Politics of emotions in the context of the global Islamic resurgence

Abstract

Understanding the current Islamic resurgence has not been an easy task. Islamic terrorism, the caricature controversy, and other recent incidents have intensified the global presence of Islam over the last years. The idea behind this contribution is that the logic of political actions does not follow mere rational reasoning. Therefore, it is essential to try to widen the scope of analysis also in relation to the global Islamic resurgence. The focus of this article is on the meaning of emotions as part of politics and political actions. This contribution holds that political activity is motivated and empowered by collectively expressed emotions.

The meaning of emotions in political theory has been a rather marginal issue. “Real” politics is understood as rational and goal-orientated activity, in which emotions appear as a troublemaker or a problem to be solved. However, for example sorrow, anger, frustration, fear, desperation, and hope can be linked to the logic of political actions in a relevant way.

This presentation poses the following questions: What does politics of emotions mean in the context of politics in general, and, especially, in the context of global Islamic activity; how can it be categorized, and what are the preconditions for Islamic politics of emotions? The empirical area of interest is global Islamic terrorism, specifically Al-Qaeda. The contribution deals with the politics of emotions in terms religion, rituals, past, memory, media, and global consciousness.

1. Al-Qaeda and the problem of interpretation
The examination of Al-Qaeda, 9/11, and other Al-Qaeda-related incidents has not been an easy task because there has been no consensus about the nature of the group and its actions. Al-Qaeda and 9/11 almost immediately gained an incomparable position: “By funnelling the experience through the image of American exceptionalism, 9/11 quickly took on an exceptionality.” (Der Derian 2002, 102) Like Nazism earlier, Al-Qaeda has been placed in a position in which there is no space for open interpretations – at least in the context of media or political practices. The actions of Al-Qaeda have been placed beyond “normal” theorization or historicity.

After 9/11, Al-Qaeda was quickly demonized, and e.g. the war against the terrorist threat was not a war against Islam, but against evil (see e.g. Bar 2004, 17). The demonization of Al-Qaeda hid the possibilities to study the various phenomena behind the group. Regardless of how inhuman and cruel the acts of 9/11 were – like other Al-Qaeda-related actions have been – they can still be conceptualized and theorized. Declaiming the exceptionality of Al-Qaeda acts is the prerequisite for any research conducted on this group.

In general, terrorism has been defined as “a method of political action that uses violence against civilians and civilian infrastructure in order to influence behaviour, to inflict punishment or exact revenge.” (Booth & Dunne 2002, 8) Violence of threatening and random nature is typical for terrorism: it can basically hit anyone. There are at least five different ways to conceptualize religious terrorism; i.e., terrorism in terms of crime, war, communication, religion, and politics. (Schmid 2004) Even though there was at first a tendency to consider Al-Qaeda’s actions in a limited sense, the group has later been studied from very different points of view, including the security threats posed by Al-Qaeda, the psychological dimensions of its terrorism and suicide attacks, the economic prerequisites of Al-Qaeda, etc.

Probably the most common way to approach the concept – at least by politicians and ordinary people, but also by scholars – is to place the actions of Al-Qaeda and of those against it into a context of war and crime. It is not difficult to find opinions according to which Al-Qaeda’s terrorist acts are purely criminal. Ayla Schbley (2003, 106) states, “the definition of terrorism must be removed from politics and placed into the realms of criminal justice and future international criminal court(s)”. Greg Bankoff reflects similar emotions: “the modern terrorist is above all ‘a criminal’ in the eyes of the West” (Bankoff 2003, 419). However, it would be misleading to see Al-Qaeda only as a criminal, irrational terrorist movement; it cannot be defined as a specific kind of organization including only one guiding principle. Accordingly, the binary representations of the Cold War – outlawed collectives seen as political players or common criminals – do not make sense in a current situation (Rauffer 2003, 391).

On the whole, the political dimensions of Al-Qaeda’s actions have been examined to a lesser extent. The actions of Al-Qaeda should be seen from a wider perspective; they are not only acts of war or crime because their effects and consequences are also dramatically political. Al-Qaeda has, for
example, been very efficient in creating an agenda of international politics, and also politics at the national and local levels. Furthermore, if Al-Qaeda’s political nature is accepted, it should also be noted that it represents not only something we call international politics or relations but also national and global politics. Therefore, Al-Qaeda puts pressure on political scientists to find new ways to conceptualize current religious terrorism in relation to politics and political theory.

It is essential to understand the political sources and logic of Al-Qaeda. The group and its associates politicize Islam and, accordingly, Islam as a religion has been linked to terrorist acts by terrorists themselves and by the general public, whether we like it or not. Therefore, a question arises: How is the political dimension of terrorism represented and how is religion being employed? Carol Gentry correctly points out that “politically violent groups do not just come into being fully formed and ready to commit violence. They have a previously formed identity and located history somewhere.” (Gentry 2004, 279)

The purpose of this paper is to find ways to understand the actions of Al-Qaeda through emotions: what is the role of emotions in the context of a violent, extreme organization? How should the politics of Al-Qaeda be understood with respect to emotions? The argument is that Al-Qaeda should be seen not as an irrational or senseless group of people committing outrageous criminal or warlike actions but as a specific kind of organization with a strong sense of the meanings and goals of own actions.  

2. Politics of emotions

2.1. Concept of emotions

Why emotions? What could they tell us about extreme political actions or any politics at all? Emotions seem to be an underrated topic in politics and international relations. Those who study politics, according to Mabel Berezin (2002, 34), “view emotions as extrinsic to the study of politics”. This contribution will provide a different perspective to emotions and politics. Ian Burkitt (2005, 694) argues that “any analysis of power, government, and politics that does not consider emotion misses its essential element.” What, then, are emotions?

There are many different ways to approach emotions. Depending on the scholar, three to ten basic emotions can be identified, including fear, anger, disgust, surprise, happiness, enjoyment, shame, guilt, grief, and sadness. (See e.g. Busy 2003, 79, Burkitt 2005, 682) Emotions can be categorized in many ways. Affective emotions include e.g. love and hate and reactive emotions e.g. outrage and grief. Furthermore, moods include e.g. defiance, enthusiasm and envy. (Berezin 2002, 37) On the other hand, several emotions can be involved in one phenomenon or issue, e.g. unemployment can

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1 As the first draft, this paper is a theoretical exercise rather than an empirically based research, and, therefore, the empirical evidence remains to be shown in future contributions.
be associated with fear, shame, depression or boredom. Emotions are not stable and unchangeable entities either. According to Carl Ratner (2000, 9), they have different characteristics, such as quality, behavioural expression, the manner in which they are managed, and organization.

In order to understand the political dimension of emotions, they should be interpreted in a broader context; they should not be regarded merely as individual and somehow “internal” phenomena (see Burkitt 2005, 679) or as responses to external stimuli. Jane Fajans describes emotions as a relation between different domains:

“Emotions are bodily experiences in that they are situated in organism, but they mediate relations between the subject and the external environment and are often provoked by events outside the individual. Emotions are thus activities that negotiate the interface between inside and outside, individual and collective, public and private, bodiliness and cognition, meaning and feeling. As mediating phenomena, emotions are a conduit between these different domains. Neither totally social nor totally innate, emotions are subjective manifestations and transformations of important biological and psychodynamic processes.” (Fajans 2006, 104)

It follows that emotions are not passive reactions to external forces, but they emerge as a part of the relationship between an individual and a physical, social, and cultural context. Emotions should not be located within the sphere of subjectivity alone (cf. Emirbayer & Goldberg 2000, 486), even though it has been argued that an emotion is fundamentally and undeniably an individual-level phenomenon. Theodore Kemper states that “only individuals experience emotions.” However, Kemper also notes that there can be a group emotion or a dominant emotion of a group: “some aggregate of individuals is feeling something that is sufficiently alike to be identified as the common emotion of that aggregate.” (Kemper 2002, 56)

I agree with Ross’s argument that “emotions are strictly neither individual nor collective” (Ross 2006, 213). Emotions are in social relations (Barbalet 2002, 4), i.e., politics of emotion is a relational issue characterized by reciprocality. Different emotional reactions enhance each other: “Emotions influence the ways in which we respond to and engage with our relationships.” (Porter 2006, 97) Kemper, in turn, emphasizes the issue of power and status when trying to understand the relational nature of emotions:

“Anger results from a loss of status, fear from a loss of power relative to other, sadness from the loss of a status that is irremediable, joy from a gain of power. These emotions are thus responses to outcomes of interaction in power and status terms. Beyond these primary emotions, guilt is understood to be the felt when one

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2 Jack Barbalet, in turn, speaks about an emotional climate, which “does not require that every person subject to it experiences the same emotion. As emotional climates are group phenomena and as different people occupy different positions within groups, perform different roles and have different capacities, it is indeed likely that individuals will differ from each other in their emotional experiences. Yet in their relationships they will each contribute to the feelings of the group qua group, to its emotional formulation or climate.” (Barbalet 2002, 5)
understands that one has used excess power on another. Shame is understood as the emotion felt when one has acted in a manner that belies the mount of status that one expects another to confer on oneself, that is, one has not acted in a status-worthy manner.” (Kemper 2002, 56)

Emotions are responses to different stimuli, and they should not be reduced into essentialized entities or qualities. Therefore, emotions should be seen as processes which interplay between stimuli and responses: emotions “engage the subject in a relationship with the external world”. The constructivist idea of emotions emphasizes that emotions should be seen as a socially constructed concept, articulated in social relations.

2.2. Reason and emotions

As mentioned, there is a considerable number of counterarguments against the relevance of emotion in the context of politics. One of the main arguments is related to the ideas of reason and rationality: reason and emotion are considered incompatible, and reason has been represented as superior to emotion (cf. Hampshire 2002, 640). Traditional politics appears as a sphere of rational choices, and good decisions are based on logical and coherent thinking (See Mercer 2005, 80).

In terms of Islamic politics, the question of reason and emotions is relevant. The relation between reason and emotions is complicated and contested as such, but including the dimension of terrorism and extreme violence makes the situation even more complicated. Terrorism is often considered to be irrational violence without a rational ideology behind it. By emphasizing emotions we do not deem terrorism to be irrational. Instead, by elaborating on the role of emotions we can also understand the rational dimension of acts.

What, then, is the connection between emotions and reason? As a basic rule, ordinary people as well as scholars consider emotions as the opposite of reason. The dualistic approach is clearly present in the following relations: passion vs. reason, emotion vs. cognition, irrational vs. rational, unconscious vs. conscious, unintentional vs. intentional (Mercer 2006, 289; see also Ratner 2000, 5). Emotions are seen distinct from rationality (Mercer 2005, 92-93) and a representative political action is seen as a rational choice between different alternatives. Emotions are regarded as “an inappropriate category of analysis, unless accounting for psychological and behavioural pathology, in which case the emotions are held to predominate.” (Barbalet 2002, 1)³

According to Jonathan Mercer, emotion plays a role for political scientists when needed to explain irrational choices or mistakes. Emotions are a somewhat separate and irrational part of human action: “Scholars view emotion as a cost or benefit to be modelled, a toll to be manipulated to send

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³ See also Edward (1999, 273): “[Emotions] are conceived to be natural bodily experiences and expressions, older than language, irrational and subjective, unconscious rather than deliberate, genuine rather than artificial, feeling rather than thoughts.”
signals or impart credibility, or as an inevitable but unfortunate aspect of human decision making.” (Mercer 2005, 92-93) In other words, emotion is understood as a source of misperception or to explain a deviation from a rational baseline: emotion causes mistakes, and seldom prevents them (Mercer 2006, 291).  

Even though emotion and reason are defined as opposite entities, an increasing number of scholars try to define an alternative model for the dichotomised ideas of reason and emotion. There are scholars who view “some emotions as strategic and therefore rational”. In other words, emotion could be utilized to pursue short-term self-interests. (Mercer 2006, 293) Nevertheless, also in these cases emotion is seen subordinate to rationality. A more balanced idea of the relation between emotion and rationality emphasizes that “emotion is not merely a tool of rationality but instead is necessary to rationality” (Mercer 2005, 92-93). As Ratner (2000, 6) criticizes, “[t]he most fundamental error is dichotomizing emotions and thinking and attributing them to different processes.” Ratner stresses that emotions are feelings that accompany thinking: “Emotions never exist alone, apart from thoughts.” (ibid.)

This argumentation underscores the interconnectedness of reason and emotion; emotion is viewed as essential to rationality: “Emotion is not only a consequence of incentives but it constitutes interests and causes behaviour. Far from being epiphenomenal, emotion makes rationality possible.” (Mercer 2006, 294) In this thinking, rationality and logic have no human “content” as such; emotion and reason cannot be separated and since, politics without emotional “commitments” is not feasible. Politics is produced and performed by human beings, and therefore feelings, emotions and passions cannot be neglected. Michael Walzer argues that “[p]olitics has mostly to do with people who have both convictions and passions, reason and enthusiasm, always in unstable combination.” (Walzer 2002, 625)  

2.3. Emotions and political action

As noted, emotions are more than only an individual and psychological dimension of human beings. It is also conceivable to see emotions compatible with rationality and reason. The question remains, however, how emotions are linked to politics and political action. What are the theoretical starting points necessary to understand the role of emotions in politics?

In conventional political theory, emotion is understood primarily as a consequence and rarely a cause in political processes (see Mercer 2006, 290): politics and other actions cause different emotions, but emotions do not cause politics. The starting point here, on the contrary, is that there is no action without emotional involvement (Barbalet 2002, 2). Mercer states that “without emotion we have neither motivation nor direction nor creativity” (Mercer 2006, 292). Emotions are therefore

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4 Mercer quotes Elster, who also argues in this manner: ‘Emotions provide a meaning and sense of direction of life, but they also prevent us from going steadily in that direction.’ (Elster in Mercer 2006, 292)
closely intertwined with actions: “Emotion precedes choice (by ranking one’s preferences), emotion influences choice (because it directs one’s attention and is source of action), and emotion follows choice (which determines how one feels about one’s choice and influences one’s preferences).” (Mercer 2005, 94)

Emotions also show a direction to values and political ideals: they “play a role in our thinking about the good and the just, and therefore in evaluations of political ideas and ideals” (Burkitt 2005, 682). Also Elizabeth Porter emphasizes the role of emotion in relation to political values and practices. He states that “[e]motions reveal what is important to us, what we value, how we perceive situations, what affects us, and how we should respond ethically.” (Porter 2006, 97) In other words and following this argumentation, values, ideals, and thinking do not appear from “vacumized rationality,” but there is a clear emotional context behind them.

Carl Ratner (2000, 5) says that the etymology of ‘emotion’ is ‘to move something’.5 That is close to the idea of change. Vince argues that in understanding change the relation between politics and emotion is important. Political behaviour and action, according to Vince, emerges from different emotions such as fear and anxiety related to the direction and consequences of change (Vince 2002, 1190).

In research, the emotional side of politics has many times been linked to social movements and oppositional politics. Political and social movements are studied frequently through resources or power positions, but the emotional perspective emphasizes collective psychology and re-conceptualizing of emotions in contentious politics (cf. Emirbayer & Goldberg 2000, 470). In this sense, belonging to a movement is a thoroughly emotional experience: recruitment to a movement, staying in, and dropping out all could involve a strong emotional aspect. (Adams 2003, 85)6

Even though many different emotions have received attention in the context of political activity, especially the role of passion has been discussed widely. Passion is typically an emotion which has been difficult to tackle with in rational politics. Hall argues that some theorists do not appreciate passion at all or as much as reason, power, or justice; others consider passion a danger to politics and that it therefore should be eliminated from the public realm. It is said that passion forms a problem which should be resolved. (Hall 2002, 728) Hall, on the other hand, perceives passion – or eros – as a source of political action (Hall 2000, 741):

“The most important point for my purposes is that eros or passion motivates not only private action but public action as well. Political apathy among citizens is a commonly noted problem. .. But what is apathy, if not a lack of passion? As the feminist authors

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5 The English term ‘emotion’ meant movement until the mid-18th century. Later, it took on a meaning of political agitation or disturbance. At the end of the 18th century, emotion was linked to the sense of strong feeling. (Ratner 2000, 5)

6 This is not to say in a dichotomised manner that the emotions of social protesters are temporary and unstructured in contrast to “the long-lived and enduring nature of institutionalized rationality.”
argue, without *eros* people lack the energy and commitment to act, because they lack the sense that their actions have any meaning. … In order to become political involved, people must care about an issue, they must have some vision of how things ought to be done, and they must have some hope that at least some progress can be made toward realizing this vision.” (Hall 2000, 741)

The concept of *emotional power* is also useful in understanding political action: emotions are able to move “people into protest and enthuse and electrify a crowd” (Burkitt 2005, 680). Emotional power is also related to collective identities. If a certain group has a strong feeling of group identity, this “leads to sharing, cooperation, perceived mutuality of interest, and willingness to sacrifice personal interests for group interests.” (Mercer 2005, 96) People have to invest emotional significance in groups in order to “care about them; if people do not care, they neither cooperate nor compete” (Mercer 2005, 96). Shared feelings and emotions are therefore essential to collective identifications.

3. Islamic politics and emotions: the case of Al-Qaeda

3.1. Nature of the emotional politics of Al-Qaeda

"I say to you William (Defence Secretary) that: These youths love death as you loves life. They inherit dignity, pride, courage, generosity, truthfulness and sacrifice from father to father. They are most delivering and steadfast at war. They inherit these values from their ancestors (even from the time of the Jaheliyyah, before Islam).” (Ladenese Epistle, 1998)

The religious extremism in the form of terrorism represented by Al-Qaeda is a good example of the power of emotions. As noted earlier, it has been difficult to frame or interpret the actions of Al-Qaeda due to the complex nature of the organization. Al-Qaeda, as a global network, provides an interesting platform for investigating the meanings of emotions. Global consciousness and media connections enable people to settle in relation to each other: global communities of emotions are being constructed across national borders. Those communities can include very heterogeneous people constructing an idea of common interests and goals.

A variety of emotions can be found in the world of Al-Qaeda. For example anger, hate, passion, and joy are constituents of the “emotional package” of the organization. Especially the humiliation of Muslim people is a basic circumstance outlining their emotional responses. The organization’s relation to its enemies is not articulated in economic terms: the politics is characterized by emotional linkages between ingroup and outgroup members.

Oppositional – including terrorist – socio-political and psychological dynamism can be observed through different phases. According to Laurence Miller (2006a, 127-128), the first phase is "it’s not right,” the second one is ”it’s not fair,” the third one is “it’s your fault,” and, finally, the fourth one is ”you’re evil.” Aggressive actions become acceptable and understandable, and, at the same time,
aggressive behaviour is being motivated by the action of others. The basis of politics lies in the mobilization of emotions, insults, and hostility against a certain group of people.

In the case of Al-Qaeda, the politicization of emotions has a rather *uncompromised* and *nonnegotiable* nature. This follows the logic of politicized emotions in general. In conventional politics, interests between different groups potentially cause conflicts, but those conflicts, according to Walzer (2002, 617), “can be negotiated, principles can be debated, and negotiations and debates are political processes that, in practice and in principle, set limits on the behaviour of those who join them.” In other words, interest-based politics are somehow manageable through negotiations. The emotion or passion-based politics, on the other hand, are beyond negotiations or mutual understanding:

Emotional politics are politics of “all or nothing” (cf. Walzer 2002, 628). Accordingly, Al-Qaeda has shown no interest for negotiations or compromises in its ideology: the organization has a very clear and definite understanding and interpretation of Islam. The combination of feelings and doctrines related to Islam forms a firm basis for Al-Qaeda’s actions, which also defines the absolute borders between Al-Qaeda and its outer world. Miller formulates that when speaking about Muslim terrorists in general, the targets of the terrorists could be anything and anybody because the idea of innocence cannot be applied to “others.” According to Miller (2006b, 256), “[n]o target population is entirely innocent, either because their own acts have targeted innocents as well or simply because they are evil by association with the enemy group, by exemplifying or supporting the corrupt values and actions of hated groups.”

The targets (or opponents) of terrorist groups are also part of the motivation and emotional aspect of politics. As emotional politics are a relational concept, the enemy also defines the content of its own politics. The more evil the enemy, the more effective the basis for emotional politics:

“The passionate intensity of terrorists and murderers is, at least sometimes, matched by their most heroic and effective opponents. If there were nothing awful to oppose, there would be no need (and no occasion) for that kind of emotional engagement.” (Walzer 2002, 622-623; emphasis added)

Al-Qaeda’s enemies follow this logic; the target of the organization is broad, including the Americans and their allies, the Western world, economics or politics, enemies of God, Zionists, Muslim infidels, and invaders of the holy places of Mecca and Medina. The enemies are noticeable enough to beget emotional effects and consequences. Everybody is able make an emotional connection to these kinds of large entities. In addition, the targets of 9/11 – the WTC towers, Pentagon, and the could-be-target White House – did not have a mere symbolic meaning, representing the West or Western values. By attacking them, Al-Qaeda also tried to insult and offence the very feelings of the American people.
In order to understand Al-Qaeda or other terrorist organizations, it is also important to understand the emotional aspect of being in an organization. To be part of a purposeful organization and to work with comrades sharing a common ideology and goals may create a strong sense of belonging:

"Former terrorists, when asked what they miss about their lives as active members of such groups, often talk about the closeness they felt with group members, the sense of shared risk and common purpose. In their eyes, life as terrorist had an intensity and purpose that life outside the organization noticeably lacked.” (Silke 2004, 192)

The joint mission goes hand in hand with constructing the comradeship. Certain members of the organization and its cells have lived together intensively and created a strong feeling of togetherness. “Point-of-no-return” rituals (e.g. farewell messages and videos, farewell parties, etc.) of suicide bombers commit them psychologically to strikes and death (see Miller 2006, 131).

On the one hand, emotions make political actions rather clear because the positions between different actors are precise. But, on the other hand, emotions cannot be easily governed or managed, and therefore emotional politics can also be unpredictable:

"It is the ambivalence and alternation of emotions, which makes emotional responses hard to predict in all relations, including political relations. This means that it is difficult for governments, or any political group, to manipulate emotion in order to govern by directing conduct.” (Burkitt 2005, 684)

This is also apparent in the case of Al-Qaeda. Although the organization has been, one could argue, very successful in its emotional politics, a possible weakness also exists within Al-Qaeda. Emotional commitment to the organization – in terms of the global emotional climate among Muslims – can change or disappear. The emotional link between an individual actor and an organization may be very strong, but, on the other hand, emotions cannot be entirely forced. In other words, emotional politics may be of an uncompromised nature, but they have to be based on voluntary actions to be effective.

3.2. Emotions and religions

What is the role of religion in the context of emotions and Islamic politics, especially Al-Qaeda? At first, the question seems obvious since Al-Qaeda is a religious organization per se and religions seem to be emotional as such. However, the emotional aspects of religions and religious organizations need also to be studied thoroughly because they have not been properly dealt with in political research. Religions in general – in this case Islam – provide not only a religious but also a cultural, social, and political toolkit for emotional experiences; and it can therefore be expected that religion performs in many ways a major role in the emotional politics of Al-Qaeda as well.
A religion forms a firm basis for emotional politics and actions. It provides a bridge between individual and collective experiences, and also between this world and the afterlife. Religions are able to answer “a permanent emotional need in individuals, the need to love something greater than the self” (Shilling 2002, 17).

To love something greater than the self is often comparable to being or becoming greater than the self. According to Theodore Kemper, ideologies, including absolute faith in God “can turn even the weakest actors into highly dedicated, highly destructive combatants, willing to suffer self-immolation as long as they exert disproportionate injury to an enemy” (Kemper 2002, 62). The feeling of belonging to an omnipotent and eternal entity could be an important emancipatory power.

In a way, religions can create symbolic spaces which attract people to commit to religiously based collectives and movements, and, furthermore, “influences members’ emotion that keeps people from leaving a movement and contributes to its strengths” (Adams 2003, 86). In this sense, religion could also be seen as “emotional capital” for an organization such as Al-Qaeda; it is a “recourse for mobilizing potential participants and for sustaining their involvement” (Dunn 2004, 235).

Religiously motivated emotions are also closely linked to the concepts of identity and community. In research, the political dimension of identity has been widely recognized (also in the context of political Islam), but its connection to emotions – such as love, hate, shame, and anger – has been undermined or totally ignored. (See Vogler 2000, 20) The emotional side of identity is also relevant in order to understand the psychological dimensions of communities and collectives.

The idea of a global Islamic community, umma, is one of the cornerstones of Islam. There is a profound basis for the construction of community of emotions which are “emotional responses to events that lie outside institutional politics” (Berezin 2002, 38, 43; Berezin speaks of community of feelings). Al-Qaeda’s violent activities, which also resemble war to some extent, could provide to its cadres a deep connection to religious roots and community. Community and jihad belong together:

“Everyone who participated with the Americans in their Crusade, whether hirelings, religion-traders or rulers, must be aware that they won’t be facing the lions of Jihad in Afghanistan and Iraq only, but are about to face - with Allah's permission - a Muslim Ummah revitalized by Jihad, and a Muslim Ummah angry and flaming with rage after it was shown their betrayals and crimes.” (Zawahiri 2007)

Dan Stone argues that war “like the festival, connects man to the sacred” (Stone 2004, 54). He (2004, 55) calls this “a sacred participation, a divine transgression, since it is carried out in the name of community, purifying it, returning it to its myth.” War and killing is then a “holy task of renewing the community” (Stone 2004, 56-57). Stone identifies “ecstatic communities” in which

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7 Stone refers in his study mostly in holocaust and genocide, however, his ideas could be used heuristically also in the case of Al-Qaeda.
individuals can experience an apocalyptic, even orgiastic feeling of participation (Stone 2004, 48-49).

3.3. Rituals and performativity

Religiously based emotions are manifested mentally and concretely; mentally in the sense that they exist in a psychological and inner sphere of life. The concrete or practical aspects of religious emotions can be explored through the concepts of ritual and performativity.

According to Kertzer (in Berezin 2002, 44), rituals could be seen as “formalized manifestations of emotions.” A ritual is defined as follows:

“symbolic behaviour that is socially standardized and repetitive. -- [Ritual action] follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning. Ritual action is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channelling emotions, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups.” (Kertzer, 1988, in Berezin 2002, 44; emphasis added)

In other words, ritual actions are a practical medium of conveying emotions. The actions of Al-Qaeda and the ways in which those actions are executed are not arbitrary: ritual actions combine meanings between individuals and collectives. In his studies of the emotional identity of fascist regimes, Mabel Berezin has explored five components of ritual activity: 1) the myth of the founding element, 2) the forging of enemies and heroes, 3) the appropriation of the commonplace, 4) the merging of the sacred and secular, 5) the using of categories of persons as symbolic icons. (Berezin 2002, 44) According to him, public political rituals create arenas of emotions, and repeated participation in ritual activities constructs emotional community: “The repeated experience of ritual participation produces a feeling of solidarity – ‘we are all here together, we must share something,’ and lastly, it produces collective memory – ‘we were there together.’” (Berezin 2002, 44-45)

Rituals related to grief serve as a powerful emotional instrument. The loss of members can potentially threaten the unity of the community. In those cases, collective rituals of grief are a means to recreate solidarity among the group. (Burkitt 2005, 693) Therefore, e.g. the deaths or killings of members of Al-Qaeda are a double-edged sword: they could be and have been used for eliminating members of the organization, but for the organization itself they could serve as a ritualistic possibility to enforce the unity of the organization.

Adams refers to Taylor and Whittier, who argue that activists try to create and legitimize emotional norms. Those norms include “how they should feel themselves and about dominant groups and how they should manage and express the feelings evoked by their day-to-day encounters with dominant groups, often through ritual; as such, movements may contain their own emotion culture.” (Adams
According to this idea, emotions are not voluntary; especially certain kinds of activist groups try to control emotional and, accordingly, ritual experiences.

The violent actions of Al-Qaeda have been ritualistic performances. Through martyrdom, violence has become the Islamic action which is performed in a very detailed manner. The 9/11 incident was a carefully-planned performance of the medialized world. Also, the acts and conduct of the suicide bombers have been very intentional and "performative.” Al-Qaeda’s form of political Islam, based on terror, has been effective also with respect to other forms of immediate effects: it has become normalized type of action also outside the organization.

3.4. Past and memory

Religions provide access to afterlife. They are also mediators to past and historical events, and Islam is no exception. Religions can serve as an ideological frame for conveying memory, and therefore, provide an access to past emotions as well. (Cf. Carrette 2004, 283) History is a symbolic recourse for potential emotions. Jeremy Carrette argues that emotion involves history and memory, and also other way round:

“[M]emory and history involve emotion. We remember things because of the emotional impact they upon us, and we remember historical events, in the development of a collective or cultural memory, for the same reasons. Memory in turn requires a community for renewal, a community that will carry out the processes of repetition and adaptation.” (Carrette 2004, 280)

Thus, memory and remembering are not abstract matters, but related to the feelings and emotions of people or collectives, i.e., people do not remember things which do not affect them. The task of communities is to keep memories alive through rituals, narratives and remembering. Fajans (2006, 105) argues that emotions derive “from the individual’s own drives and desires in combination with memories from past performance and actions, and the social, cultural and interpersonal forces outside the actor.” Emotions are processes in which special and historical, social and environmental meet (Fajans 2006, 105).

Al-Qaeda has extensively used history to articulate its aims and reasons for actions. Bin Laden has been skilful in utilizing and addressing different events of Islamic history; he has constructed a narrative combining history and the present, collectives and individuals. Crusades and other main battles between Muslims and infidels are major illustrations of victories, and humiliations as well.

Our Islamic nation has been tasting the same for more 80 years, of humiliation and disgrace, its sons killed and their blood spilled, its sanctities desecrated. (Osama bin Laden, 7.10.2001)

“We are not surprised from the action of our youths. The youths were the companions of Muhammad (Allah's Blessings and Salutations may be on him), and was it not the
youths themselves who killed Aba-Jahl, the Pharaoh of this Ummah? Our youths are the best descendent of the best ancestors. (Ladenese Epistle, 1998)

Carrette (2004, 279, 287) has examined the ideas of Stjepan Metrovitc, and introduces his concept of postemotionalism. Postemotional societies could be defined as social spaces where mass production of individual spirituality takes place. The political nature of memory is linked to religious traditions. Religions and their emotional history construct the cultural capital which can be used for political purposes. The use of emotional history is selective: suitable events and occasions are utilized; others are not memorized nor remembered.

Carrette calls postemotionalism rational marketing of emotion to political and social ends. Past and historical emotions are manipulated and manufactured for the use of contemporary societies and for shaping human consciousness. Accordingly, it is not accidental how Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden have used past events to create certain emotional spaces. The politicization of the past is a source of motivation for current politics:

_We hope those brothers are the first martyrs in the battle of Islam in this age. The new Jewish crusader campaign is led by the biggest crusader Bush under the banner of the cross. This battle is considered one of the battles of Islam._ (Osama bin Laden, 24.9.2001)

### 3.5. The meaning of media in the construction of emotions

Politically motivated emotions are collective phenomena which need a wide arena to reach a global audience. When trying to understand global Islamic movements like Al-Qaeda, it is particularly important to recognize the effects of the current media. Emotional life – including rituals, performatives, symbols, etc. – is being transformed and also shaped by media constructs (Carrette 2004, 276). The Internet as well as the real-time and worldwide TV, mobile telephones, SMS, etc. are effective transmitters of information – and emotions. Emotional politics in its current form is a representative creation of the medialized and global world.

Medialization has changed the preconditions for political actions – not only in the West, but also in the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda terrorism could not have taken place before the contemporary media and its role as a mediator of politics. Al-Qaeda terrorism has brought Islamic political actions, meanings, and messages to the worldwide audience – both the Muslims and the non-Muslims. To a certain degree, Islamic discourse has seized the international political space and also changed the political arrangements of international politics. Al-Qaeda’s extensive medialization of Islamic politics provides a platform for new kinds of communities and political coalitions.

With its use of the global media, Al-Qaeda has promoted a political conflict which could be named “the global clash of emotions” (Moïsi 2006). Media affects the formation of global consciousness: in certain circumstances the local and the national can accumulate into a shared reality all over the
world. The meaning of media is essential in reaching the masses: the global emotional community of Muslims utilizes the real-time and worldwide flow of news and other programs. Media in its all forms also helps to create networks among Muslims living in various countries. Media plays an important role in enforcing the feeling of community, and Al-Qaeda has explicitly emphasized this dimension:

*That's why I ask my Muslim brothers in general and the callers and Mujahideen and their media organizations in particular to highlight the concept of Islamic brotherhood and disown all partisanship, loyalties and animosities based on nationalism, and I ask them not to allow the wrongdoing of a faction or entity motivate them to speak evil of that party's entire people or race.*

*I also thank my brothers working in Islamic Jihadi media for their blessed efforts which have deprived the Crusaders, Zionists and their aides of sleep. And I call on them to continue their blessed giving with Allah's help, and to combine their efforts and concentrate on the critical issues, especially the issue of the treasonous religion-traders who sell the lands of Islam to the Crusaders in the name of Islam and in pursuit of illegitimate wealth. I also call on them to encourage the Ummah to go forth with men and money to the fields of Jihad, and to reveal to their Ummah just how ugly the crimes of the corruptive rulers really are; those rulers who neither respect in us kinship nor covenants in order to please their masters in Washington and Tel Aviv. And I ask Allah to protect our brothers in media, take care of them and guide them, and to give victory through them to His religion, Book and believing slaves.*

(Zawahiri, 2007)

Emotional politics is often based on charismatic leadership conveyed by the media. In the case of Al-Qaeda, this is particularly evident: Osama bin Laden has been the essential part of the construction and maintaining of the organization and its emotional climate, and in this process media has played a central role. Besides bin Laden’s contribution as the concrete leader of a certain part of Al-Qaeda, he has acted as the symbolic and ideological leader of the organization. Osama bin Laden has been successful in terms of emotional politics. With the help of his communication capacity, bin Laden has reached the international and global Muslim masses. However, his emotional power is not only attached to his capability of attracting the globally-spread Muslim people. What is interesting in this context is his faculty to “behave as if they were speaking to each viewer individually – and with sense of projected sincerity – even while addressing a national or international news audience” (Bucy 2003, 79). The “emotional touch” is based on the personal and individual aspects of communication: the more intimate the feeling between the *sender* and the *receiver*, the more effective the communication terms of political actions.

4. **Final remarks**

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8 When speaking of Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, one can even argue that his position is what Lauren Langman (2002, 459) calls “leadership by celebrity”.
We can critically ask whether politics of emotions is able open new directions or ideas to study Islamic politics in the current, global world. Does it add something valuable to the prevalent explanations of Al-Qaeda? A main counterargument to politics of emotions in the context of Islamic politics is that it could lead to an orientalistic or exotic approach which could further marginalize or “non-rationalize” the behaviour of Muslim people.

I have argued that politics of emotions could provide alternative possibilities to understand the global resurgence of Islam. Of course, the emergence of emotions is a universal phenomenon, which is perhaps even wider in the Western world than in the Muslim world, as noticed e.g. in the contexts of the death of Princess Diana, 9/11, or the tsunami of 2004. Those incidents have been characterized by strong emotional reactions, and they have for their part spoken for the existence of global emotional politics.

How could the idea of emotions be applied to other phenomena related to global Islam? Is there anything common between the actions of Al-Qaeda and e.g. the anxious Muslim reactions to the Mohammed caricatures, the Pope’s statement in Regensburg or the theatre play in Berlin (all these incidents in 2006)? At first, those phenomena cannot be connected together. It is very well known that the Muslim world is not a homogeneous entity; the Muslims living in Manhattan most certainly differ from those living e.g. in Indonesia. On the other hand, a Muslim living in the centre of Cairo might have much more in common with a fellow believer in Europe than with the next door neighbour.

However, if we wish to understand the logic of behaviour of different Muslim actors in different locations – be they terrorists, activists, politicians, religious leaders, or ordinary people – emotions cannot be put aside in research. Politics of emotions could be seen as a general framework for understanding protest or oppositional politics and as a logic of constructing political coalitions. Islamic history and traditions as well as the socio-political situation of the Muslim world provide a rich basis for various emotional responses.

The idea of emotional politics resembles that of identity politics, which has been one of the most promising concepts in understanding ethnic or religious politics during the post-Cold War era. However, politics of emotions goes further in the direction of human beings. Politics is not only attached to e.g. structural or economic dimensions: human consciousness is also relevant in order to understand current global political tendencies.

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