing perceptions of insecurity and resurgent populism.

Emotion, Affect, Collective Experience, and Identity

Our critical theorization of popular emotion is rooted in our views on both the relationship between emotion and affective experience and how best to conceptualize the collective manifestations of each. Recognizing that there is much debate on these issues—both in terms of terminology and substance, we seek to chart a specific path through the available approaches across multiple fields.

Our approach is to distinguish emotions from the broader category of affective experience of which we believe they are a part. For the purposes of this paper, *affective experience* encompasses various somatic and felt states and responses—short- and long-term, conscious and unconscious—including those readily observable and those not. Affective experience, even at the individual level, is never monotonic but rather multifaceted, diverse, and transient. In contrast, *emotions*, as “socially recognized, structured episodes of affectively valenced response” (Hall and Ross 2015, 849), denote socially derived categories used to comprehend motives and behavior regarded as products of affective experience (Barrett 2017). Whereas affective experience is multifaceted and changing, emotions such as “anger,” “guilt,” or “fear” are linguistic constructs employed to simplify that messier reality into discrete, recognizable responses and states. Consistent with recent trends in neuroscience and psychology away from fixed lists of “basic emotions” (Lapate and Shackman 2018), we regard individual emotion categories as essentially contested but nevertheless socially and politically significant. The social performance of emotions can be used to convey messages about intentions or even manifest certain institutionalized forms of identity (Hall 2015, Pace & Bilgic 2018).

While affective experience is typically viewed as personal and individual, within sociology, psychology, and emotions research, there exists an array of approaches to theorizing the collective dimensions of affect and emotion (Von Scheve and Ismer 2013, Smith and Mackie 2016, Goldenberg et al. 2016, Salmela and Nagatsu 2016, Parkinson, Fischer, and Manstead 2005, 87-114, Menges and Kilduff 2015). Some theories focus on shared group identifications as a source of collectively convergent emotion (Smith and Mackie 2016); work in this vein draws upon both appraisal-based views of emotions (Lazarus 1991) and classic social psychological approaches to group identity (Tajfel 1974, Turner 1975). Others posit that interaction facilitates the spread of emotional reactions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1993), a view which has received support from recent work on mirror neurons (Nummenmaa et al. 2008). Meanwhile, sociological approaches examine shared norms governing emotional expression (Hochschild 2012). Seeking to synthesize these vast literatures, Menges and Kilduff (2015) helpfully identify four routes to collective emotions: (1) *inclinations*, or shared affective dispositions across actors; (2) *interactions*, which spread emotions through contagion effects or collective interpretations; (3) *institutionalization*, which creates emotional norms, routines, and rituals; and (4) *identification*, whereby shared identity or group membership forms the basis of emotional response. Alternatively, Von Scheve and Ismer (2013) postulate three sets of interactive mechanisms: (1) shared appraisals and intentions; (2) shared facial dialects of expression; and (3) the combined workings of collective memory, group-based sentiment, and shared norms. Although some treat these mechanisms as mutually reinforcing, they can equally be the source of diverse and contradictory influences, with significant individual variation.

Within IR, there is now a significant body of work building in different ways on these theoretical foundations. It should be noted that there are those who, in focusing on the emotions of leaders and diplomats, circumvent questions of collective response by remaining close to more individual-oriented ontologies and methodologies within cognitive psychology and neuroscience (Holmes 2018, McDermott 2009). But others seek to establish an ontological basis for attributing emotionality to states and other groups by focusing on group identity, embracing the view that members of a group share emotional responses by virtue of a commonly held identity (Mercer 2014, Sasley 2011). This latter work can thus present itself as a framework for theorizing shared emotions resulting from experiences of collective success, failure, or stigma and lends itself well to being grafted onto the state-based national identities commonly associated with international politics. Indeed, a range of scholars

examine the political and cultural dynamics of honor and status in ways that often implicate emotional responses and relate these to the state or nation (Lebow 2008, Onca 2014, Wolf 2011, Zarakol 2011). Such theories in IR thus replicate claims that that group emotions follow from shared identities, often with the twist that nation-state identifications have particular pride of place.

Still other scholars in IR, while either resisting or not embracing a causal arrow from shared identity to emotion, posit relationships of constitution and/or emergence between emotion (or affect) and identity. Ross (2006) sees an ontological linkage between identities and partly inarticulable affective processes underpinning them, Solomon (2014) describes affective “investments” as being among “the anchoring forces that bind subjects to their identities” (729), and Koschut (2017) examines the emotional vocabularies that work to constitute a nation state. In a similar vein, Steele (2010) examines the political impact of aesthetic and emotional experiences specifically oriented toward a “corporate Self” such as the nation (3-4). Recent contributions propose identity as an emergent outcome of affective performances. Hutchison (2016), for example, finds emotional significance within cultural representations (such as photographs) which come to constitute the identity of a political community over time. Pace and Bilgic (2018) argue that cultural identities emerge through public performances of emotion that help to produce a “self” in relation to some “other,” becoming “constitutive dynamics of identities and subjectivities” (508).

Our approach views affective experience as inherently diverse and transitory and collective affective experience as messy and multiply realizable, with shared identifications being only one of many potential sources. Following existing work, we also see interpersonal and social dynamics, as well as norms and social expectations as playing significant roles in generating converging responses. To capture this variety, for the purposes of this piece we borrow from Hall and Ross (2015) the threefold typology of bottom-up, horizontal, and top-down pathways to shared affective experience. *Bottom-up* responses emerge by virtue of the various concerns and attachments—including identities—an individual may possess, some of which may be held in common by other actors. *Horizontal pathways* describe forms of social interaction and interpersonal or mediated communication that shape and transmit affective states and responses. For example, protests, media content, or rituals of memorialization—can condition the affective reactions among participants and audiences (Ross 2014)—both heightening or dampening them—and may involve processes of emotional contagion. Lastly,

top-down processes involve norms, social forces, institutional structures, and even discrete strategic efforts that work to elicit, suppress, or harmonize affective responses.

This framework permits shared affective experience to emerge across actors, but it privileges no specific pathway and predicts no clean correspondence of emotion with any specific attribute. This thus contrasts with approaches that assert the centrality of group identity, whereby “being a group member means experiencing and expressing similar feelings” (Mercer 2014, 522, 523). Certainly, shared identifications can elicit homologous responses across some individuals, but political events and interactions may also simultaneously elicit a wide variety of sometimes mutually contradictory responses both across and within individuals. What is more, affective reactions can also spread through pathways that show little respect for group demarcations or, alternately, fail to emerge evenly across those assumed to belong to a group. And however concerted top-down forces might be, affective experience is too varied and transient to ever be totally corralled into conformity. In short, we may be able to read the workings of identity within emotional responses, but cannot a priori assume emotions on the basis of group membership alone. To assert a single emotion for a group is to impose a structured, socially recognized category of affective experience, expression, and intention upon a much messier reality. Consequently, where such assertions are at work, it is not just psychological forces in play but also social, political, or ideological ones.

Popular Emotion and the Construction of Political Agency

There is thus a key distinction between shared affective experience—the transient phenomenon of general affective arousal involving multiple, shifting dimensions—and the social construct of popular emotion—which affixes upon groups singular labels and simplistic models of emotional stimuli and response. Although invocations of popular emotion involve and refer to psychological responses and states, their ontological basis lies in politically or ideologically charged assumptions. Indeed, claims about popular emotion cannot but be political, for to attribute a specific emotional state to a group is to make a statement as to who feels what and why, thereby pronouncing—explicitly or implicitly—upon their identity, rationality, political competency, desires, and moral orientation and status. The construction of popular emotion apprehends the psychology of emotion, but does so selectively through politically laden claims about either empirically likely or normatively desirable emotional

responses—and, indeed, often through caricatures, generalizations, and prejudices regarding emotionality and political agency.

Importantly, endowing popular emotion with a social and political ontology does not negate the possibility of its having a psychological impact. Constructions of popular emotion may begin from assumptions regarding which emotions are or ought to be most salient—fear following a terrorist attack, for example, or hatred in situations of protracted inter-group conflict. But because those constructions are created by cultural authorities, political leaders, and other actors immanent to the social field, they have the potential to discipline shared affective experience in ways that produce—or at least encourage conformity of expression to—the idealized emotions they invoke, generating top-down effects. Without denying this constitutive or disciplining element (Reddy 1997), our focus here is more broadly oriented towards the field of cultural and political contestations around popular emotion, with the aim of understanding how interests, ideas, and agencies can variously be elevated or diminished by them.

Understanding the construction of popular emotion thus intersects with and extends constructivist concerns for the productivity of political discourse. Various scholars have noted how discursive constructions of identity make use of emotional descriptors. Jackson (2005) demonstrates that U.S. President Bush’s post-9/11 discourse constructed terrorists as being “naturally full of hate,” and Hansen (2006) recognizes the importance of historical tropes regarding “passion” and “ancient hatreds” in shaping the political agency attributed to the peoples of the Balkan region during the 1990s (104-108). Such studies demonstrate the capacity for political rhetoric and discourse to produce political subjectivities according to specific idealized stereotypes and attributes. References to emotion are thus among the “predications” that Milliken (1999) argues are routinely imputed to subjects through political discourse (232-233). But the frequency with which “constructions of the Other” reference emotions specifically merits further consideration. Why are discursive constructions of popular emotion so commonplace? And what functions do they perform that other elements of political discourse do not?

Political constructions of popular emotion represent a special opportunity to make claims about the values and desires of a collective. Since WWII, foreign policy decision-making has been informed by public opinion research aimed at measuring public attitudes (Holsti 1992). But strikingly, attributing shared popular emotion continues to operate as a parallel

mechanism for discerning—and constituting—public sentiments. What explains this persistent reliance on popular emotion? Emotions are tied to underlying concerns in which a person or group of people has invested value—for example, a symbol, a standard of conduct, or a moral principle (Hall and Ross 2015, 854). While social actors may present publicly any number of political claims or arguments, their emotional responses are commonly regarded as pure, unfiltered expressions of some true concern (Salmela 2005). As one group of scholars explains, “because emotion is perceived as spontaneous and natural..., people believe that it is an untainted signal of an individual’s underlying state” (Barasch et al. 2014, 395).

Hochschild regards this imputed authenticity as a reaction to efforts to manage emotional expression, the latter affirming the idea that spontaneous feelings reveal some inner truth (Hochschild 2012, 192). Such expectations contribute to the idea that emotions serve as heuristic devices capable of revealing the true sentiments or concerns of an individual—or, indeed, a community.

Studying affect beyond the individual in IR demands continual critical interrogation of the discourses, frameworks, and presuppositions influencing which emotions are—and which are not—considered to be widely shared in a given context. To posit a popular emotion is to select, elevate, and impose a false unity on the diversity both between and within the human beings that constitute political communities. And given that popular emotions are politically meaningful as evidence of the nature, orientations, and desires of the community to which they are attributed, these are not innocuous descriptors. That popular emotion is a construction does not negate its potential to have social and political impact: indeed, by assuming the status of a social fact and being perceived as real by those who invoke it, it can shape strategies, perceptions, beliefs, and debates. As we suggest below, it does so through two commonplace tropes.

Tropes of Popular Emotion: Communal and Mass

Popular emotion serves to impute shared characteristics to a population, to craft a social or cultural entity and posit unity of psychology and even desire in the form of emotion.

Normative and political reflection on the shared emotions of a community pervade the history of political thought. Connections between shared emotion, moral judgment, and virtuous conduct find roots in early Christian ideas of shared love, as well as in Enlightenment notions of sympathy and common sense. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, claims for emotional unity were transposed onto the nation, with idealized accounts of the “general

will” as a basis for citizenship, or shared language as the natural basis for patriotic feeling. Such ideas are foundational to the idea, pervasive in the modern history of international relations, that the nation and/or nation-state is a natural organizing principle for shared affections (Linklater 1998, 2).

But, while nations and states have been historically privileged, the selection of a collective entity as the “owner” of shared emotion is itself a process of contestation. Non-state actors such as irredentist movements and diaspora groups are regularly cast as sites of communal emotion by those who participate in them, and by others as sites of disruptive, mass emotion (Kaufman 2001, Petersen 2002). Claims regarding the location of shared emotion are thus intrinsically connected to contestation over the boundaries of political community—they are among the performances that bring “the people” into being (Ochoa Espejo 2017, 619). As a political rather than psychological phenomenon, attributions of group emotion can thus be the product of efforts at managing the legitimacy of actors and actions.

We label emotions attributed to a community and regarded as authentic sources of legitimacy and markers of collective unity *communal emotion*. In this idiom, the appearance of shared emotions serves as evidence of something more deeply shared across a community despite its divisions, particularly in the face of moments of adversity or triumph. Frequently its referent is the nation as the core political community to and from which emotion flows. As Leheny (2018, 5) explains, “when people invoke national emotions...they are likely to have political goals in mind” and such language works by “creating the image of an affective community not fragmented by the divisive, messy stuff of politics.” Hutchison (2016) in particular, notes the importance of public representations of emotion for the construction of political community, bestowing recognizability and legitimacy on certain actors and formulations of political community.

Regarded as the product of some deeper essence that binds together members of a community, communal emotion is often connected to rhetorical efforts to elevate some norm or policy. Actors and institutions can be invested with legitimacy where they align—or are shown to align—with the ostensibly authentic expressions of communal emotion. For example, after 9/11 the militarized response to terrorism was variously justified according to claims about authentic feelings of anger, fear, or both within the American public. Such group emotions are significant not simply due to a possible causal connection between anger within the American public and support for war (Lieberman 2006) but due to the potential for

claims about fear and anger, as publicly representative emotions, to serve as a basis for legitimation. Moreover, these moments of purported emotional unity in the past become woven into the stories told about groups in the present.

But emotional responses attributed to particular political communities are not always portrayed so favorably. Emotions have long been identified as threats to “reason” and epistemological order. This fear of emotion is manifest in a second trope we term *mass emotion*. Mass emotion denotes the attribution of dangerous, irrational, and excessive emotion to a particular community or political group. Constructions of mass emotion often invoke the crowd or the mob—unbalanced, excitable, potentially destructive. This view of popular emotion has a long pedigree, epitomized in Gustav Le Bon’s 1896 treatise *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. In his account, crowds have psychological properties distinct from individuals, including susceptibility to emotional contagion (LeBon 1995, 148). As Van Rythoven notes of Le Bon, “his writing worked to legitimize pre-existing anxieties over the masses as a source of emotional volatility, a volatility that could easily be mobilized as a threat to public order” (Van Rythoven 2018, 39). Such anxiety is visible today in apprehensions over popular emotions such as panic, outrage, or even over-enthusiastic euphoria.

Far from conveying legitimacy, mass emotion is understood to manifest vehement unreason requiring containment and mitigation. Representations of mass emotion can serve to delegitimize the political claims and agency of certain actors, as indicated by the long history of efforts to describe revolutionary movements and crowds as emotionally driven disruptions to social stability (Ginneken 1992, Van Rythoven 2018). In some cases, mass emotions may be regarded as authentic emotional expressions of some culturally divergent community—as in the essentializing notion of “Islamic rage” (Ross 2010). Here, mass emotions are attributed to communities on the opposite side of a politically salient marker of difference, whether national, religious, class-based, gender or racial, in ways that further work to generate dangerous, irrational, or untrustworthy others (Bilgic and Gjørsv, this issue). As scholars of gender have powerfully demonstrated, such attributions of emotionality can serve as gatekeeping mechanisms excluding subjects coded as feminine from the political sphere (Åhäll 2018). Mass emotion can also reinforce notions of an elite-mass divide, in which masses can be targeted for top-down manipulation and steered by educated and less excitable elites. In such cases, mass emotions may appear as inauthentic, the products of clever machinations or delusions associated with crowds and other mass political formations.

Both communal and mass emotion are attributions that constitute the groups to which they are applied. In selectively elevating certain emotional responses as exemplary, these tropes bestow specific emotions with political salience. Where they differ is that the communal trope regards popular emotion as serving a noble political cause, whereas the mass trope views it as a volatile variable threatening a political agenda or order. The communal/mass distinction thus reflects not universally objective criteria, but instead the political orientation of those who wield it. Attributions of communal emotion uphold certain emotional responses as validating a political project or ideology, and in the process can cast other affective currents within a community as personal, private, or even deviant. Mass emotion, conversely, posits politically threatening deviancy or excess that therefore must be tamed.

To be clear, popular emotion is a fiction, and communal and mass emotion are genres in which it frequently appears. But that said, this fiction can be the object of political agendas and struggles with real effects. Fear of mass emotion can mobilize elite, top-down efforts to prevent its outbreak, quarantine and calm its perceived fires, or direct its force towards desired targets. Attributions of communal emotion can work to legitimate particular political choices while disciplining acceptable public expression. Significantly, the retrospective construction of popular emotion can also work to political ends. Reference to past communal emotion can serve to critique disunity and discipline in the present, whereas portraying past political choices as the result of mass emotion can work to condemn them. In the following section, we demonstrate such political effects through a brief excursion into the case of World War I.

Popular Emotion and The Great War

The “Great War” continues to fascinate IR scholars—and for good reason. As Levy and Vasquez (2014) observe, it “remains *the* case to which nearly every IR conflict theorist is drawn” (4; italics in original). We perpetuate this pattern but with a specific focus on the politicization of emotion during the prelude to and early stages of war—a theme widely discussed by historians but generally overlooked in IR. Where IR has broached the topic of emotion in relation to WWI, it often has either accepted claims of uniform affective responses, such as “war enthusiasm,” or treated the nation-state as a coherent vessel for psychological dynamics.

In particular, recent contributions have raised important questions about the role of honor, status, reputation, and self-esteem, but have done so in a way that largely preserves analytical focus on a generalized affective orientation associated with the nation-state (Lebow 2008, Offer 1995, Wolf 2014). While offering important insights, such work ties emotion to some nationally defined identity or Self; doing so risks both reifying the nation-state form and omitting the political construction of psychological dynamics attributed to the collective. Alternately, scholars focused on the dynamics of recognition have approached the war as an opportunity to secure social affirmation and/or avoid rejection for some Self or identity (Loewener 2014, Murray 2015), whereas our account highlights a more fluid social context in which discursive representations of popular emotion are themselves construct putative collective agency. Ringmar (2018) tackles the problem of pre-war emotion directly by theorizing emotions not as “things” but as “moods” belonging to a social environment; he then considers the possibility that a “public mood” might be characteristic of “a particular society at a particular time” (42). Our account instead embraces the claims of revisionist historians that the terrain of shared affective experience was more differentiated, and then treats mass and communal emotions as political constructions.

Specifically, we make three points. First, following our theoretical understanding of affective experience, we show that the affective responses that accompanied the outbreak of the war—far from exhibiting a coherent “war enthusiasm”—were myriad, contradictory, and shifting, exhibiting various forms of bottom-up and horizontal arousal. Second, we posit that on the eve of the war, elites imagined and feared mass emotions and thus engaged in top-down efforts to steer the domestic populace. Finally, we find accounts of war enthusiasm to stem first from a politically motivated myth of communal emotion, imposed upon the public response both as it unfolded and retroactively, and then also from later discourses of mass emotion as well. Our time frame is purposely truncated, since the late summer months of 1914 showcase both the diversity of lived affective experience and the ways in which constructions of popular emotion projected both political fears and desires upon it.

Affective Complexity

Recent historical research suggests that the July Crisis unfolded against a complex—indeed, messy—backdrop of affective reactions and states. Especially focused on the crowd activities of August 1914, revisionist historians emphasize Europeans reactions were more varied and dynamic than contemporaneous accounts suggest. Before the rejection of the Austrian

ultimatum and the news of Russian mobilization, most Europeans remained either indifferent to the conflict in the Balkans or convinced it would not lead to a general war (Neiberg 2011). Even as the crisis escalated and war began, it is difficult to establish a uniform pattern of enthusiasm. The impressive crowds that gathered in German cities on the eve of war were not uniformly joyous but simply “curious” and “confused” about the impending war (Neiberg 2011, 121, 125, Verhey 2000, 27,62). In Britain, most who volunteered for military service did so not in an immediate flurry of excitement but later, following news reports of German aggression and national efforts at recruitment (Gregory 2008, 32). Europeans experienced a variety of emotional responses to the war—from enthusiasm and confusion, but also sadness, anxiety, and relief (Neiberg 2011, 131, Gregory 2008, 34-5). Such evidence indicates a diversity of individual-based, bottom-up responses to the news of the war, not a singular reaction based upon a shared identity.

In this context, crowd activities both revealed affective reactions stemming from bottom-up processes and generated new ones in and through the horizontal pathways that emerged through demonstrating. Verhey (2000) explains that smaller groups of educated youth—motivated by excitement—began to demonstrate in Berlin and several other large German cities the evening of July 25. Anticipating Serbia’s response to the Austrian ultimatum, others gathered in public spaces and near newspaper distribution sites, curious and eager to hear the news. But as diplomatic maneuvers inched closer to war, crowds characterized by expressions of fear and panic emerged alongside both enthusiastic parades and anti-war demonstrators. Thus, initially bottom-up forms of affective excitement produced by personal responses to unfolding events began to spread horizontally as individuals came into contact with one another. Such horizontal dynamics were visible in the giddy parades but also mass activities such as withdrawing money from banks and hoarding groceries in preparation for war (Chickering 2007, 207, Verhey 2000, 48-9). By the time of German mobilization on August 1, hundreds of thousands waited for the Kaiser to appear at the Berlin palace (Verhey 2000, 65-6). As one scholar notes, “reluctance, anxiety, panic, or opposition were more common than enthusiasm for military action—at least until the German declaration of mobilization” (Chickering 2007, 202). Bottom-up reactions to events may have reflected national identity commitments and, indeed, may have pushed some into the streets. But these initial responses equally could have entailed more personal concerns and proclivities, or more general reactions to the uncertainties and upheavals participants perceived. Moreover, through horizontal pathways, crowds also were shaping the emotions of their participants,

with a result more differentiated and dynamic than clear-cut war enthusiasm (see also Becker 1986). The affective excitement exhibited by crowds was not of a uniform nature, and it impacted those exposed to it by eliciting a variety of responses, ranging from exhilaration to dread. There was no singular group emotion, but rather a kaleidoscope of tumultuous affective reactions.

The plurality of affective responses was also reflected in proliferating rumors about impending war. Indeed, alongside crowds, rumors constituted an important source of diverse horizontal transmission. As publics became aware of censorship, established news media lost credibility. In its place, ordinary people began to circulate suggestive rumors; as Gregory writes of the British context, “the public itself rushed to fill in the gaps” (2008, 64). The resulting rumors often induced affective responses that resonated with constructions of popular emotion. For example, a notorious rumor in Britain concerned the unexpected passage of Russians to France via Scotland and England: “By mid-September 1914 everyone knew someone, who new someone, who had seen Russians” (Gregory 2008, 65). Also common were rumors suggestive of the war’s imminent end (Neiberg 2011, 185-6); these hopeful messages became “‘crumbs to live on,’ even if they appeared false on the surface” (161).

In sum, the outbreak of World War I involved a diversity of shifting affective reactions. They emerged both in bottom-up fashion—as individuals reacted to events as they perceived them—as well as through horizontal processes, such as crowd activities or the circulation of rumors. They included seemingly identifiable strains—excitement, fear, sadness, panic—but these were transient elements within a more fluid environment of heightened affective response. And as examined below, they were also subject to top-down attempts at control and discipline, attempts rooted first in apprehensions born out of fear of projected mass emotions, then later in efforts to cast national reactions in a more favorable, communal light.

Fear of Mass Emotion and the Strategies This Engendered

In preparing for war, European leaders were fearful of the mass emotions they imagined could turn against them: they saw support for war as far from given. Several years earlier in Germany, for instance, the military Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke had counseled the Kaiser against war during the Bosnian Crisis, stating, “a war that the German people did not want or did not understand, and therefore would not greet with sympathy, would be a very

dangerous affair” (Mombauer 2001, 118). Policymakers were deeply concerned to frame the coming conflict in top-down ways that manipulated public indignation and nationalist allegiances to their favor. French and German governments, especially, worried about possible Socialist resistance to their emotional strategies, preparing lists of Socialist “agitators” to be taken into custody on the eve of the war (Herbert 1989, 59, Joll and Martel 2007, 169).

Key to these efforts was portraying adversaries as the belligerent party. For instance, even as war appeared imminent, the German leadership nevertheless delayed declaring war—sacrificing time for mobilization—to paint Russia as the aggressor (Herwig 2003, 181-182, Hewitson 2004, 202, Joll and Martel 2007, 28, Pogge von Strandmann 1988, 106). Similarly, in France, one of the primary decisions of a Cabinet meeting in the midst of the crisis was: “for the sake of public opinion, let the Germans put themselves in the wrong” (Keiger 1995, 127). The French President, Raymond Poincaré, not only resisted multiple entreaties from the military to mobilize, but actually ordered the withdrawal of troops ten kilometers from the French border so as to avoid any possible altercation that the German side could cite as a *casus belli* (Williamson and Van Wyk 2003, 206-217). French patience held, and Germany was the first to declare war. Poincaré wrote in his diary: “it was for all members of the cabinet a relief. Never before had a declaration of war been welcomed with such satisfaction... If we had had to declare war ourselves... national unity would have smashed” (Keiger 1995, 140).

Governments thus sought to control and channel the mass emotions they anticipated and feared through various techniques, above all the control of information. Germany offers an illustrative example, with the most concerted campaign of censorship and propaganda. The only wire service, the Wolff Telegraph Bureau, was already under an obligation to refer “sensitive material” to the Foreign Office. And the August 1 announcement of the “Imperial Law of the State of Siege” gave the Kaiser and the military direct authority over all information distributed by German media (Welch 2000, 27-31). Bethmann Hollweg imposed a list of 26 prohibitions on news agencies, and military authorities supplied a strict and detailed set of guidelines “to protect the Fatherland” (quoted in Welch 2000, 31). During the first part of the war, these restrictions aimed at promoting national unity by emphasizing the defensive nature of the war. In mid-October 1914, for example, the German government required all papers to publish a 1906 document, allegedly found by German soldiers in Belgium, that disclosed a plan by France and Britain to use Belgium as a staging ground for invading Germany in the event of war; the document served as rhetorical support for

Germany's pre-emptive attack (Neiberg 2011, 183). As the war progressed, messages shifted to demonizing the enemy, rationalizing economic sacrifices, and clarifying war aims. Whether by withholding information of casualties or by circulating exaggerated claims of enemy atrocities, governments were frightened of mass emotions that could turn against them and sought to channel public reactions towards outward enemies.

A Communal Emotion is Born...

While affective experiences were very diverse—despite the top-down efforts of various governments—the appearance of crowds in the streets quickly became fodder for the construction of communal emotion, particularly in Germany. Conservative newspapers began describing the initial gatherings as evidence of war enthusiasm, and events became self-propagating. They generated still larger crowds and spread to more and more of Germany's cities in the following days. Crowd activities thus had a contagious quality, with earlier parades establishing a pattern of conduct for later gatherings, which often involved on-lookers motivated by curiosity (Chickering 2007, 205). Even if enthusiasm was not their primary motivation, assembled crowds were taken as evidence of communal emotion.

Correspondingly, as reporting imposed a narrative of communal emotion upon public assemblies, intellectuals, leaders, and other advocates of war circulated narratives about the impressive “enthusiasm” Europeans exhibited during August 1914. The outpouring of public enthusiasm was soon coined “the spirit of 1914” and referenced both during and after the war as evidence of public support for military mobilization (Verhey 2000, 7-11). For some, the “August experiences” were quasi-mystical, a spiritual impulse toward national unity (Chickering 2004, 15). For government officials and political parties, the myth of an authentic outpouring of public emotion afforded “a representation of a militaristic public opinion, of a will to fight.” Popular emotion served as a key element in political efforts to justify involvement in the war and legitimize conservative, nationalist ideals more generally (Verhey 2000, 138).

Interestingly, while conservative elites narrated “the spirit of 1914” during and after the war as a moment of pure community—an idealized communal emotion expressing the essence of the nation—those coming from different ideological perspectives reframed it as mass emotion run amok. Although not evenly distributed across European societies (Chickering 2004, 149, Welch 2000, 13), pacifists regarded the “Spirit of 1914” as a sign of the irrationality of war

(Gregory 2008, 9-10). LeBon himself saw the “mood of 1914” as evidence of how easily emotion could triumph over reason (Neiberg 2011, 130). In Britain, crowd activities in mid-1914 were regarded as reminiscent of the Mafeking Night that followed Baden-Powell’s famous siege during the Boer War (Pennell 2012). Public memorialization of those demonstrations had, Pennell argues, “morphed into concerns that the British public had been dangerously out of control in its lust for war” (42). The same events and behaviors could thus be cast as either manifestations of noble communal emotions or dangerous mass ones, depending on the political perspective of the commentator. Indeed, on the eve of the war in Britain, pacifists betrayed great confidence in themselves as “far-sighted individuals who were ‘above the melee’” (Gregory 2008, 9-10). As far as they were concerned, the “spirit of 1914” was the irrational exuberance of ill-informed youth.

The above offers some important insights into the nature of shared affective experience and the social construction of popular emotion. Public reactions to the events of July and August 1914 supplied a key reference point for ideas and ideals of popular emotion—whether the unity of communal emotion exemplified in the spirit of 1914 or the dangers of mass emotion seen in what is read as war-lust—throughout the war and in the post-war period. In this way, popular emotion was prolonged, extended, and memorialized in various ways after the fact, constructed and re-constructed into communal and mass forms. As we have sought to show, shared affective experiences were more varied and dynamic than any representation of popular emotion could ever capture. Both disparate responses and more general feelings of excitement emerged in bottom-up fashion; were elicited, shaped, and heightened by horizontal processes; and were the target of top-down attempts at manipulation. And throughout it all, they remained stubbornly messy. But despite its diversity, the subsequent, prevailing images of that affective context—what one account describes as a “roller-coaster ride of emotions” (Neiberg 2011, 89)—were painted in the monotone of popular emotion.

Discussion

It is tempting to dismiss WWI as no longer germane to current discussions of group emotion—perhaps a *sui generis* instance of nationalistic frenzy or an anachronistic case predating modern public opinion research. And yet kindred constructions of popular emotion persist in contemporary claims relating to fear of terrorism, humanitarian

compassion, and populist anger. We see this in the rhetoric of policymakers, journalists, and even scholars who take affective reactions expressed in the actions of individuals on the street, letters to the editor, or even in short bursts of online text as evidence of emotional reactions representative of a whole. Neither is the interpretation of public opinion data fully immune to these dynamics, as it too is gathered and filtered through assumptions about mass and communal emotion, with the latter filling the gaps where the former is ambiguous. While the past century has certainly entailed important technological and institutional changes affecting how popular emotion is invoked and with what impact, the underlying phenomenon of political representations of shared emotion persists. But why, and with what social and political effect? What political and normative function do claims about popular emotion serve that alternative heuristics of public opinion do not? How can this help us make sense of contemporary responses to political shifts and insecurities?

One important lesson from WWI is that assertions of popular emotion can become closely interlinked with particular, politically informed readings of the past and future. Popular emotions from the past become objects of debate, as leaders and other public authorities seek to harness them to legitimize policies, norms, or institutions. Consider, for example, the appeal to the exemplary displays of courage from the so-called “greatest generation,” invoked in the aftermath of 9/11 to promote national unity and vigilance (Noon 2004). Such communal emotions serve as evidence of a purported uniformity of feeling that, even if momentarily, brought a given collective together. Here too exists a double move: on the one hand, disciplining the past by erasing or eliding the actual diversity of affective experience; on the other hand, admonishing the present by holding up a measure of political community against which it cannot but fall short. Its power as a political resource thus lies in motivating projects to venerate or even reassert a past that could not have been.

Contestation over the shared emotions of the past is invariably bound up with efforts to anticipate and shape future emotions. Collective memories are not merely abstract discourses about historical facts; they are affectively laden reconstructions that fuel political debate and practice in the present (Eberle, this issue; Bell 2006, Edkins 2003, Hutchison 2016). A memory elevated as collective cues signal events and actions germane to collective assessments of agency, responsibility, and moral conduct. As one historian explains, a collective memory “must steer emotions, motivate people to act, be received; in short, it must become a socio-cultural mode of action” (Confino 1997, 1390). The representation of past emotional conduct is not the only form of memory that shapes action in this manner, but it is

likely an especially salient one. Reconstructions of popular emotion help to tell the story of the motivations that have held sway over a society in the past, whether revered or disparaged.

The case of WWI also reveals how value-laden folk theories of popular emotion held by elites and other decision-makers shaped their responses and strategies. Indeed, fears of mass emotion were not limited to the context of WWI. Consider U.S. policymakers' concerns about "mass panic" during the Cold War (Ruby 2012) or French leaders' worries about public outrage prior to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (Hall 2016). Fears of these mass emotions shaped policy. The result in the former case was prophylactic gestures of civil defense; in the latter, a preemptive declaration of war.

Constructions of communal emotion also afford the possibility of claiming alignment with some authentically representative affective response within a community. The "enthusiasm" at the center of the "Spirit of 1914" myth held enduring significance because it could be construed as a pure and spontaneous expression of public desires. This element of authenticity helps to explain why claims about popular emotion are so consistently mired in controversy and invested with normative significance. Identifying popular enthusiasm for war serves as a basis for the normative claim that waging war in 1914 was unavoidable, just, or—more likely—both. More recently, the post-9/11 anger identified by hawks and conservatives served as an indicator that a moral boundary had credibly been transgressed—the immediate aftermath of the attacks was, as William Bennett argued, "a moment of moral clarity" (2002, 2, see also Elshtain 2003, 7). The political significance of claims to communal emotion thus lie in this potential to invest policies, actions, and communities with normative legitimacy.

Far from being a vestige of conflicts past, rhetorical appeals to popular emotion are thriving in the age of insecurity and resurgent populism. When dismissed as angry during the 2016 primary election season, then candidate Donald Trump declared: "I'm angry, and a lot of other people are angry, too, at how incompetently our country is being run" (Duhigg 2019). Meanwhile, as a coalition of opponents continue to resist his agenda, the populist right seeks to undermine their legitimacy with descriptions of an "angry mob"—viz. through the trope of mass emotion (Viser and Costa 2018). These examples offer preliminary indication of the enduring political value of invoking popular emotion and their centrality to contestation over the values and interests at the heart of political community.

All this bolsters the view that the political representation of emotions—here in group form—is an important object of study in and of itself (Hutchinson and Blieker, 2014; Leheny, 2018). And while much of this work has adopted a case-study oriented approach, the tropes we discuss here would on the surface appear to have a robust presence across multiple historical and political contexts, suggesting the potential for other methodological approaches, including discourse and textual analysis, to examine their prevalence on a broader scale. Comparative research across cases could help to discern when and why popular emotion—and, specifically, each of its variants—is most commonly invoked, as well as the relationship it bears to political discourse invoking the more familiar category of public opinion.

Conclusion

We frequently encounter references to popular emotion in political discourse—be they enthusiasm or rage, mourning or elation. Instead of trying to find a basis for this in group psychological dynamics, we approach popular emotion as a social construction—one that by its nature invokes normative assumptions about the nature of collective political action. As the case of WWI demonstrates, the selective application of its tropes—whether mass and communal—betray the political beliefs and values of those who invoke them. Our account does not deny the possibility of shared affective experience but rather highlights the gulf existing between such experience and the claims of popular emotion so frequently imposed upon it. Tropes of popular emotion mold and select from affective experience in ways that reflect and advance specific ideas about who should be showcasing which emotions, when, where, and why.

Our analysis further suggests that as scholars we need to be cognizant of claims regarding popular emotion and alert to the ways in which even scholarly research may invoke its tropes. In assuming the primacy of national identity as the source of politically salient collective emotional experience within the nation-state, we may be implicitly affirming the ideological underpinnings of communal emotion. Alternately, by attributing political outcomes to the emotional responses of non-elite or foreign actors led astray by manipulation or psychological volatility, we may be propagating problematic notions of mass emotion. Popular emotions of both kinds reveal an implicit economy of contestation over the definition of political community and the acceptable forms of agency proper to it. Such concerns may be all the

more pressing in the era of populist movements that reference feelings of alienation, humiliation, or resentment. There is a need for IR scholars to investigate the social salience of such emotional dynamics, to parse their social and economic origins, and to map what connections they might have to national and oppositional identities. But the framework we present here recommends also a parallel investigation into the moral assumptions informing such accounts, as well as the cultural impact they may have as they embolden certain political claims and discredit others.

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