Book Review

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) *Emotions, Media and Politics.* Cambridge: Polity Press. 220 pages.

Research on emotions has been experiencing a renaissance since the nineties and has become a 'hot topic' of scientific interest (Evans, 2001), formulating an interdisciplinary field which social sciences now take into consideration. The so-called 'emotional turn' has also taken place in human sciences, thus in the last decades emotions have been in the focus of sociology, cultural anthropology and political sciences. *Emotions, Media and Politics* tries to react to the emotional turn, and it finds that emotions matter to mediated politics. Actually, they do not simply matter, but they matter a lot.

Despite the fact that contemporary culture is often depicted as 'emotional culture', and we can witness an emerging centrality of emotion in society, emotion sometimes 'could be seen as an epistemological elephant in the room' (p. 167). However, its 'unspoken presence' (p. 167) determines our life in many ways: emotions are everywhere, and they can be easily found in (mediated) politics as well. This omnipresence is not good or bad, but it is a satisfactory reason why emotions have to be considered 'as an integral part of any explanation of what it means to be engaged by, participate in and make decisions about politics' (p. 172). This statement means an explicit turning away from the theory of deliberative democracy, in which the decision-making process is always rational and never involves the emotional dimension.

The book is structured into seven main chapters, plus an introductory and a concluding chapter. In the first two chapters the author positions emotions in (mediated) politics and in journalism. The point of departure is the assumption of radical democrats', that is, 'political brain is an emotional brain' (Westen, 2007: xv). On the one hand, there is a process of informalization of political life, and emotions can be seen as important expressive forms and tools of contemporary politics. On the other hand, the role of emotions is also seen as a key factor in shaping the practices of journalism. Nowadays emotions are taken into account in high quality journalism as well, and the so-called 'strategic ritual of objectivity' (p. 38) shifted into the 'strategic ritual of emotionality' (p. 44). Good storytelling inherently involves emotions, because emotions can make social and political issues easily visible, and they can elicit compassion in audiences. So, there is no journalism without emotions and there is no politics without emotions, and that is why emotions need to be studied in the context of mediated politics as well.

Chapter three demonstrates why personalized storytelling is so crucial in political life. Personalized storytelling can be considered as some kind of emotional talk, by which politicians can make connections between private and public. Personalized storytelling makes the politician authentic in the eye of the public, and it creates an emotional bond between the politician and the audience. This communication form can be useful from the 'other side' as well, because it elicits

compassion oriented towards the creation of communities which want to achieve social and political change.

After having focused on the role of emotions in mediated politics generally, the book moves on to exploring particular emotions. Two chapters are dedicated to anger as a central political emotion, and one chapter deals with the 'the politics of love', more specifically with the phenomenon of political fandom.

According to the author, anger is first and foremost 'performative, discursively constructed, collective and political' (p. 92). In order to give a more comprehensive analysis of this typology, the book studies protest coverage and it finds that anger bolsters engagement in political activity. Another important statement of the book is that: 'mediated anger is always-already political' (p. 108), because it allows us to express our collective grievances. In chapter five the author applies this idea to the case of the Donald Trump's 'angry populism',[1] while the studied emotion is connected with the notion of 'emotional regime' (Reddy, 2001). The main strength of the book is that it introduces the concept of emotional regime, because with this act it emphasizes that emotions are not just working on the individual level and circulating in individual bodies, but they have collective and constructed nature, too. The author proposes that there was a shift in emotional regimes, and after Obama's presidency a new regime, the angry populism was born. The chapter also examines Trump's angry populism in the coverage of anger from the 2016 US presidential election to Trump's first 100 days in office. This examination shows that angry populism is being mediated and anger has played a crucial role in Trump's ascent, it became a real political force 'on its own right' (p. 17). Furthermore, the chapter suggests the complexity of this emotion, i.e. anger is not only a tool in the hand of political opportunists like Trump, but it can give voice to the supporters and opponents of Trump as well.

The chapter six deals with another particular emotion, it examines the politics of love. The political aspect of love is studied through the phenomenon of 'fandom', more specifically the Milifandom movement (fans of Ed Miliband, UK Labour leader) and the movement of Trump lovers. In both cases love and other emotions legitimized the fans' political engagement, and this explicitly articulated affective commitment oriented them towards political and social change. It is also important that this chapter differentiates between different kinds of use of the term 'love'. In the case of Ed Miliband, love elicited other positive forms of emotions (political interest), while in the case of Trump this kind of fandom was an essential element of Trump's angry populism. While Trump's fans expressed their love, they also created identity boundaries and defined 'the Others', so love was usually combined with anger and hate.

Chapter seven tackles the emotional architecture of social media. Emotions have a central space on social media platforms, and this centrality of feelings 'shows a paradigm shift in thinking about public debate as it takes place through social media' (p. 165). Besides the fact that rationality is overshadowed by

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[1] Anger is the key (ideological) factor of Trump's populism, hence the emotional connection between Trump and his supporters is based on the establishment of an 'us' against the 'them'. This emotional bond can be most easily maintained and intensified by the aversion and anger felt towards the 'others'.

emotions, social media is also a perfect place to manipulate users' emotions and use them for commercial success. There is a real 'emotional economy of our mediatized world' (p. 165), and that is why it is so important to take emotions into account in the field of politics as well.

The book ends with nine propositions. Though some of these are undoubtedly important, either they can seem self-evident or they have long been part of the discourse on emotions in political science. For instance, the first proposition (emotions are everywhere) talks about 'the massive unspoken presence' of emotions 'that hovers over everything, but that we have for so long refused to see, talk about and engage with' (p. 167). This statement is highly questionable, because in recent years emotions have become 'trendy' in the field of political science as well. It is a fact that today, there is a huge amount of literature dealing with emotions from very different perspectives: emotions are clearly visible, and it is getting harder and harder to ignore them. Proposition 4 (emotions are everywhere in mediated politics), proposition 5 (emotional storytelling may cultivate authenticity and compassion), proposition 6 (anger is the essential political emotion) and proposition 9 (research agendas in media and politics must consider the role of emotion) are not very much developed either, hence they essentially lack any kind of specifications, and they are not organized into a well-elaborated theory. Some readers may feel that more illuminating conclusions would have been provided in the last chapter by drawing on the extremely interesting observations of the previous part of the volume.

Apart from the above-mentioned shortcomings of the book, I would like to present those two statements which I found the most innovative, and which – I think – fight against those stereotypes that somewhat determine the way we think about emotions.

The first one is that emotionality and rationality are not mutually exclusive. In the 1980s, neurological research showed that there is no clear rational decision, so a decision-making process cannot exist without involving the emotional dimension as well (Damasio, 1994; Zajanc, 1984). Nevertheless, (political) emotions are still considered as threats to rational thinking and rational decision-making (not that thoughts, which are free from emotions, cannot be 'dangerous' in themselves anyway?) Rationality and emotionality are simultaneously present in politics, and for this reason they have to be examined together, in order to obtain a more accurate picture of politics. It is also important that a decision that seems to be overemotional, can be rational in the realm of politics, because it can help to gain and maintain political support (see Trump's angry populism.) Having focused on political gain, we can see that 'mediated emotions gain their significance from their performative construction and their role as a strategic resource' (p. 173). Emotional management and the manipulation of emotions can be a tool of political gain, thus emotions used in favour of (political) interest is another good example for the coexistence of rationality and emotionality.

'Love motivates us to engage in politics' (p. 170) is another impressive statement of the book. When we think of politics, we usually notice the overwhelming majority of negative emotions. This concept of negativity can be a cliché about politically relevant emotions. It is crucial that positive emotions ought

to be the object of future examinations too, because they can play just as important a role in politics as their negative counterparts. In connection with emotional valence there is another stereotype which the book attempts to resolve, that is 'emotions are not inherently good nor inherently bad' (p. 173). In order to change this binary subdivision (good/bad, positive/negative), emotions should be studied in their complexity. We can see from chapter six that fans' love can easily transform into hate and anger, while chapter five demonstrates that anger can play an important role in mobilizing and motivating people and in intensifying political engagement, too. Emotions are not just 'for themselves', we have to see the context, and it can be necessary to map the whole emotional repertoire in order to understand politics.

While the book makes many innovative statements about the political role of (mediated) emotions, these undoubtedly important concepts are not organized into one unified and complex theory, hence sometimes these valuable thoughts remain fragmented and we miss the potential connection points between them. Despite this criticism, *Emotions, Media and Politics* is an impressive work that designates future research directions in the study of emotions in political science and in political communication.

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