Emotions and the social

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Understanding the role that emotions play in international relations is one of the field's 'great frontiers'. As my fellow contributors point out, emotions such as fear, anger, honor, shame, and trust are everyday features of global social and political life, and our most prominent theories assume these conditions as elementary theoretical building blocks. Yet, until recently, International Relations scholars have turned a stubborn blind eye to the nature and role of emotions in world politics. Structuralism, materialism, and rationalism have all encouraged this neglect, as has the analytical privileging of second- and third-image modes of analysis. In the past decade, however, a new wave of scholarship has focused on the nature and political implications of emotions. One of the most exciting insights of this research draws on findings from the neurosciences to show that emotions are not only internal psychological and physiological phenomena, they are also inherently social: our neurological systems are socially adaptive. The implications of this insight are profound, challenging as it does the conventional battle lines between psychological and sociological, and ideational and material, approaches.

I am interested here, however, in a different set of relationships between emotions and the social, with how emotions condition the social world of international relations, not how our neurological processes are shaped by interaction with the social universe. My concern is with the core proposition animating the new wave of scholarship: that emotions merit systematic examination because they are politically consequential. Nothing I say here questions this proposition. Rather, I am concerned with how emotions scholars engage the social, conceptually and analytically. My reference points are the opening essays by Neta Crawford and Jonathan Mercer, both of whom argue that emotions are politically consequential in part because they work not merely at the individual level but also at the level of groups, states, and institutions. Demonstrating this, as Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker stress (2014, 491–514), is essential for establishing the veracity of emotions in world politics, and Crawford and Mercer contribute significantly to this end. However, as they move from theorizing emotions, as psychological and physiological states embedded in social environments

and intersubjective contexts, to the relation between emotions and collectivities, states, and institutions, their conceptual and theoretical steps become more precarious.

Groups

Mercer's goal is to show how we might reasonably speak of group-level emotions, and in turn understand how 'a person can feel like a state' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). He admits that only corporeal beings can produce emotions, but argues that emotions are not ontologically reducible to the body: 'The content cannot be reduced to the cause' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). A crucial distinction must be drawn, he contends, between personal and social emotions, the second of which occur and make sense only within social relationships (Mercer 2014, 515–35). Fear of heights is a personal emotion, but guilt, shame, pride, envy, and belonging are social: they only arise and have meaning in society. Individual-level emotions can be personal or social, but all group-level emotions are always social, Mercer contends. A group-level emotion is one whose referent is a social group, where one feels guilty not for something one did oneself but for something one's group did, for example. Or where one feels pride not for one's own achievements but for the achievements of one's group. Social identification is clearly essential to group emotions. When individuals identify with a group, Mercer argues, they do not feel pride or shame *on behalf* of that group, they feel it *as part* of that group; and the stronger individuals identify with a group, the stronger these feelings are likely to be. Furthermore, Mercer holds that group-level emotions can be stronger than individual emotions. Culture, he argues, has a regulatory effect on emotions: 'How one feels often depends on culturally framed interpretations' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). Added to this, because individuals interact most with members of their group, 'in-group members are likely to influence each other' (Mercer 2014, 515–35); and because we interact with our in-group, there is a contagion effect, where 'other people's emotion influences one's emotion' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). Finally, because individuals identify with their group, group membership informs their interests, generating emotional responses (Mercer 2014, 515–35).

This idea of group-level emotions is crucial for Mercer's argument that one can feel like a state. I address the jump he makes from groups to states below, but a few remarks are needed on groups as an analytical stepping stone. Mercer talks about groups as though (a) they take a singular form, and (b) they constitute coherent social entities. He insists that 'Group emotion does not require that individuals within that group exhibit uniformity of thought, behavior, or expression – a social group is not

homogenous' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). Yet, this is precisely how groups appear as his argument unfolds.

First, Mercer argues that if 'a group of two can experience group emotion, then in principle so can a group of two billion' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). While at some level this may well be true, it obscures the very significant differences between groups: they not only vary in size, but also in composition, institutional structure, and level of abstraction (which Mercer fully recognizes); and it is not at all clear that the same mechanisms of identification and emotional association are at work in all types: families are not the same as nations.

Second, individuals do not exist in single groups, they live in multiple, overlapping, semi-porous, internally contested social groupings, and part of the art of social existence is navigating one's way through this complex social universe. However, if this is true, then Mercer's claim that 'One's group identity provides ones emotional reality' (Mercer 2014, 515–35) is either wrong or the phenomenon is considerably more complex than he acknowledges. As a middle-aged, left-leaning, white male academic Australian citizen of Dutch, English, and Chinese–Indonesian ancestry raised in intercity Melbourne, what is my 'group identity' and how does it define my emotional reality?

Third, social groups are realms of emotional difference and contestation as much as convergence. When discussing how members of a group respond to accusations of torture, Mercer argues that those who identify strongly with the group are likely to deny the accusations, thus avoiding feelings of guilt. Conversely, the 'weaker one's identification with the group, the more receptive one is to negative information about the group and thus the more likely one will experience guilt for the group's behavior' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). But is the identification/emotion connection so simple? Surely feeling guilty for something one's group has done requires strong, not weak, identification with that group, and if this is true, then strong social identification can generate diametrically opposed emotional responses: denial and guilt.

States

The idea of group-level emotions is a necessary step in Mercer's argument that it is possible to feel like a state – 'Only if an actor identifies with a collective, so that the group's shame is the actor's own, can a museum or a state be shamed. Feeling shame or pride in one's state is an example of what it means to feel like a state' (Mercer 2014, 515–35). But is this step sustainable? Mercer acknowledges the considerable debate that surrounds whether states should be treated as groups, but he does so nonetheless (Mercer 2014, 515–35). If the state is a group, though, which group,

and what kind of group is it? Is the state the same as the nation, and if so, how should we define the nation? Or is the state the group comprising all individuals within a designated territory, or is it only the citizenry? If the latter, what is it that binds this group together? Is it strong social identification, or a common legal status? And even if one can satisfactorily settle on one of these groupings as 'the state', how does one then speak of the varied relation between the state and society, as any move to define the state as a group risks conflating the two?

Any attempt to see the state as a group needs to deal, however, with another tradition of thought that defines the state not as a group but as an institution. States are administrative entities, complexes of institutional rules and procedures, organizational structures such as bureaucracies, and decision-making procedures. For some, states are not actors at all, collective or otherwise, they are institutional arenas that set the parameters in which individuals and groups act. For others, states are institutions, but institutions with interests. This was the insight of the 'bringing back the state' project (see Evans *et al.* 1985). The state is still not a group, though, and certainly not the group of 'Australians', 'Greeks', or 'Germans'. Indeed, the central insight of that project was that the state could not be reduced to society: the two must be treated as analytically distinct. This institutionalist perspective must be addressed by Mercer and others who want to argue that one can feel like a state. Either the institutionalist perspective on the state has to be knocked down, or another way of advancing the state/emotions argument has to be found. Mercer might respond that individuals can still identify with a state, even if the state is an institution not a group. However, even if this is true, individual identification is only one part of his argument, not only does he claim that members of a group can experience the same emotions, but that group characteristics and dynamics – such as culture, interaction, contagion, and collective experiences – generate and reinforce group emotions. If the state is an institution, however, these dynamics no longer hold (even if others are at work).

Institutions

Like Mercer, Crawford is concerned with how emotions work beyond the level of individuals. Her strategy, however, is markedly different from his. Instead of trying to establish the existence of group-level emotions, and in turn how it feels to be a state, she is interested in how emotions come to be institutionalized within and between states. Her project is in part a normative one, as she is animated by a desire to find ways to institutionalize empathy instead of fear. Understanding this is essential, she argues, because institutionalized emotions license some kinds of practices and circumscribe others (Crawford 2014, 535–57).

This focus on processes of institutionalization is attractive because it sidesteps the issue of feeling like a group or a state. In theory at least, one can speak of emotions being embedded in social norms and practices without many of the problems that attend the move to groups. Moreover, if emotions can be inscribed in institutions, there is no *a priori* reason why they cannot be inscribed in states, *qua* institutions. However, there are several ambiguities in Crawford's argument.

First, Crawford frequently talks about the institutionalization of *beliefs* and *emotions* in one sentence, as though the processes of institutionalization were the same for both. For instance, she writes that 'Organizational actors, operating within their institutionalized roles use pre-existing or newly articulated beliefs and feelings to apprehend their environment, structure the acquisition and organization of knowledge, interpret information, routinize decision-making procedures and operations and formulate responses to challenges' (Crawford 2014, 535–57). But are beliefs and emotions (or feelings) the same kinds of things, and are they institutionalized in the same ways? Is a scientific belief, such as human activity causes global warming, the same as an emotion such as fear of empathy? One might, of course, feel fear as a consequence of holding this scientific belief, but not necessarily. There are some who see global warming as an opportunity, and they may feel anything but fearful. Emotions and beliefs are different phenomena, and if this is the case, we should be open to the possibility that their institutionalization involves different processes.

Second, in discussing the institutionalization of fear, Crawford explains how after the attacks of 11 September 2001, fear became institutionalized in a host of United States' security practices, from preventive war to the maintenance of heightened terrorist alerts. But while fear may well have driven the adoption and institutionalization of these practices, was the emotion itself institutionalized? There is little doubt that a particular set of security principles and ways of being in the world were embedded in legal frameworks and organizational practices, and it is equally clear that this has shaped how individuals and groups have acted. Can one say, though, that fear itself was institutionalized? There are many examples of where fear prompted the development of institutional principles and practices, but where these principles and practices persisted long after the emotional fire that sparked their institutionalization had gone out. It is the relative autonomy of fear and institutionalized practices, and the relative difficulty perhaps of institutionalizing emotions, that leads political elites to periodically stoke the fire of fear. This is one way to tell the story of the Cold War: that fear encouraged the institutionalization of a particular set of geo-strategic practices, but the emotional roots of these practices flagged over time, requiring political recultivation.

Conclusion

Crawford, Mercer, and other students of emotions in world politics are successfully pushing the boundaries of international relations theory by mining ideas and insights from the neurosciences and psychology. However, as the preceding discussion suggests, this is not sufficient, in and of itself, to understand how emotions work in social contexts, especially complex ones. International relations scholars are rightly criticized for having 'black boxed' the individual, but their work has, nonetheless, generated considerable insights into the nature and dynamics of the global social and political order (often drawing on ideas and methodologies from other fields of social inquiry). Along with colleagues in political theory and comparative politics, we have learned much about social and political agency, structural determi-nation/constitution, materiality and intersubjectivity, modalities of action and practice, institutional constraint and enablement, and the complexities of social and political power. Yet, when Mercer and Crawford move from the rich seam of psychological and neuroscientific insights to engage the social, there is a simplicity to this engagement (which is surprising given the significant contribution the very same scholars have made elsewhere to the social theorizing of international relations). Phenomena such as groups, states, and institutions are discussed *de novo*, with little conscription of the extant knowledge and debates surrounding these and other components of the global social order. Curiously, perhaps, this suggests that further under-standing of emotions in world politics may come most productively not through further excursions in neuroscience and psychology (though these will certainly be crucial) but through a creative reengagement with the insights and debates of global social and political theory and analysis.

Acknowledgements

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Anger and world politics: how collective emotions shift over time

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The inter-relations between emotions, social structures, and personal and collective identities are now more central to the study of international relations than ever before. Scholars have shown that 'social institutions and politics embody and produce emotions' (see Crawford 2014, 535–57). They have argued that 'emotions are social because culture influences their experience and expression', and they have demonstrated that 'who we are' depends on 'what we feel' (see Mercer 2014, 515–35).

The purpose of this commentary is to extend those investigations by drawing on a pioneering explanation of how collective emotions change over time, namely process sociological analysis. Doing so reveals how, over approximately five centuries, European peoples came to exercise greater control over emotions that were deemed to clash with their 'civilized' self-images (Elias 2012 [1939]). Emotion management in increasingly-pacified societies included the suppression of open displays of anger that were seen to 'heighten risk-taking' behaviour that could lead to violence (see Crawford 2014, 535–57) and that was linked with warfare (see Mercer 2014, 515–35). To explore that theme, the following analysis contrasts modern attitudes to 'negative' emotions such as anger with some classical investigations that described it in more positive terms.

Collective anger in long-term perspective

Modern orientations to anger were anticipated by Grotius's comment in 1625 that he observed 'throughout the Christian world… a lack of