

The Double Instance of the Political. Imaginary - affects as rhetorical means and structure

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Abstract Although emotions are linked to irrationality, a number of recent researches have shown emotions are central to political behaviour. While as politics is an emotionally dense sphere of individual and collective action, any fuller comprehension of the political imaginary must ponder it. This paper considers the emotional dimension of the political imaginary according to a dual rhetorical instance: the use of emotions as tools (emotional appeals) to influence behaviour and thinking; and the very affective nature of politics as such. In other words, I will examine affects as rhetorical means and as structuring elements of the political imaginary. By referring to empirical political messages - from the Daisy Ad until the election of the comedian actor Volodymyr Zelensky as President of Ukraine - it is claimed that the political imaginary is not just about collective reasoning. The political imaginary is also something that we feel. This paper intends to clarify how affects help to determine collective feeling and, consequently, political decision making and social understanding

Keywords Political Imaginary | Affect | Emotions | Rhetoric | Social Imaginaries





1. Introduction

Traditionally, emotions have been separated out from politics. In fact, emotions have had only a shadow existence with no place in the rational models of political theory (Goodwin *et al.* 2001, p.1). With exception of a few philosophers such as Aristotle and Spinoza, social scientists emphasized the political process as an almost mechanical processing of symbols, tending to ignore the role of passions in political life. Max Weber, for instance, associated emotions with irrationality:

“The more we ourselves are susceptible to such emotional reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion, and appetites of all sorts, and to the ‘irrational’ conduct which grows out of them, the more readily we can empathize with them. . . . For the purposes of a typological scientific analysis it is convenient to treat all irrational, affectual determined elements of behaviour as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action” (Weber 1978, p.6).

Twentieth century crowd psychology, such as found in Le Bon and Tarde’s works, acknowledged the passionate dimension discerned in social movements in the idea of “group mind” and “contagion of feelings”. However, crowds were considered atypical political manifestations that short-circuited symbolic communication since participants were seen as directly responding to each other’s physical actions (driven by rumours, anxiety, fear or excitement).

Following this tradition, most studies of political decision-making treat emotions as a nuisance (Sears 2000; Marcus 2000) - although political scientists have recognized both substantive and emotional contents of key importance in the effects of campaign advertising on voters (Ridout and Searles 2011), and on behaviour and attitudes (Lodge and Taber 2005). Indeed, a growing number of studies brought to light how of processes of interaction and negotiation, shared cultural meanings and social networks are driven by emotions. Consequently, emotions must be integrated in a general sociological perspective in order to reveal the social nature of human emotions, as well as the emotional nature of social phenomena and politics (Bericat 2015). Understanding how emotions interfere with and constitute the political process means we first need to understand the social situation that produces it. So, to study emotions in politics involves examining the social nature of emotions and the emotional nature of social reality. Collective phenomena in which passions perform a central role such as festivals, sporting events, political revolutions and protests, need to be appraised by exposing their affective structures and emotional dynamics (Bericat 2015, p.7).

For this reason, we need to consider the political imaginary. The political imaginary is a sub-set of a social imaginary - which envelops all the mental, philosophical and cultural realities of a society. It encompasses the social representations and may be described as a set of values, institutions, symbols, narratives, images and myths publicly available to individual and collective use. Since it encapsulates a



communicative mediation between the real and the imagined, theory and practice, the material and the symbolic, the imaginary is always crossed by a primordial tension between emotion and reason. The Imaginary and the Real are, thus, not separate and independent entities. They are not dichotomous elements. Instead, every imaginary is real and every reality is imagined. To Durand (1960), existence is always situated in this interbreed realm of the imaginary.

The imaginary can assume the role of a semantic basin to all human expressions. But, most important from a political standpoint, the imaginary is also a force and a social catalyst that unites peoples in tribes and groups (Maffesoli 1991). It forms a coordinated background of symbolic representations from which societies constitute themselves. It is also the manifestation of a collective *aesthesis* and of the sensible that expresses social cohesion. Hence, the political imaginary is mainly felt as a pure emotion (Maffesoli 1995). It is not just ideas and beliefs; it also sentiments and feelings that structure collective identity.

This paper describes the affective nature of the political imaginary. For its purposes, it will take emotions and affects as interchangeable notions (Glaser and Salovey, 1998). Affect is not related to the Affective Turn (Clough and Halley 2007) or Affect in Philosophical terms (Massumi 2015). Affects are here simply understood as a general framework from which specific emotions emerge. They form clusters that organize emotional dispositions. The paper adopts a perspective on the affective structures and emotional dynamics of the political imaginary based on a cultural approach. This means that emotions are understood as not just biological responses but social constructed feelings emerging in the socialization process. Societies possess an emotional culture and vocabulary (Bericat 2015, p.9) that define what should be felt and how it should be expressed. This is why examining the political imaginary from an affective standpoint is so important. It recognizes the cultural matrix in which affects emerge and address social shared patterns of interaction. Failing to focus on this cultural matrix of the affective dimension of the political imaginary is to fail to acknowledge how emotional cultures and societal emotions inhabit and configure politics.

In what follows, a brief description of the link between emotions and the political imaginary is made, followed by an assessment of the emotionally loaded rhetoric of the political imaginary by looking into some of the most iconic examples of 20 and 21st century political communication.

2. The Political Imaginary and its Emotional Density

The reality of everyday life appears to the self as an intersubjective world, a world that is communicatively shared with others. It is taken for granted as reality (Berger and Luckman 1967, p.36). However, the reality of everyday life is not exhausted by the



immediate presence of phenomena, here and now. There are several degrees of closeness and remoteness, both spatially and temporally, that impose the transition from the paramount reality to the finite provinces of meaning (Berger and Luckman 1967, p.39).

The social imaginaries provide the symbolic richness that nourishes those finite provinces of meaning. A social imaginary is a socially constructed scheme that enables us to understand something as real, explain it and intervene operatively in what we think as our reality (Pintos 2000).

The political imaginary can be seen as a specific division of the social imaginary that bind individuals by a sense of solidarity, and it suggests bonds of trust, loyalty but also of affection and synchronous vibrancy. The political imaginary is thus composed of intellectual symbols but also of affective symbols and features in which cognition and affect intermix. The national anthem is not just the narrative of the nation; it is likewise a shared patriotic feeling of nationhood that plays a significant role in the preservation of collective identity. Patriotism may, indeed, have affective as well cognitive orientations (Schatz, Staub and Lavine 1999).

The political imaginary is not solely expressed by ideologies and utopias but also by myths, allegories and rituals based on emotional contagion. It is an emotionally dense phenomenon that brings feelings of group solidarity, pumps emotional energy and extrapolates collective participation.

The political imaginary is, therefore, explained in similar terms of Durkheim's collective effervescence (Durkheim 1965). Just as Durkheim emphasized ritual as the operating function of emotional effervescence (in which the symbols of the group are brought forward as catalyst of collective attention and communion), we can identify emotional transformation as the operating function of the political imaginary. Emotional sharing may be understood as the motor of social belonging as it amplifies emotional experiences (for example, anger against a policy, mistrust and disdain against a politician, pity for a victim).

On the one hand, this means that we should include affection parallel to cognition. On the other, this too means that emotions present a cognitive side. Political ceremonies, commemorations, homages, and other ritual events are just as representational as they are performative. They are arenas of identity through which meaning is conveyed.

Also, emotional appeals may be apprehended as a vehicle of emotional, non-rational learning. Non-discursive elements of aesthetic emotion are, in this case, paramount elements that counter or reinforce discursive elements such as political ideology and ideological worldviews (Berezin 2001, p.93). So, there is no cognition versus affection dichotomy. They both work on the political imaginary at different levels: the intellectual side and the sensible one.

Parallel to ideologies and political programs, there is panoply of integrated symbols and affections that lead the political process. Most contemporary research on political psychology indicates some influence of affects on political judgement (Glaser and



Salovey 1998, p.161; Marcus 2000) and even that affect is a powerful predictor of electoral choice, more than “purely” cognitive appraisals (Marcus 1988).

Marcus (1988) suggests candidates might do well by concentrating on emotional appeals than to focus on issue-oriented campaigns. Other studies claim that people tend to respond to political issues with an affective (kind of gut) reaction, rather than in rational manner (Kuklinski, Luskin and Bolland 1991). More than a few scholars and political commentators attributed to affective reactions the popularity of former US President Ronald Reagan. This could explain the discrepancies between public opinion and the overall evaluation of Reagan as a politician (Glaser and Salovey 2001, p.161). One study made by Halberstadt and Niedenthal (1997) even showed that persons attending to emotionally rich stimuli can extract more information than people in impoverished circumstances, suggesting that emotional evaluations may have greater importance than “strictly” cognitive ones. This all points to the idea that affect reaction mediate judgement making emotions not just a fundamental element of politics but also of the political imaginary.

As privileged forms of felt identities, political affects are not irrational. In fact, affects are the very logic of politics and one of the very core aspects of the political imaginary. As Slaby and Bens (2019, p.340) remark:

All political practices are affective. Political action and its institutional and organizational architectures are embedded in and productive of affective dynamics. At the same time, political practices and institutions are dependent on specific forms of affectivity, which may crystallize into prevailing sentiments and emotional orientations.

Henceforth, the political imaginary is inhabited by emotions but also operates in the transformation of emotions into something else (Collins 2001, p.29): a form of public consciousness that focus collective attention on the basis of emotional interpretations of the reality (for example, where the collision of two airplanes became the catalyst for USA’s “war on terror”).

The political imaginary is nourished by this double operation: by one hand, it supplies the emotional feeling with its aesthetic experience of the sensible; by other hand, it addresses the political use of emotions as justifications to political actions. While the former indicates an affective political imaginary, the latter designates the *affects in politics* (Slaby and Bens, 2019, p.341). Affect in politics deals with the regulated sphere of collective action and how emotions and affects regulate, alter and confront everyday political practices.

The political imaginary is made of these two distinct issues: how affects inhabit political understanding of the social world; and how affects are used to configure political praxis. In this second case, affects are a means to governance and political negotiation (functioning as fuel to resistance or to conformist actions). In the first case, affects are themselves structures of the political imaginary.

Within this twofold process, the political imaginary distributes identities, expresses social needs and establish the goals to be reached. Through the shared feeling of



politics cognitive complexity is reduced and tuned to a common note. Because politics is always an unfinished narrative with continuing images and rituals abundantly invoked, the political imaginary is also a network of shared sensations, common feelings, sensible and emotional experiences. The political imaginary, in this regard, is a fundamental pillar of the communities of feeling in which modern nation-states serve as vehicles of political emotion and in which citizenship is felt identity (Berezin 2001, p.86).

“Citizenship is far from a formal, criteria-based mode of allegiance but a thoroughly affective affair” (Slaby and Bens 2019, p.348).

The political imaginary is emotionally dense: the double movement around *affective politics* and *affect in politics* puts a strong emphasis on a complex core of emotions ruling political understanding. Emotion is, indeed, one of the pivots upon which the political imaginary turns. The vocabulary of sentiment - such as the thrill of risk, the despair of loss or the joy of triumph - are not banal and empty emotions. On the contrary, they are the ways individuals are put together and politics is exercised.

3. Affects as Rhetorical Means and Structures of the Political Imaginary.

After political affectivity (Clarke, Hoggett and Thompson 2006; Protevi 2009) has been established, this section will draw on some examples illustrating the affective political imaginary.

In the first part, it will illustrate the political use of emotions. In the second, it will examine the emotional nature of the political imaginary. Both presuppose an affective rhetoric (Mateus 2018). Indeed, rhetoric is absolutely central in deliberative democracy and modern politics.

Rhetoric facilitates the making and hearing of representation claims spanning subjects and audiences divided in their commitments and dispositions. Deliberative democracy requires a deliberative system with multiple components whose linkage often needs rhetoric. (Dryzek 2010, p.1)

However, while in the first dimension concerns mainly (verbal, visual and sound) emotional appeals, the second dimension points to the very emotional structuring of political action. Each of these parts concerns, therefore, the double movement of the emotionally dense political imaginary mentioned earlier: affects as means of political discourse; and affects as structuring elements of the political imaginary.



3.1 *Affects as Means*

Let us start by considering emotions as tools of political discourse. In such a case, we are dealing with social uses of emotions (and emotional appeals) in order to enhance political success and impact public opinion. Emotions are taken as a kind of performative tool (Cislaru 2012, p.107) that sustains politics while generating political power. Elections, wars, catastrophes, crises, attacks and accidents are examples of events in which the emotions encounter a fertile ground to prosper.

Media have a special role in propagating images, ideas, narratives based on emotions such as danger, fear, anxiety, terror or even euphoria and delirium. Populist political discourse, such as the one re-emerging in the 21st century, is specially emotionally oriented (Charadeau 2008). Those leaders are associated with inflamed speeches, full of invectives and moral evaluations that are super-loaded with emotional charge. It is easy to find examples on media discourse where words are provocative and emotional such as “Scandalous Decision”, “Disgraceful Action”, “Unacceptable”, “Shameful”, “Insulting” or “Offending”.

Since the political imaginary (including slogans, social manifestations, political cartoons, memes and social networks hashtags) is impregnated with these emotionally-charged discourses, it is now very difficult to accept that citizens act solely based on the cold, rational consideration of non-emotionally charged information (Glaser and Salovey 1998, p.156). The 2018 Brazilian presidential election of Bolsonaro, for example, has been linked with such an emotionally charged discourse propagated in digital media (such as WhatsApp) that provides us with a good example of the relevance of emotions in today’s political imaginary.

From analysing links to news sources and random sample of images and videos we found that: (1) In Brazil, WhatsApp presents an extremely low number of professional political content and a high number of junk news content; (2) Information spreading on WhatsApp relies intensely on the dissemination media files, which don’t use the same rhetoric as junk news sources, not attempting to simulate authority to credit information; (3) Content dissemination strategies within WhatsApp groups often resort to hate speech and deception to achieve viral dissemination. (Machado *et al.* 2019, p.1017).

But emotions as tools do not revolve solely around verbal communication. Non-verbal communications such as body language and physical appearance also subsidize the political imaginary. Recent research has consistently shown that a candidate’s image (including physical appearance and expressiveness) influence voter choices. A politician’s attractiveness, facial expressions, voice and general attitudes have been linked to a more or less trustworthy evaluation influencing also the competency appraisal (Rosenberg *et al.*, 1991). Even candidates who speak more optimistically have greater chances of success (Glaser and Salovey 1998, p.158). One may, thus, say that



politics concedes to citizens' feelings a major political decision-making role that is not possible to detach from rational arguments and ideological constructs. Reason and emotion, ideology and affective political praxis, are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the political imaginary is colonised by both logics: non-emotional and emotional communication.

The "affective congruence hypothesis" is a good illustration of this. It posits the mood will influence the receptivity of the political message predicting that citizen's mood match with the affective tone of the message will determine citizen's receptivity to that message (Niedenthal *et alii*. 1997). This suggests that citizens feeling angry with a given situation reacted best to political appeals based on an angry tone. Interestingly, fearful citizens on a given topic (such as a nuclear war) seem to respond most favourably to hopeful discourses (Glaser and Salovey 1998, p.160).

Emotional rhetorical appeals have been widely used in politics around the globe and are a key aspect of mediated political campaigning. The political imaginary is immersed in this productive use of emotions as a means to influence decision-making. These are just a few examples.

One of the classic cases is the "Daisy Ad" of 1964 US presidential campaign in which the terrifying nature of images of nuclear explosions are contraposed to images of a small innocent girl. This ad aims to produce emotions in voters in order to facilitate a political decision in favour of Lyndon Johnson. Anxiety seems here the fundamental emotional trigger that is intended to determine the political evaluation of the candidate. There is no long speech accusing the rival of potentially leading us to extinction. In just 90 seconds, the "Daisy Ad" established a very clear path to political decision making through the strategic use of emotions. Anxiety is, in this case, linked to fear and its consequences: withdrawal, risk aversion or avoidance behaviours. By focusing on a concrete threat (nuclear power), the ad drives voters against Goldwater stimulating increased attention to campaign information (Searles and Ridout 2017).



Figure 1 – *Daisy Advert (1964)*

But it is not just fear and anxiety that are abundant within today's political imaginary. Reagan's 1984 ad "Morning in America" or Obama's 2008 presidential campaign are both based on engendering feelings of hope what also has been shown to increase news consumption on that candidate (Just *et alii. apud* Searles and Ridout 2017). It is even pointed out that positive emotional arousal such as hope play a significant role in political decision-making (Belt *et alii. apud* Searles and Ridout 2017).

Another example of the use of hope is Clinton's 1992 "The Man from Hope" video. Firstly, shown at the 1992 democratic convention, the VHS video is a biographical portrait of Bill Clinton including reminisces on his childhood experiences and his early political career. It is based on Hope Arkansas, a small city and hometown of the candidate. But it is also based on the idea of changing the future by appealing to hope. One of the last sentences is: "I still believe in the promise of America, and I still believe in a place called Hope." While there are references to sadness (he never got to know his father), the chosen emotion to perform the political message is precisely hopefulness (and faith) - a state of arousal that will hopefully persuade citizens to vote in him.

Discrete emotions are, then, frequent in political messages and may function as emotional stimuli and tools to political efficiency and persuasion.



Figure 2 – *Man From Hope* (1992)

Curiously, and despite its anger-based rhetoric, 2016 presidential candidate Donald Trump registers 45.5 % of his political ads as alluding and referring to hope (Searles and Ridout 2017). This is easily understandable if one has in mind his slogan: “Make America Great Again!” The hope encapsulated in the slogan is succinctly described as making references to the ways Trump would restore (the allegedly disappeared) greatness of US while changing the political system. This is an emotionally charged message, where hope resides in his capacity to bring about change for the better in a near future. The slogan is, thus, also a promise and demand of trust without which the promised change would never be accomplished.



Figure 3 – *Trump's slogan* (2016)



These examples illustrate the use of emotions in political discourse. More, all of these emotions are subject to different kinds of discourse: verbal discourses but also visual discourse (two films and one print advertising). For this reason, they are relevant cases where it is possible to see the political imaginary being inundated with symbols and feelings that instil an aesthetic and sensible way of thinking politics.

3.2 *Affects as structural elements*

In this way of conceiving emotions on politics, they are not means to an end (eg. instil trust in order to influence voting). Instead of focusing on rhetorical strategies adopted by social movements (Chavez 2011) or on formal communication across parliamentary debates and political campaigns, we are re-focusing into the very affective core of political rhetoric. The political imaginary's affective rhetoric lies at a deeper, structuring level.

In this case, rhetoric is not applied to a given topic (climate change, terrorism, personal authenticity, etc). We are dealing with a fundamental layer of the political imaginary that is basically and primordially impacted by affects - and from which emotions derive. They are not a product of strategic rhetoric (for instance, political ambiguity may be intentional (Condor *et al.* 2019, p.36)).

As we have seen, emotions are complete elements of politics, as rhetorical appeals, or as fundamental elements that mediate collective life as Durkheim (1965) showed. A key aspect of the political imaginary is an affective rhetoric "grounded in theories of affect that recognize the bodily, visceral response to signs and images that preserves but exceeds their symbolic or referential value" (Zappen 2016, p.1). It is a kind of (affective) energy in excess and beyond symbolic and referential meanings. Affective rhetoric encompasses both the symbolic and affective ways by which people are united with (and therefore) divided from one another including textual but also bodily representations.

It is this very characteristic that puts affective rhetoric as a key notion of the political imaginary. By encompassing both symbolic and non-symbolic, real and imagined, intellectual or emotional reasonings the imaginary rests on the affective rhetoric to make it visible. Because the imaginary is not just worldviews but also common feeling: it is speech but also intonation; it uses argument and formal logic but also draws on preference and empathy, in word and (communicative) silence.

Speaking of "affective rhetoric" as an event, we are not just referencing appeals to emotions as extensively studied by argumentation theory but, above all, that affective energy circulates among signs, images, sounds and communities. Affective rhetoric is about the social mobilization of affects and how they lead to rhetorical persuasion (Mateus 2018). It is about the predominance of the rhetorical *pathos* over *logos* and *ethos*.

In the case of social imaginaries, considering an affective rhetoric is useful since it studies how affects (including passions, moods, feelings, or sentiments) are socially and culturally deployed in the manifold manifestations of the political imaginary. The



affective moment entails a kind of rhetoric magma that conduces the way and think and feel politics through its many forms (symbolically or sensibly), genres (humor, formal addresses or ceremonial events) and multimodality (visual, verbal, etc).

Politics is always pre-configured in terms of affects (that bring closer or that push further away) including a diversity of expressions such as violent protests, homages of tragic events or political campaigning in popular street-encounters with citizens, where kissing is frequent. This primitive form of emotional arousal is essential to the very exercise of political campaigning and it includes hand shaking and collective cheers. Affects res structural elements of political rhetoric in all its multimodal semiotic forms: from assembly speeches, to activism songs to symbolic acts such as vigils. Before the actualization of emotions in a given context with rhetorical intent, there is a more hidden and visceral layer of affects structuring and organizing political action.

Of course, above all, political campaigns are about policy debates and political deliberation. But, from the start, the political imaginary sets them in affective terms. Discourses shape the way we see the world. Symbols, of course, are crucial to that endeavor. But so they are affects. As social beings, we communicate by *feeling the symbols*. The social imaginary is felt communion by affects that shape collective understanding of symbols. So, ideological programs are also felt and emotionally understood. So, affects structure the political imaginary. They are not just another layer of meaning but, given the close association between reason and emotion, affects are constitutive forms of both the real and the imagined.

One example: fiction TV series “The Simpsons” (Season 11, episode 17) “predicted” 15 years before Trump would be elected President of the United States. Of course, the screenwriters did not foresee the future. But this is a good example of the difficulty to distinguish the real and the imagined. It is also an opportunity to confirm how emotions permeate the imaginary. At the time, that could be understood as sarcasm or ridicule; but in the present time is now an illustration of the fusion between the imaginary and the real. Emotional reactions of laughter and joy soon became emotional reactions of bewilderment. As quickly as this was put into circulation in news and social media, the hypothetical became a certainty and the North-American imaginary was flooded with allusions between fiction and reality, television and reality. The political imaginary is thus influenced by the media imaginary and the basic emotions of the audience are transferred into the basic emotions of citizens (and voters). To many political commentators, the hilarious prediction of “The Simpsons” became the tragic reality.



Figure 3 – *Comparing fiction and reality in “The Simpsons”*

We find a comparable example on the recent election of the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that brought to politics a non-verbal vocabulary of comedy. Zelensky is a comedic actor who, prior to the election, entered in the houses of Ukrainian citizens through a fictional television program where he played precisely the role of the Ukraine’s President. People got used to his presence as a fictional character, and the potential positive emotions toward his fictional character had quickly transformed fiction into reality. The country’s political imaginary was soon colonised by this mixture of man and character. Political commentators, without hesitation, described his political candidacy as a joke. But once again laughs turned into effective affective instances that, ultimately, helped to elect Zelensky. His political experience was limited to his acting as President on a television show. He was a newcomer on politics that capitalized an affective rhetoric- based on the everyday familiarity of a television character- that convinced voters. His debate with Poroshenko was even described in terms of a boxing match and it was staged as a television spectacle. We see, then, how the political imaginary acquires an almost entertaining , where expressions such as “fake candidate”, “dramatic entrance” and “know-out blow” entered with ease¹.

¹ One such example is the Independent news: “Comedian Zelensky faces down Petro Poroshenko in fiery Ukrainian presidential debate: “I’m not your opponent, I’m your sentence”, accessed at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-election-latest-volodymyr-zelensky-petro-poroshenko-debate-comedian-vote-a8878716.html>



His body language, besides, mirrors juvenile manifestations that are frequently observed in mass musical concerts. He introduced a repertoire of gestures that are not part of the traditional non-verbal vocabulary of politics. This facilitated the replication of elements, gestures and messages of the entertainment and media imaginary into the political imaginary.



Figure 4 – *Non-verbal communication of Zelensky*

These two examples are, of course, not exhaustive but they should give us a fair idea of how politics is much more than rational argumentation and how it has become inhabited by an affective rhetoric (verbal and non-verbal) where emotions play a major, structuring role in the way we see the political process. Both cases go beyond the mere verbal rhetorical discourse and point to a political process envisaged as an imagined and fictional world that becomes real; or, on the other hand, a political process envisaged as reality that seems fiction.

Nevertheless, emotions of amazement and bewilderment are here crucial to understand how amusing (and emotional) the political imaginary has become. The affects are here mobilizing not so much emotional appeals but a substrate layer upon which political practice is accomplished. This layer crosses the real and the imaginary, the intellectual and the sensible, reason and emotion. The political imaginary resonates these very aspects of politics, as 21th century examples demonstrate.



4. Conclusion

Emotions are essential elements to understanding politics. Therefore, the political imaginary cannot be apprehended without contemplating their role on political decision-making, voter behaviour and collective experience. In this paper, it was proposed to look into the emotional dimension of the political imaginary according to a double instance: the use of emotions as tools (emotional appeals) to influence behaviour and thinking; and the very affective nature of politics.

By taking into consideration both instances, we recognize that emotions lie at the very core of the political imaginary. The distinction here introduced helps to separate two functioning regimes of an emotion-determined political imaginary in which ideologies and sentiments, rational reasoning and mood, as well as speech and non-verbal communication, decisively contribute to configure the affective contours of the political imaginary's symbols, rituals and emblematic images. As politics is not just about information-processing, the political imaginary is not just about collective (and discursive) reasoning. Politics is also felt; and understanding how we feel the political imaginary is what this paper is about. Affective energies permeate the political imaginary. As a semantic basin to all human expressions, it is also a concrete and imagined emotional resonance. The political imaginary enlightens the mind while, at the same time, it puts them into a common vibrancy and emotional arrangement.

"The political is the sphere where human individuals and collectives determine – either jointly or adversely – what their finite earthly existence will ultimately look like: the *how* of their living together and relating to one another" (Slaby and Bens 2018, p.349).

Following this idea, one could add that the political is where human individuals and collectives determine how they feel their living together through an imaginary where reason and emotion are combined together. Providing an account of the affective life of politics is, hence, a fundamental task future research may certainly answer.

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