Collective Emotions in an Emotional Framework of Rationality

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Abstract: The aim of this project is to provide an argument in favour of the legitimacy of collective emotional claims in political discourse. In this paper I will distinguish appropriate and inappropriate collective emotion, and argue that collective emotional testimony should be considered meaningful when making collective decisions. This recommendation stands in contrast to prevailing dispassionate and alienated community deliberation processes. I suggest that the dispassionate method of collective decision-making is just as much a collective emotion, and is just as prone to bias. So when groups fail to act in ways which seem reasonable, some acknowledgement and attempt to modify their collective emotion may have a substantial role to play in developing more capable decision-making communities.

Collective emotion provides a basis for legitimizing the testimony of passionate individuals and groups. These testimonies provide an appraisal of a situation that implicitly includes what counts as important for an affected community. However, such testimonies may be challenged because they fail to meet a certain standard of conservative propriety, professional decorum, or rationality. While many protests and activist testimonies are not “proper”, I will argue that the collective emotions represented in their testimonies can contribute to rational debate by highlighting what is important. Further, I will argue that when we, together as a collective, dispassionately fail to recognize the importance of a situation, we behave according to a collective pattern which is just as emotional, and just as prone to bias, as the passionate collective emotions to which activists testify.

I begin the paper by explaining what a collective emotion is. I focus on two central elements in my conception of collective emotions: that they are not reducible to the sum of individual emotional states of members, and that individuals provide a testimony to collective emotions.
emotions. To unpack both how an emotion can contribute to rational decisions and what qualifies as an appropriate or inappropriate emotion, I look to Ronald de Sousa’s book *Emotional Truth*. De Sousa’s view is that individual emotions can be a deciding factor between what he calls strategic and epistemic rationality when they are in conflict. Emotions can be authoritative in these contexts because they can appraise the significance of various options.

Against de Sousa, Jon Elster argues that individual emotions are not rational grounds. In his conception, emotions allow us to misrepresent what is rational or in our interest. This form of error, while it has uses, is in principle not rational. I rebut this view, wherein emotional arbitration is a form of error, by framing apathetic reasoning as a particular affective disposition that has the same arbitrating effect as more passionate emotions and is liable to the same biases. On this account, there is no non-emotional option and therefore no reason to prefer apathetic dispositions. That is, business-as-usual dispassion is still a form of collective emotion. To conclude, I briefly look at what being responsive to collective emotional states within a collective emotional framework of rationality looks like.

1. What is a Collective Emotion?

1.1 Pettigrove and Parsons’ Analysis of Uses of ‘Collective Emotion’

I want to briefly specify what I mean by ‘collective emotion.’ Attempting to overcome some of the scepticism brought to mind when we imagine a collective as a mass of people reduced to a single consciousness, Glenn Pettigrove and Nigel Parsons describe three plausible meanings of collective emotion. Sometimes we might use collective emotions to refer to an aggregate emotion. Pettigrove and Parsons explain that the aggregate use of ‘collective emotion’ “will ascribe an emotion to a collective if a significant number of its members feel a particular

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3 Ibid. 6-8.
5 Ibid. 403-404.
This happens when we say something like “they are angry” and mean “each, or most, of those people is angry”. Pettigrove and Parsons criticize this model, claiming “it overlooks the way being ‘in this together’ affects the emotional experiences of group members.”

This shortcoming is rectified in part by what Pettigrove and Parsons call the ‘simple structural view’, which is based on group-choice theory in philosophy of law. This view suggests that collective emotions are “something that supervenes on the emotions of the group’s individual members but is not easily reduced to the individuals’ emotions.” This view accounts for the non-reducibility of some collective emotions. This allows us to claim that, in some cases, aggregate emotions do not constitute collective emotions, and sometimes a collective emotion will not imply an aggregate emotion. This view has been elaborated in collective intentions literature.

The third view of collective emotion is the ‘network model,’ which comes from sociological and social psychological literature. Building on the simple structural model, the network model explains the role of interaction between individuals constituting the contagious quality of collective emotion. Pettigrove and Parsons introduce the network model by explaining: “When these various social dimensions of emotion – causal, expressive, interpretative, normative– are combined, what we shall call a network conception of collective emotion emerges.”

The network approach often builds on the observation by emotion theorists that there is a socially constructed element in how our emotions come to be instantiated and expressed. I understand collective emotions on the network conception, following John Protevi’s account. However, I do not take the network conception to exclude simple structural models. Rather, I find the simple structural model very useful for teasing apart the distinct nature of the collective level of analysis, while the network approach is better at identifying collective emotional phenomenon in experience and observed social behaviors.

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7Ibid. 506.
8Ibid. 506.
9Ibid. 507.
10Ibid. 510.
1.2 Protevi’s Embodied Network Conception of Collective Emotion

John Protevi’s network conception builds on Manuel Delanda’s\textsuperscript{11} reading of Deleuze’s concept of a body-politic by setting it into a dynamic systems model. Protevi defines collective emotions as the affective experience of a body-politic understood as an embodied nexus of embedded and interrelated individuals.\textsuperscript{12} He argues that a collective emotion is an emergent property belonging to collectives.\textsuperscript{13} This emergentist perspective is justified through a dynamic systems model of collective emotion that takes a collective emotion to be a pattern of stable behaviour constituted by social interactions.\textsuperscript{14} This pattern is produced by a tendency for the group’s behaviour to self-organize towards certain specified attractor points or norms.\textsuperscript{15} The pattern will break down and reconfigure itself if a threshold of deviation is met.\textsuperscript{16} A threshold point can be understood as a necessary condition to form a new and contagious behaviour pattern. This model explains collective emotions as a contagious, self-replicating pattern, emerging from social interactions, which line up with certain thresholds of normal group behaviour.

To help clarify what constitutes a body-politic, Protevi draws an analogy between “bodies politic” and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus.’\textsuperscript{17} It is worth explaining habitus if only to emphasize that the emergent patterns of collective behaviour Protevi is describing are not chance occurrences. Instead, they are something into which we are recursively drawn. Collective emotions are types of habit-forming processes. When these processes are disrupted, it contributes to crossing the threshold towards a new pattern of habit-formation. On Bourdieu’s account, the collective, understood as having a habitus, can attribute meanings informed by situational features.\textsuperscript{18} On my interpretation, the thresholds and attractors, which Protevi discusses, amount to

\textsuperscript{11}Manuel Delanda, \textit{a New Philosophy of Society}, (London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid. 7.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid. 9.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid. 5.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. 7.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid. 32,198.

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the meanings that collectives give to their situations.

In my argument for a framework of rationality that includes collective emotions, I will focus on this ability of a collective to attribute importance to some ends and not others, based on a collective emotional appraisal of the situation. With this in mind, I take a critical look at our (too) often individualistic understanding of what counts as rational in discourse about political and community decisions.

2. Non-Reducibility and Testimony of Collective Emotions

In order to properly limit my discussion I will explain precisely in what sense a collective emotion is *emotional*. I will describe two important aspects of a collective emotion. To help establish the *collective* nature of collective emotions, I will look at Margaret Gilbert’s structural account of collective emotions emphasizing commitment and mutual obligation, intrinsic to the process of reaffirming and replicating the collective emotion. We also need to recognize that insofar as collective emotions are experienced, community members can testify to them, bringing them into political discourse. I will look at Katie Stockdale and Peg Birmingham’s accounts of testimony to clarify this point.

2.1 Gilbert’s Structural Account of Collective Emotion as a Commitment

Gilbert’s view of collective emotions builds on her work in collective intentions literature.\(^{19}\) According to Gilbert, at the core of a collective emotion is a joint commitment to hold that collective emotion.\(^{20}\) Gilbert argues that “all those involved must express their readiness, in conditions of common knowledge, *together to commit them all* in some particular way.”\(^{21}\) The concurrent expression of readiness to be jointly committed is taken as sufficient for there to be joint commitment. This is distinct from individuals all coincidentally feeling the same way, because of the mutual understanding that they are committed to hold a feeling *together*.

\(^{21}\)Ibid. 24.
This sufficient condition can be met through implicit agreement. If a collective emotion is defined by shared meanings that act as attractor points to produce the larger patterns of collective emotion, participating in these shared meanings can serve as the readiness to be committed to feel a certain way alongside others. By accepting these meanings, we are committed to share in collective emotions resulting from those meanings just because we belong to the social body that maintains those meanings.

This commitment is the foundation for Gilbert’s obligation criterion, explained as: “the fact that the [jointly committed parties] have the standing to rebuke one another for behaviour that is not in the spirit of the collective emotion.”

Having expressed the willingness to feel something together each individual can be held accountable for behaving accordingly. This is Gilbert’s basic case, and it would tend to work well for a small group making an explicit expression to each other.

Gilbert’s obligation criterion is a structural component of collective emotion. It is not the case that just because a collective emotion exists we have a morally salient reason to conform. I will argue that collective emotions provide an evaluation of what a community finds meaningful. In some cases, the expression of just how important some meanings are to a community is belittled, undermined, or dismissed because of a bias against collective emotions. I interpret this bias as the inappropriate application of the obligation to express a cold, alienated emotion in professional circumstances.

I am especially interested in cases like the *Occupy Wall Street* movement where the end that protesters were cooperating towards was an expression of discontent, without a uniform set of demands or a specific body responsible for meeting them. In this case ‘collective’ does not refer only to the activists. Rather, they are providing a testimony of the collective emotion that represents tensions within a larger system of collaborating individuals, characterized as the “99%”. Insofar as we make it public that we believe our complacency is contributing to an unjust and disadvantageous system with which we are dissatisfied, we are not necessarily agreeing to do something about it; rather, we are agreeing to sympathize with changing that system. Even those who were not protesting are implicated in the real and existing outrage at the unjust

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22Ibid. 22.
distribution of wealth. Protesters and other representatives of collective emotions are not the exclusive body holding the collective emotion. This example is meant to show that a collective emotion is not a particular thing that we “create” to do work. Like reasons, collective emotions are found and presented, and the cooperative social life that gives rise to them is not a specific organization of political bodies. Rather, it is an always already cooperating and expressive public—one with already existing spaces of common knowledge and norms of expression that say something about the context of that body-politic.

2.2 Stockdale’s and Birmingham’s Accounts of Testifying to Collective Emotion

Stockdale argues that collective emotions, specifically collective resentment as it appears in the Idle No More movement, should be respected when these emotions are presented as an appraisal of a collective situation. She considers the case of indigenous and settler Canadians’ mutual collective resentment. In this case, each group is alienated from the other because of tensions concerning a history of abuse on one side and frustration with repeated failure to satisfy indigenous Canadians on the other. Stockdale explains:

Collective resentment is resentment that is felt and expressed by individuals in response to a perceived threat to a collective to which they belong. In collective resentment, the reasons for resentment are reasons for a collective, not an individual victim of mistreatment.

The emotional element involved here concerns feelings experienced by virtue of belonging to a particular group, and these feelings are an apprehension of our struggle alongside other members of our group. Stockdale argues that there must be an open recognition of each narrative, including recognizing the abuse and oppression that fosters much of the collective resentment and recognizing that perceived threats to settler society are not appropriately construed. These feelings cannot be brushed aside; they are integral to the formation of a more productive and mutually understanding discourse.

On Stockdale’s account, collective emotions are structurally different from individual

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24Ibid. 507.
25Ibid. 521.
emotions; they bear witness to the significance of something for a group. Not only do events have significance because we encounter them in our experience, but since our experiences are shared, courses of action have significance to collectives because the collective itself has a history and interests. Therefore, when group members offer a testimony about the collective emotional importance of something for the group, then as a group with a history and interests, they are giving a reason to choose one course of action over another.

Testimony to collective experience is discussed by Birmingham. She is concerned that “the best way to destroy factual truths is to reduce them to so many opinions that can then be easily dismissed as ‘just another opinion’ open to dispute, contest, and interpretation.” I share this concern insofar as emotional significance of a group can be dismissed on the ground that it is the idiosyncrasy of a single group member. This is why it is important to recognize that collective emotions are not an amalgamation of individual emotions. Birmingham argues that “factual truth requires witnesses to establish the fact of its appearance.” Likewise, collective emotion requires the fact that it occurs to be testified to. Therefore, when an expression of collective emotion enters a discourse, it will enter as a testimony to a factual truth, and not as the spirit of the discourse itself. Birmingham offers an important additional cautionary point on considering testimony:

A distinction must be made between testimonies that provide material evidence for factual reality – first order narratives – and second order narratives that rely on this material evidence for their accounts, accounts that are judged in part on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record.

This distinction is significant to the establishment of what counts as a testimony of collective emotion. The second order accounts given as examples in this paper are not testimonies of collective emotion. The testimony will always be a first order account, in the terms of “we feel” rather than “they feel”.

Thus far, I have provided accounts of collective emotions as a shared, affectively salient pattern based on common struggles, projects, and experiences that are premised on collectively

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27Ibid. 203.
28Ibid. 214.
established evaluation of contexts, meanings, and histories. For the purpose of this paper, I will take collective emotion to mean: *a systematically reinforced emotion an individual has based on their membership in a group*. This assumes a conception of emotions as an informative disposition that provides an appraisal of a situation.

People can individually feel differently than they collectively feel, and their collective emotion can refer to meaningful commitments, distresses, resentments, fears and so forth. I will argue that we should recognize these collective structures, welcoming their expression, responding to their outpouring, and mobilizing their self-organizing power. We should overcome the imposition of inappropriate collective alienation because this is a collective emotion in its own right, one which resists passionate collective expression, and takes for granted that a cold disposition indicates rationality.

### 3. An Emotional Framework of Rationality

I want to set my argument that collective emotions are informative in a context provided by Marion Barnes, who explicitly recommends passionate politics. She argues that responsiveness to emotions is necessary for what she calls ‘deliberative democracy’ or ‘participatory policy-making.’ This involves practices wherein political decision makers enter into a dialogue with community members.  

> She explains that in these dialogues, “the onus on managing emotions thus rests with the service users or citizens taking part; officials can invoke institutional rules and norms to define what is acceptable in contexts they control.”

These rules are a failure from Barnes’ perspective because they undermine trust. The officials seem “like they are ‘going through the motions’, that they do not ‘really care’ about the issues in any significant sense.”

In order for a democratic forum to adequately represent the public, the forum must be responsive to the emotional outcry, outrage, compassion, generosity, or life of the communities they represent. I argue this is because these emotions indicate what is meaningful to

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30 Ibid. 33.

31 Ibid. 25.
those communities. When individuals are barred from expressing emotion, it excludes the possibility that their emotional appraisal of a situation counts as a testimony to the experience of the community. Barnes recommends a principle of responsiveness to establish the trust necessary for this kind of discourse.\footnote{Ibid. 36.} In my view, Barnes does not go far enough. Dispassionate forums fail to acknowledge the implicit biases to which dispassion, as a collective emotional state, is subject. As a result, I will recommend that we look at the alienating exclusion of emotion as an unjustified exclusion of \textit{reasons} to prefer different accounts of what is rational.

3.1 De Sousa’s Emotional Framework of Rationality

In \textit{Emotional Truth}, de Sousa argues that emotions have a role to play in the reasoning of individuals. He discusses two interpretations of \textit{akrasia}, intending to clarify what counts as a violation of rationality. The first interpretation construes \textit{akrasia} as moral failing. In this case, de Sousa argues that \textit{akrasia} is a violation of what he terms ‘strategic rationality’, which he defines as: rationality “which aims at maximizing the likelihood of success in action.”\footnote{Ronald de Sousa, \textit{Emotional truth}, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011). 6.} The second interpretation takes \textit{akrasia} to be a violation of a rationality that“aims to maximize true belief.”\footnote{Ibid. 6.} He calls this framework ‘epistemic rationality’. These two frameworks of rationality clash whenever “a belief is both more likely to lead to good consequences and less likely to be true,”\footnote{Ibid. 7.} or vice versa. To resolve conflicts like this, de Sousa proposes a third \textit{emotional} framework. In this framework an emotional attitude of ‘caring’ provides a “perception of value” with which we can appraise the appropriateness of either strategic or epistemic frameworks of rationality.\footnote{Ibid. 8.}

This leaves us with a model reminiscent of Aristotle’s treatment of the passions in Eudemian Ethics. On Aristotle’s view, the ends we pursue are determined by states of character, and virtuous ends are determined by a virtuous character.\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{Eudemian Ethics}, Trans, Anthony Kenny (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011). 36, 1227b 33–40.} These states of character govern how much we enjoy or endure pleasure and pain,\footnote{Ibid. 35, 1227b 8-11.} including the pleasures and pains of the passions.\footnote{Ibid. 35, 1227b 8-11.}
Thus, virtue occurs when passions are balanced under virtuous character so that we can identify the best ends to direct our efforts towards. By contrast, intellectual virtues govern only whether or not the means to obtain those ends are correct. This means that Aristotle recognized that passion is involved in directing us towards the proper ends. Traditional intellectual virtues involved in strategic and epistemic rationality only concern how to accomplish those ends. By excluding passion from the discourse we implicitly prefer indifferent emotional positions, which direct us towards certain ends that may not be best. Instead, some balance of passions is needed to isolate that for which we should strive and struggle, even if emotions are not likely to be informative in how we should accomplish those ends. To elaborate on how emotions can contribute to selecting our ends, I look to de Sousa’s emotional framework of rationality.

3.2 Appropriate Appraisal

Emotions themselves are checked against whether or not they are appropriate to a situation. In de Sousa’s framework, emotions appraise a situation by comparing it to a paradigm scenario that designates appropriate ways of reacting to certain types of objects. For de Sousa, there are two conditions required for an emotion to be appropriate. Emotions serve as an *appropriate* appraisal of a situation when: (i) the object of the emotion is not an illusion, and (ii) the apparent object of the emotion is also the object that brought up the emotion in the individual. For example, in order for me to be appropriately angry with someone for an insult, and to have that anger count as a rational appraisal, it must be the case that the person in question did in fact insult me, and that the anger arose in response to that insult and not as displaced aggravation for another event.

To set this in a collective context, consider anger directed at an oppressive other-group. In this situation, it will only be appropriate if that anger is directed at the oppressor for the oppression. It will be inappropriate if the collective being oppressed directs its anger at another party as a scapegoat. It will also be inappropriate if the oppressed collective is angry with the

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39Ibid. 18, 1220b 14.
40Ibid. 75, 1138b 19-20.
41Ibid. 20, 71-73.
42Ibid. 34.
43Ibid. 30, 57-58.
oppressor group for some action they took that alleviates pressures on the oppressed. Both of these situations are cases of illusion about the nature of the situation leading to a misdirected emotional disposition.

4. Emotions as Non-Rational Bias

Against this view, Elster argues that when individuals’ emotions change what is rational in a situation, they often serve as a self-deceiving bias. Elster argues that individual emotions bias preferences towards under (or over) investment in information gathering prior to making a decision. Individual emotions may allow for adaptive reactions involving underinvestment in information gathering. The sudden fright from seeing a non-poisonous snake is an example of such adaptation. Such a view problematically assumes that there are non-emotional states that are more “rational.” In Elster’s terminology, there are states that are neither transmutated nor misrepresented by passion. From this perspective passion is a force for a potentially adaptive, biased construal of a situation in contrast to a more objective, non-emotional point of view.

4.1 Apparent Irrationality of Pettigrove and Parsons’ exploration of Collective Shame

To explain how this criticism can get traction in collective emotional situations, I want to revisit Pettigrove and Parsons’ account of collective emotion mentioned at the beginning of this paper. In Pettigrove and Parsons’ discussion of collective shame, Palestinians feel a collective shame caused by the oppression from Israel. The shame serves to exaggerate the distinction between the two groups, creating a false polarization, setting each group up as the enemy of the other. The collective emotion is transmutating into the belief that these groups have an interest in not cooperating. This would not seem true by looking at preferences alone; after all, peace, calm,

46Ibid. 278.
and trust would be preferable for all involved. A history of oppression and violence have embittered these groups and entrenched collective mistrust. Furthermore, these emotions are appropriate. For de Sousa, emotions must have an existing object that is also the cause of that feeling. In the case of the Palestinian collective shame, it really is the existing oppression by Israel that offends, and this causes the ongoing disposition towards mistrust.

In this example of regional mistrust, it can seem as though the collective emotion is getting in the way of rational political deliberation. This lends some support to the idea that emotions are acting as a form of bias. In this case, there is a regional bias being supported by the collective emotion. I want to argue that these collective emotions are not irrational. Mistrust, by definition, suggests a lack of a needed trust. Trust, as a collective affective pattern, is not a lack of shame, but the presence of care, responsiveness, and authentic expression of decisions that can break with consistency or strategy in meaningful ways.

To support this view, I must establish that when the options are emotionally salient then it does not seem like a non-emotional intervening principle could bring about a decision that does not have affective affiliations. This means that distinguishing between a purely rational principle and an emotionally highlighted one may be a trickier business than is viable, considering that groups already have emotions that signify the relative importance of situations.

4.2 Contrasting Colombetti’s Model of Emotion with Elster’s Conception

If an emotionally highlighted system of rationality is not clearly distinguished from a non-emotional one, then a non-emotional conception of rational decision-making rests on the wholesale exclusion of emotion. Once emotions are introduced to the equation, ignoring them is only another emotional position; typically a “cold” disposition. Giovanna Colombetti’s account stands in contrast to the structural assumptions made about emotions by theorists like Elster who assume that emotional processes are somehow distinct from other mental processes. Concerning individual emotions, Colombetti argues that the emotion is not a “quick and dirty” shortcut for decision-making. Instead, emotions are a product of the interconnected nature of mental

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processes. Her account of emotion criticizes the modular and hierarchical conception of brain-processes.

While collectives do not have a brain, compartmentalized or otherwise, they can be subject to an over-compartmentalization. When we divide a collective’s decision-making processes into fragmented bureaucratic offices, or further fragmented collections of individual decisions, we miss the interconnected effects of individual decisions. Protevi argues that interconnectivity of a collective forms the body politic capable of emotion. This model aligns much better with Colombetti’s account than Elster’s. So, when officials dismiss emotional testimonies from a political discourse, they are treating emotions as a separate component and not the interconnected nexus of behaviour patterns that it is.

5. Collective Alienation is a Collective Emotion

The exclusion of emotion itself takes a particular emotional position relative to the passionate position it resists. Concerning collective emotions, this pattern of coordinating interconnected behaviour constitutes a stern and affectively cold disposition. We might call this ‘collective alienation’, and it has its own biases. This situation, as it has effectively dominated corporate and government bodies, seems to favour quantifiable profit over other values such as the environment and human welfare. It bears the same marks of non-rational emotional effects Elster attributes to passionate emotional states. In some cases, it results in an over-investment of information when it is slow to act to urgent situations. At other times, it has an under-investment when these bodies-politic pursue short term economic gains at enormous environmental costs. This makes “calm, cool, and collected” collective emotional states liable to result in the self-deceptive ‘transmutation’ of one’s own interests; just as how Elster sees more passionate states.

51Ibid. 13.
52Ibid. 6.
5.1 Collective Alienation is Often Inappropriate

There is no unilateral reason to suggest collective alienation is always inappropriate. Taken as an “appraisal,” just about any emotion can have its appropriate place. Perhaps in our lives as academics or employees, individuation through a collective emotion of alienation associated with professionalism might be appropriate. In our society, however, collective alienation is often found in inappropriate roles.

If I am to take Elster’s criticism of emotions as bias seriously, then both dispassionate and passionate emotional realities can bias the kinds of decisions that we make because either disposition can frame what counts as “important” differently. When we encounter emotionally salient problems, there is something to reconcile, something which should not be dismissed. This is because dismissing or suppressing emotional testimony is just imposing the collective emotion that dominates the institution onto the collective being dismissed. It is not elevating the discourse above emotion. On this account, I can concede to Elster that emotions do bring in biases. However, the dismissal of emotional testimony presented either in protest or participatory discussion is likely an inappropriate emotion. The indifference in those cases is not an appraisal of the situation at hand; it does not respond to - nor care about - the facts or significances being testified to. As a result, the “non-emotional” biases are not only biased to emphasize some considerations over others, but that emphasis is also being misplaced.

Once a passionate collective emotional testimony enters into dialogue, calm, cool, and collected dispositions take on an emotional character as something not-passionate. This means that when testimony of collective emotions enters a discussion, it colors the whole discourse in emotional terms. So statements that condemn or dismiss appropriate feelings are misguided because the very same condemnation can be made of the dispassionate disposition.

6. Ways Forward

I want to end this discussion by considering what the recognition of collective alienation as a collective emotion means. In order to reconcile political problems in an emotionally
responsive way, three types of opportunities avail themselves. First, we can attempt to address how some collective emotions are not appropriate. When this is the case, Stockdale argues that we should abandon them and come to terms with a more appropriate appraisal of the situation. Second, we might attempt to change an unfavorable collective emotion through rituals, like state apologies. However, Pettigrove suggests that public apologies are often dissatisfying. Resolving long standing disputes is not simply a matter of expressing the appropriate emotions, it is a matter of negotiation within and among the groups in question.

Daniel Bar-Tal, Eran Halperin, and Joseph de Rivera explain that there are collective ‘rituals’ that can “foster the reconciliation needed for a culture of peace.” They suggest that these include acknowledging wrongs, which might include both admitting inappropriate emotions, and issuing apologies (even if they are less than adequate). Bar-Tal et al. adds that we also need some way of “marrying truth and mercy, justice and peace.” This is more interesting and hints at a third method: recognizing the socially interconnected nexus of behaviours that gives rise to these collective emotions in the first place.

When we present a testimony or coordinate an activist motion, we can include a collective emotional framework of rationality in two ways. First, when we organize we can be responsive to the emotions of those we are organizing. James Jasper explains that activist groups are formed through a network of personal relationships, not just interested persons. Forging these personal relationships provides the affective infrastructure to trust each other, and overcome divisive emotions. Deborah Gould explains that when we try to form and maintain these emotional relationships we also need to recognize the dynamic emotional state of the community we are forming. You cannot always assert hope, acceptance, or peace among despairing and alienated people, but you can mobilize people on account of a collective despair.

59Ibid. 456.
62Ibid. 110.
This recognizes the shared collective condition we experience, and that helps to form the necessary network of commitments. Saying “we have political despair” allows people to proclaim “I am together with you,” and those people can feel understood by that group breaking out of the alienated, dispassionate status quo.

This in turn leads to the second way to implement the responsive approach to acknowledging collective emotions, which is to recognize that the collective emotion is something performed and embodied in the world. When a collective emotion is inappropriate, the emotionally rational response would be to refuse to participate in it, to set up a new commitment for people to join with. Eva Simms provides a simple case of this, which I find promising. She explains that a community collectively developed the habit of treating a green space poorly, leaving garbage in it, fearing it, and avoiding it. Simms states: “In the consciousness of the community these abandoned places become strange and alien places. Because they are no longer used and known neighbours look at them with fear and suspicion.”

The way to change the community’s destructive collective appraisal of the space was to show love for the green space, to haul garbage out of it, to territorialize it again. Once clean, the attitude of the community unsurprisingly changed to value the green space they previously considered a liability.

This simple story gives me hope that the way to shake inappropriate collective emotions is just through the ‘ritual’ of refusing to participate in them, and that includes refusing to participate in the rampant collective apathy. Of course, the way to change a complex attitude like settler resentment into something more understanding - in such a way that it can become contagious - is not going to be as simple, and I have no answers in practical terms. Perhaps in light of contagion as a goal, we should consider rituals like public apology important, not because they can satisfy an appropriate discontent, but because they can erode something inappropriate.

In conclusion, when present, collective emotion indicates what is significant to the collective. Failure to account for this leaves us assuming an alternate, but still emotional, perspective; even if we only assume the calm, cool, and collected emotional position. If that

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64Ibid. 242.
position conflicts with the collective emotion to which members testify, then the discourse is misjudging the significance of the matters at hand. This could be a failure to recognize legitimate resentment or shame, a failure to mobilize on the emotions actually present in a collective, and therefore a failure to respond authentically to the reality of a community. Following a collective emotional framework of rationality, then, means being responsive to what is important for a collective. Productive change can be made when we recognize what is important to us collectively and we stand up for it.

Works Cited


