

## FORUM

### History of Emotions

Recent years have seen a massive increase in interest in emotions not just among historians but also across the humanities and in the natural sciences. Some observers have already proclaimed an ‘emotional turn’ in cultural studies more generally. To be sure, historians have long been interested in emotions. As early as 1941, Lucien Febvre, the co-founder of the *Annales*, called for a history of the ‘emotional life of man in all its manifestations’. More recently, historians such as Peter Stearns, William Reddy and Joanna Bourke have made important contributions to the history of emotions in other national contexts. Yet these theoretical proposals and practical examples have rarely informed the writing of German history. Perhaps more so than in other national historiographies, the dominating social science paradigm after 1945 tended to marginalize historical interest in emotions. And with some very important exceptions, more recent cultural history approaches have also not drawn on ‘emotions’ as a distinct category of analysis. This situation, however, is changing rapidly. There is a growing number of edited volumes, conferences, monographs in preparation, and programmatic essays, and this indicates a heterogeneous, pluralistic yet sustained effort to write the history of emotions in the German lands—often also in explicitly comparative and transnational perspective. In the light of the multitude of theoretical approaches, however, it is not entirely clear how precisely this history of emotions should be conceptualized, nor is it apparent how it will inform or even revise the writing of German history. To gain insight into these questions, Frank Biess (*University of California, San Diego*) has invited to the virtual round table five colleagues who have already made significant contributions to this newly emergent field. They are Alon Confino (*University of Virginia*), Ute Frevert (*Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung*), Uffa Jensen (*Universität Göttingen*), Lyndal Roper (*Oxford University*) and Daniela Saxer (*Universität Zürich/ETH Zürich*). Their contributions to the forum probe the pitfalls but also the potential of a history of emotions in Germany, and in so doing, seek to make accessible a new and exciting field of research to the larger community of historians of Germany.

**1. How do you explain the current interest in emotions? What sorts of questions and issues can a history of emotions address that other methodologies have not sufficiently illuminated? In other words: why do we need a history of emotions?**

**Frevert:** There seems to be more than one factor influencing the current interest in emotions. Even in psychology—which has ‘done’ emotions since its very beginning—we see an ‘emotional turn’, a heightened concern about emotions, feelings. This is, I think, due to the prominence of neuroscience since the 1990s—with their methods (especially neuro-imaging) providing a new boost to psychological research and reasoning. This research in the neurosciences is not lost on the humanities, either. Particularly in literary

and theatre studies, scholars are thrilled by the new possibilities for measuring emotions and thus finding out more about the effects that works of art (and their staging) have on the human mind. In history, this is much more difficult. We cannot bring neuro-imaging to bear on our ancestors. But we can make use of new insights that point towards the close link between cognition and emotions, between body and soul, so to speak. Emotions are said to have the capacity to connect the two, and this renders them an ideal topic of historical research.

Honestly speaking, historians (and specialists from other fields of humanities) did not really need this neurological proof to become interested in emotions. They could have turned to older research, and much older sources, to become aware of the power of emotions. Aristotle was already writing on this topic, and among our more recent colleagues, Johan Huizinga, Lucien Febvre, and Norbert Elias have all paid attention to this issue. They all wrote in the wake of tumultuous and highly destructive events and processes, they all saw the power of emotions in politics, in daily life, in social movements. Unfortunately, they were all Cartesians—dismissing emotions (sentiments for Febvre, affects for Elias) as something primitive and irrational. This perception was largely responsible for the lack of interest that the topic generated among later generations of historians. For social and economic historians, emotions were much less ‘sexy’ and approachable than material interests; political historians relegated them to individual biographies of great men. Febvre’s 1941 suggestion that emotions are relational and contagious went basically unheard. In my view, however, it is exactly this—the social dimension of emotions—that should be of interest to historians. By studying emotions, we can find out much more about human motives, about what triggers actions (and non-actions), about what influences decisions (and non-decisions), about what causes people to bond (or to tear up bonds). This is what psychological research teaches us: that men and women are above all emotional beings, and that emotions are, as Silvan Tomkins wrote forty years ago, ‘primary human motives’. History that does not pay attention to human motives is bad history.

**Jensen:** As Ute Frevert has just pointed out, several converging developments created the growing interest in emotions. While I agree that the interest in neuroscience in the past decade or so has something to do with this, I would like to identify a different aspect, in fact, a dynamic within the field of humanities. The rise of postmodern and poststructuralist theories since the 1980s has surely reshaped the field substantially, not least by challenging the confidence of its practitioners to create viable narratives. The ‘linguistic turn’, broadly understood, brought to the forefront questions of language, the linguistic nature of all human practices and, in particular, the linguistic nature of most sources that historians tend to work with. Many participants in these debates in the humanities found such assumptions provocative. At the same time, the ‘linguistic turn’ created a broad stream of new research interested in discursive practices. I believe, however, that the uneasiness with such approaches—or shall we call it a longing for alternatives—has never really vanished; and it has certainly reemerged since the late 1990s. Reading Bachmann-Medick’s work on ‘cultural turns’, one cannot escape the impression that several such ‘turns’ were, in fact, reactions to the relative hegemony of discursive, constructivist assumptions. From this perspective, the ‘emotional turn’—if there is such a thing—belongs to a move in cultural theory similar to the ‘spatial turn’,

the ‘performative turn’, the ‘body turn’, and even, to some degree, the ‘iconic turn’. Of course, most protagonists of such ‘turns’ do not argue for a return to a positivistic, prediscursive materialism—a return to ‘something real’, for a change. However, a postconstructivist stance gained considerable attraction for cultural theory.

In part, this appeal answered to a new political climate after 9/11, which for some seemed to negate the allegedly clever, relativistic approaches of the 1980s and 1990s. The (re-)turn to emotions fit in well here, as popular books such as Joanna Bourke’s *Fear* and Peter Stearns *American Fear* indicate. I am sure that emotions such as hate, fear, paranoia, and so on, will remain on the historian’s agenda because of the political language of emotions which international terrorism uses and mobilizes. But this is not the whole story. In the daily work of historians, the fascination with the material, bodily quality of culture is often quite present. The sources we work with seem to have a physical quality, even quite apart from the actual shape they are in. We constantly stumble over material—obviously discursive—that seems to speak of a prediscursive reality, and I think we are searching for ways to let this quality shine through the texts that we produce as historians. Emotions are evidently crucial in this relationship between text and matter.

**Saxer:** In addition, the renewed societal interest in emotions may be influenced by ideas of self-management. Catchphrases from self-help literature, advice from business management and popularized scientific concepts all seem to point out that personal emotions have to be groomed as part of an individual care of the self. They also suggest that whoever wants to get ahead socially and economically has to take emotions seriously. Economics, which increasingly understands itself as a universal science of human behaviour, has contributed to this trend by studying emotions as factors in economic transactions, revising and at the same time further expanding the notion of ‘homo oeconomicus’, while drawing on the methodologies of the neurosciences as well. At the same time, even hard-core neuroscience depends on cultural and linguistic mediations of emotions. Scientists, in order to study feelings, routinely have to match the ‘blobs’ created by medical imaging with accounts of what their test persons *say* they feel. Accordingly, the widespread appraisal theory of emotions in psychology takes into account that emotions are determined by the individual cognitive appraisal of the meaning and consequences of emotion-triggering events.

It’s at this point, where the symbolically mediated character of emotions surfaces, that the history of emotions comes into play along with perspectives developed in cultural studies, cultural anthropology and other fields. These perspectives are more interested in the symbolically and socially mediated dimensions of emotions than in their roots in evolutionarily indispensable, primordial patterns of behaviour. History contributes studies about emotional regimes and ideals that trace long-term historical changes in emotions as well as historically distinct configurations of emotional expression and emotional agency in specific social contexts. In doing so, it delivers hypotheses about social and cultural factors of emotional change that remain largely invisible for other disciplines, but which—in theory—ought to be of great interest for fields such as sociology and psychology. By delivering dense, context-rich historical case studies, the history of emotion in particular should be critically involved in theories about emotions and modernity.

**Roper:** The current interest in emotions arises I think from four main developments. First, I agree with Uffa Jensen that it chimes with a widespread dissatisfaction with discourse theory. In particular, discursive analysis offers no account of the relationship between language and psychology, and that makes it hard to explain why particular discourses might be appealing, or what the relationship is between thought and action. Second, historians are becoming increasingly interested in subjectivity, that is, in how individuals make sense of their experience. But it is hard to see how to write a historical account of the subjectivity of groups rather than individuals. Emotions seem to offer a way out of this explanatory impasse: they can be collective, they are linked to action, and they bring feelings into the domain of historical research. Third, emotions are both physical and mental; they are expressed in words but they also have a physiological component. As we become interested in the relationship between body and mind, the study of emotions confronts us with parts of human behaviour that seem to be to some degree constitutional rather than simply historically constructed. There is another reason too: there are now many more women in the historical profession, and the coming generation of historians, which has grown up with the legacy of feminism, is much less embarrassed by the emotional and the subjective.

**Confino:** The topic of emotions has been a latecomer in historical studies. It existed in canonical studies (Johan Huizinga) and was proposed as early as 1941 as a new frontier of historical research (Lucien Febvre), but has only recently started to acquire the attention it deserves. Historians were preceded by psychoanalysts (Sigmund Freud), sociologists (Norbert Elias, Eva Illouz) and anthropologists (Clifford Geertz, Arlie Hochschild, Lila Abu-Lughod, Catherine Lutz). But the topic has been in the air since an explanatory shift from society to culture occurred in the last generation. Practising a cultural approach—a diverse body of works and methods that emphasized the social and the cultural as interpreted in terms of representation, experience, subjectivity, negotiation, agency, shifting relationship, and the importance of memory—brought historians closer to exploring emotions, even if they did not articulate their topics explicitly in this term. An appeal for a historical ‘emotionology’ was made by Peter and Carol Stearns in 1985; the topic has been investigated in some important studies (by William Reddy, Martina Kessel and Joanna Bourke, and also by Barbara Rosenwein, Jean Delumeau, and other scholars of medieval and early modern Europe). The history of the senses has received imaginative attention (Alain Corbin). But ‘emotions’, as a term and a topic, did not catch fire, unlike related terms such as identity, memory, race, gender, ideology, habitus, *mentalité* and the civilizing process. In a historiography dominated by investigations of imagined communities, remembered pasts, constructed genders and by a whole host of identity topics—the question may be not what are the reasons for the current interest in emotions, but why has it taken so long?

There have been good reasons for this. The topic is slippery, the interpretative rewards are not immediately obvious, and other categories have dominated the field. In this respect, it would help to think of a history of emotions in association with the history of memory, with which we are much more familiar given the research of the last generation. Emotions, like memories, are absolutely individual; social groups cannot feel or remember, much as they cannot eat or dance. And yet, one’s emotions, like one’s memory and most intimate dreams, originate from the symbols, landscape, practices and language

that are shared by a given society. Since the making of emotions, personal and collective, is embedded in a specific cultural, social, economic and political context, we can explore how people construct emotions, make sense of them and use them. The benefits for the historian who attaches his or her inquiries to everything that is human are clear: a history of emotions illuminates the relations between self and society, and the sources of human perceptions, motivations and actions.

**2. Emotions have also been the subject of a great deal of interdisciplinary research. Which theoretical approaches do you find most useful in conceptualizing a history of emotions, and what are the major methodological and theoretical challenges?**

**Roper:** I find psychoanalytic theories the most helpful, because they offer a way of thinking about emotions as connected to internal states and conflicts. Psychoanalytic insights can help us think about the causes of particular emotions, and about both the unconscious and conscious processes at work in our relations with others. Sometimes I think the history of emotions can tend to treat emotions as phenomena which simply exist, and which don't need explaining or linking back to deeper psychic conflicts and constellations. It's telling that one of the emotions about which there has been most historical work is fear. Fear is obviously linked to action, and it's contagious. But it's also an extremely vague term, and it's only a beginning: it doesn't tell us where the 'fear' fits into the subjectivity of individuals and groups, what perceptions or which experiences should have led people to feel fear, or what fantasies drove their emotion.

The major challenges which any use of psychoanalytic ideas faces are twofold. First, psychoanalysis is much better at explaining individuals than it is at dealing with groups; and historians usually want to understand collective behaviour. The second danger is that unless we historicize its use very carefully, psychoanalysis can end up being reductive, so that all kinds of different historical processes can be reduced back to oedipal feelings and aggressions, or to unresolved ego differentiation from the mother. When psychoanalysis starts to flatten our explanations, so that they become predictable, they fit too easy, then they cease to make the subjectivity of people in the past truly riveting—the only point of using such theories. In general, I think that theories are illuminating only if they are used in equal dialogue with source material, so that the sources can also suggest problems, limits and extensions of the theory.

**Confino:** There are some key questions for a history of emotions. How are emotions constructed historically, in different ways in different periods and regimes? What makes certain emotions and not others into key elements of life in a given period? How do emotions shape, and how are they shaped by, social, cultural, political and economic factors? Differently put, how can historians explore emotions, examining them not only as a result and representation of the society around them, but as a force giving shape to politics, society and culture, to beliefs and values, and to everyday life, institutional settings, and the processes of decision making? How can we link emotions to a broader canvas of memories, identities and beliefs that make up a mental horizon of an age, with all its multiplicity, contingency and contradictions?

In pursuing these questions, I see the historian as a kind of juggler: to give meaning to the past, the historian juggles concepts, methods, research tools and narrative, rearranging these elements differently at any given interpretation, while rejecting a fixed arrangement that provides unitary and universal explanation. In this sense, I find little help in empirical psychology and neuro-scientific work on emotions, which, like corresponding work on memory, is inadequate to answer historical questions. But attention to Freud, to the history of modern psychology and to the psychological working of emotions, their fantasies and justification, is important. Lyndal Roper's *Witch Craze* is a model of the genre. In anthropology and literary criticism I find most useful insights to explore emotions historically.

The history of emotions may be most usefully practised within a larger history of sensibilities, where the aim is to reconstruct a broader set of criteria for perceptual orientation in a given society. This approach provides the potential to view emotions within the mental horizon of a twentieth-century German society and its changing configurations of ideological systems of belief and personal feelings, emotions and perceptions. Such a history of sensibilities would explore emotions such as fear, love and pleasure, but also memory, sacrifice, suicide or killing, which are not emotions but make little historical sense if isolated from them.

**Frevort:** The fact that nowadays more and more historians turn towards emotions has, I think, something to do with a renewed interest in human agency and practices. What makes people tick? How do they make sense of their world and their actions? How do they relate to each other, and how do they perceive the 'other'? Here, emotions come into play on two levels: on the level of individual persons, whose emotions connect them to (or disconnect them from) their social environment; and on the level of social groups, institutions and societies. The latter provide incentives to act emotionally or to restrain passions; they also provide languages that codify and shape the way in which emotions are expressed. It is precisely the interplay between the individual and the collective that renders the history of emotions such a fascinating field—a field, furthermore, that benefits strongly from research in other disciplines. I found Martha Nussbaum's *Hidden From Humanity* extremely inspiring, from the standpoint of both a philosopher and a political theorist. It made me think about shame in a different way, and I can relate it to my own continuing interest in honour and shame practices. Furthermore, I constantly learn from psychology (my colleagues at the Max Planck Institute are all psychologists), although as a historian I am more taken by a history of science approach to the psychology of emotions, as it has developed since the late nineteenth century. Weber, Elias, Luhmann—they all have something important (if debatable) to say about the long-term development of emotions, and about their eminently social character. The latter is dramatically absent in the work of most psychologists and neuroscientists, who focus on individuals here and now, and bracket most of the environment in order to isolate the variables they want to study. This method is unacceptable for historians—not only unacceptable, but also unfeasible.

**Jensen:** I would still argue that a lot of historical work needs to be done on emotional regimes and 'emotional communities'. The relationship between individual emotional expressions, on the one hand, and the cultural, political and social 'conditions' of such

expressions, on the other, are often explored with a clear emphasis on the latter. This is not because nobody is interested in emotional biographies of individuals—in fact, many biographical works almost naturally focus on such issues. The problems are the links between the expression and the cultural setting and, in particular, the mutual nature of such links. It is much easier for us to propose the centrality of an emotional regime for individual expressions than to relate the two dimensions in a more meaningful way. Of course, I have to admit that I contributed to this problem by proposing the importance of science for emotional regimes.

To be honest, I am unsure who can help us with such questions. It is my impression that the natural sciences, especially empirical psychology and the neurosciences, do not help us much with the social dimension of individual emotional expressions. The classical social theory, which Ute Frevert has mentioned, is obviously fascinating, but is hopelessly imbued with ahistorical grand narratives, of an increasing emotional rationalization and modernization of society. I found Reddy's psychological work remarkable, but his book convinced me somewhat less in its application to the historical example of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France.

**Saxer:** I agree that it is crucial for the history of emotions how we conceptualize the core problem: the interplay between individual emotional experiences and expressions, and their collective frames. While it is extremely helpful, even indispensable, to distinguish on an analytical level between lived emotions and 'emotionologies' (Peter Stearns), this distinction should not be reified. The concept of a constant 'navigation of feeling' (William Reddy) where emotional expressions and emotional rules explore and alter the emotional fabric of the self and of society, is perhaps more helpful. This more fluid concept takes into account the constant feedback processes between emotional experiences and their cognitive and social appraisal. It allows a closer study of the social pragmatics of emotions. I see several approaches that could help to make such an understanding operational. Arlie R. Hochschild's sociological studies, informed by symbolic interactionism, have been very fruitful. Hochschild analysed in detail how in the sphere of work norms of emotional expression are inculcated and appropriated, and how this kind of emotion work does not just lead to a superficial compliance with the labour market but alters the emotional experience of employees as a whole. Hochschild identifies different fields of emotion work, such as the emphatic imitation of feelings, the conditioning of bodily signs and physical reactions, the stimulation of emotional states via memories, and other tools. Such concretizations could be helpful for us in reconstructing historical forms of implementation, negotiation and appropriation of feelings. I agree with Uffa Jensen that sociological theories and narratives often encompass problematic assumptions about the emotional and normative orientations of past societies (which often are imagined as emotionally more crude and instinctive and at the same time less alienated). This makes it all the more important for historians to contribute critically to these discussions and to challenge those all-encompassing theories.

In addition, the often-stated tension between the inner life of emotions and their public and collective apprehension and standardization delivers another point of departure. Instead of trying to level this relationship in a constructivist shortcut by simply stating that emotions are socially constructed, the relationship could be read as a

historically specific constellation. This tension is experienced differently in different historical emotional regimes, as a result of specific ‘figurations’ of the individual and society, as Norbert Elias puts it. In this perspective, concepts of the individuality and subjectivity of emotions, for example, have to be historicized.

Finally, at this point the historical importance of scientific concepts of emotions, stressed especially by Uffa Jensen, comes into play again. When such concepts have to be taken into account as a vital part of the ‘navigation of feeling’, our task as historians becomes all the more challenging. In the background of some contributions to the historiography of emotions, there is the idea that we ought to have a general theory of the psychic mechanisms of emotions in order to study emotions historically (which would enable an array of interdisciplinary work). Is it not rather our task vigorously to historicize such theories on the inner workings of emotions that penetrate our age of psychology? Here, especially work on premodern emotions is crucial in enabling us to defamiliarize our intuitions on feelings. In short, regarding the ontological or psychological question of *what* emotions are, I don’t see any Archimedian point of analysis at the horizon that would save us from the kind of conceptual precariousness that comes with historicization. I prefer to address the question of *how* emotions are brought into play as part of human agency, negotiated, expressed and conceived of in a certain historical context.

### **3. What contributions can a history of emotions make to some of the more specific themes and problems of German history? In what ways, if at all, can the history of emotions revise some of the conventional narratives of German history?**

**Roper:** The history of emotions has a great deal to contribute to the study of the European witch-hunt—and with the vast bulk of the trials taking place in German lands (perhaps as many as six out of seven ‘witches’ spoke German), the witch-hunt marks a major episode in German history. Envy, one of the most uncomfortable of the emotions, was central to witchcraft persecution. It was believed that envy was the root of witchcraft: the witch was the woman who envied the rich their wealth, or the new mother her children. So close was the connection between envy and witchcraft that envy was commonly depicted in the guise of an old hag with snake-like hair, gnawing her heart. Yet though the witch was believed to maim and kill those whom she envied, in reality, the aggression was the other way around: those who denounced witches were actually sending their victims to torture and execution. Without an understanding of the emotional dynamics of witchcraft, we cannot comprehend the intensity and bitterness of the witch trials that seized so many German communities in the early modern period.

Considering emotions also adds a new dimension to Reformation history: the heady mixture of apprehension combined with exhilaration (evident in the apocalyptic visions and expectations that circulated in the early 1520s) was part of the mood which gave people a sense of possibility, and made them receptive to Luther’s message. The Peasants’ War of 1524/5 was fuelled by such emotions as bitterness, grievance, rage and comradeship—it’s striking that one of the radicals’ early watchwords was ‘brotherly love’. Historians might also do well to consider the impact of emotions in the history of the new church: when Luther and others rejected monastic vows of chastity, and took



wives, the emotional impact on this generation of clerics, many in their 30s and 40s, suddenly let loose in the world of women, weddings and children, was profound.

**Frevert:** First of all, the history of emotions can and should address certain assumptions and suspicions that concern so-called German emotions. There is a widely held belief (especially among non-Germans) that Germans are particularly prone to angst, that they are fascinated by the uncanny. These assumptions have to be tested by comparative research. Is the romantic obsession with the uncanny really a German prerogative? And is it typical of Germans? To answer those questions, we have to move beyond literary studies that compare great books and authors. We have to find out about the respective readers, about cross-references, about the ways in which certain images are received and reappear in non-literary communication, such as political speeches or advice manuals. As to the archetypal German angst, it would be helpful to know, for example, how often angst is mentioned in German and French (or Italian etc.) texts of the 1970s and 1980s addressing issues such as nuclear power or disarmament. We have to move beyond a type of intellectual history that contents itself with quoting Heidegger and Jaspers. We also have to move beyond an uncritical and non-analytical approach that only confirms what it takes for granted, like Sabine Bode's recent book on *German Angst*.

On another level, a history of emotions is needed to explain more carefully how and why certain concepts and catchwords—such as honour and dishonour, loyalty or trust—played the role they did in German (and non-German) domestic and foreign policy. What I am aiming at is a history of political communication that takes full account of emotional language. How can we explain politics with emotions left out (rhetorical question!)? How can we make sense of political mobilization and demobilization during and after World War I without exploring the role of honour and shame? And how can we account for the nearly complete absence of those emotional concepts after World War II? What happened to those feelings in the meantime?

It will be particularly rewarding to investigate emotions not only on a societal level, but within certain institutions and social groups. There is a danger of writing emotions into society on a general level (Weimar as an emotionally 'cold' period, National Socialism as a 'hot' one). We tend to generalize particular discourses and milieus and forget about the manifold differences that shape societies. At this point it might be useful to go back to Barbara Rosenwein's idea of 'emotional communities'—and, of course, we must bear in mind that those communities are not closed entities, but that they overlap, that people belong to more than one, and so on. I wonder to what degree we can look at gender relations in this way—women and men belonging to different 'emotional communities'? As we learnt from social history, middle-class women might share as many emotions and emotional styles with middle-class men as with lower-class women, and vice versa. But it would still be interesting to find out what kind of emotions were seen as bridging class (or ethnic) differences and which ones accentuated those differences.

Moreover the history of emotions has to pay attention to institutions (such as family, workplace, the military, the judicial system). Institutions set up emotional codes that their members are supposed to learn and follow. As men and women belong to many institutions at the same time, or during their life time, they are confronted with very different expectations and rules. How does this play out, especially on a collective level? What makes institutions pursue—and change—emotional codes?

**Jensen:** Ute Frevert has indicated the importance of ‘emotional communities’. I would agree with this plea to write an emotional history of Germany, which takes notice of the inner emotional diversity of one nation-state. From a different perspective, one should also ask whether emotional regimes do not transcend national borders? Take the European bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and its emotional regime—can we really write this as a purely German story? There seem to be many convincing arguments, for example in Peter Gay’s *The Tender Passion*, that we cannot. Comparative research in emotional history could also try to relate the findings in Peter Stearns’s *American Cool* to Helmut Lethen’s study on the *Cool Conduct* in the Weimar Republic. Was there a particular regime of ‘coldness’ in the first half of the twentieth century in different countries? There might even be room for purely transnational questions, for example in the case of transnational and popular movements, such as psychoanalysis, and their historical effects on emotional management in various countries. Does the fact that Freud’s specific method of rationalizing emotions travelled in the 1920s as far as India or Japan suggest that new transnational emotional communities emerged? I am not sure, to be honest, but I think we would be ill-advised to restrict our historical work on emotions only to national histories.

**Confino:** A history of emotions within a history of sensibilities poses an alternative to the explanatory hegemony of ideology in modern German history, a hegemony that is now, to my mind, a serious constraint on the historical imagination and on developing new narratives that challenge our usual perceptions. Ideology, whether Nazi, Communist or liberal-democratic, has become a dominant term with which to interpret German history. There are good reasons for this. But scholars’ assertion that they ‘take ideology seriously’ now has the sound of *déjà vu* based on a methodological reflex, not on a critical evaluation. The problem is the hegemonic view of ideology as the organizer and arbiter of motivations, of mentalities and sensibilities. That is how Nazi ideology, for example, is now viewed in the historiography of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. The point is not that ideology is marginal to understanding Nazism and the Holocaust, but that as a guide for values and beliefs it is insufficient. A broad, very broad, view of ideology is illustrative of a historiography where it can designate anything, from a reflection by Goebbels in his diaries to medical experiments in Auschwitz. Of course, on one level, ideology is everywhere and can designate anything. And yet, if it is everything and everywhere, it explains nothing. It has become such a catch-all notion about motivations in the Third Reich that it is difficult to discriminate between ideology, on the one hand, and on the other, ways to think outside, alongside, against, underneath and above it. A history of sensibilities goes beyond the logic of ideological thinking into those emotions and memories that make human motivations and actions, into those images of the self, collectivity and the past that cannot be reduced to ideology. This adds new perspectives to the history of twentieth-century Germany, creating new links (as well as ruptures) among the various ideological regimes. It makes us able to capture that which it was possible to experience, feel and perceive in a given society and regime, and that which it was not, drawing out more clearly, for example, the emotional configuration in the Third Reich compared to what came before and after. And it will also link Germany, as Uffa Jensen has pointed out, to a transnational history of emotions. It is beneficial of course to look at what historians of other fields do—for example the growing body of work on the history of feeling as a vehicle to interpret the

French Revolution, as discussed by Sophia Rosenfeld in her recent essay ‘Thinking about Feeling, 1789–1799’ (*French Historical Studies*, 32, 4, 2009).

In this respect, I disagree with Ute Frevert’s argument on the need to explore, comparatively or not, ‘certain assumptions’ about German emotions, and whether they ‘really’ exist. I do not think our research agenda should be dictated by popular beliefs about the German soul or psyche in an attempt to refute them. And it should not be governed by the aim to establish whether this or that emotion really exists: this is an investigation that takes as its point of departure preconceived assumptions, and therefore limits interpretative potentials. Instead, we should explore, for example, the emotions, memories and sensibilities of Germans in the Third Reich that made it possible for some of them to believe in antisemitic fantasies. How did sensibilities support antisemitic fantasies, make them speak to key elements of life in Germany at the period, and make them persuasive as ways to experience the world?

**Saxer:** I thought emotions belonged only to the Italians! The history of stereotypical attributions of national emotion patterns in itself could be an interesting topic. What functions did such self-characterizations and descriptions of others fulfill in the long process of nationalization? How were they instrumentalized politically? How did they interact with scientific theories about national character (*Völkcharakter*), ethnicity, language and climate? Why are they so long-lived?

Apart from that, I would find it very exciting to study the entities proposed by Ute Frevert: institutions such as the school, student fraternities or Bible study groups as generators of emotional atmospheres and standards. This would avoid the presupposition of abstract and all-encompassing national mentalities and allow for all kinds of comparative research.

A focus on the role of emotions in the economic sphere could contribute further to the transnational and comparative research Uffa Jensen calls for. What role have emotions played in labour and business relations in Germany since the nineteenth century, and what kinds of emotional adjustments did the transatlantic circulation of new models of rationalization and production bring with it? How far did the adoption of consumer values also encompass emotionalized goods such as birthday cakes, and the commodification of emotions—for example the peace of mind offered by life insurance companies? And in what ways were these developments adjusted to specifically German institutional and political conditions?

I would suggest adding here also the dimension of discourses in the mass media. The history of emotions in the mass media of the twentieth century, in particular, is a still widely under-researched field, but it offers exciting new perspectives for German history, as first contributions have shown (see the editors’ introduction to Frank Bösch and Manuel Borutta, eds., *Die Massen bewegen. Medien und Emotionen in der Moderne*, Frankfurt and New York, 2006). This field opens new possibilities for thinking about the problems of national history, because the mass media quickly became highly internationalized in their technologies, forms and content, and at the same time were continuously nationally shaped and regulated. It would be very interesting to develop and apply tools of analysis in dialogue with the history and sociology of the media, in order to gauge the specific evocation, transportation and reception of emotions in and through media such as pulp literature, the illustrated press and the radio.

**4. What are the major practical difficulties in writing a history of emotions? Does it lead to new categories of sources and/or does it inspire new ways of reading familiar sources?**

**Saxer:** A common practice among historians of emotions is to start from a single emotion or a set of well-labelled emotions and to move from there towards fruitful insights into the social valence of romantic love, anger, envy, fear and other emotions. Such studies trace their importance, social meanings, perceptions, and changes in specific historical contexts and over time, mostly concentrating on emotional standards and ideals. They often focus on sources such as advisory literature explicitly dealing with emotions. In contrast, the perspective on the use of emotions in social interactions starts rather from institutional situations and contexts of agency and contends that one cannot separate the study of emotions from the analysis of value systems and orientations of action. This approach asks how emotions are referred to, imposed, negotiated and appropriated without necessarily concentrating on one single emotion, thus accounting for the experience that emotions in social interaction often don't appear singly, but in clusters. In addition, this perspective systematically accounts for the ways societies and communities in a certain context conceive of and reflect emotions in general. Such general conceptions must be analysed not only as emotion theories, but also as practical concepts that are part of societal negotiations, and are put to social uses and commodified. I'm not sure if this approach really contributes to or even should contribute to establishing further a well-defined field of the 'history of emotions'. This leads to a broadening towards both sources and problems that include, but ultimately go beyond the topic of emotions.

**Jensen:** I believe that there has been too much attention in the study of emotions to 'strong emotions', such as hate, fear, anger, love, happiness, and so on. Of course, this is easier to investigate, analyse and categorize. But it seems to me that most of our personal lives are spent having moods, sentiments or feelings, not such strong emotions. If this is true, what are the consequences for the history of emotions? Is it even possible to call such moods emotions, in the sense of a single emotion with a clear value and direction? Such moods may actually be a conglomerate of states and emotions on a low level. But, as in the example of melancholia, their importance for an individual biography can be quite apparent. This is obviously very much a practical problem, because such moods are even harder to detect and to dissect for historians, since they do not always appear in the sources. Still, Martina Kessel's work on the history of boredom should encourage us to search for this dimension of emotional history as well.

**Roper:** It's easy enough to get a sense of the emotions that might be involved when you read criminal interrogation records, and you can get a feel for people's emotional investments when you read their narratives (witness statements, letters, records of conversations and the like); tears, grimaces and exclamations are carefully recorded by some scribes in criminal cases. Often, people are unaware of what emotions they are feeling: envy is a case in point. But it's far harder to know for sure what emotions may be driving larger groups of people, though (for instance, in the case of riots or rebellions, or in battle) these may be crucial in creating collective action.

It is also difficult to know how far emotions are historically conditioned. There may be cultural restrictions on expressing emotion: stoic ideals, for instance, may mean that early modern people appear reserved, perhaps even heartless, at the death of loved ones, but this is not to say that they did not feel profound grief. But what difference does it make to the feeling of love if you believe (as medieval and early modern people did) that love is a passion that unbalances individuals, and that it can be caused by sorcery, as if it were an injury? Another dimension concerns how people understood and conceptualized emotions: emblem books, for one, are a rich source for how educated men conceived of the relation between emotions, love and jealousy, for instance.

Looking for the emotional clues (and for what is left out as much as what is said) in what we might term ego-documents, we get a stronger sense of documents as expressing relationships between people, where what is communicated emotionally is just as important as (indeed perhaps more than) what is apparently said in words. Luther's letters, for example, reveal not just the requests he makes (for manuscripts, letters, books and so on) but the emotional connection to those he bullies and cajoles; or the emotion of anger mixed with wounded pride as he recounts, with forced irony, his reception at Leipzig in 1519, where the Leipzigers evidently believed that Eck had bettered Luther in debate.

**Frevert:** There are more theoretical difficulties than practical ones in writing the history of emotions. The sources are those that our archives have in store: parliamentary reports, ego-documents, police reports, you name it. We should be more eager to include visual material since it tells us a lot about the staging of certain emotions (photographs, paintings, caricature).

As to theoretical problems, there are many, and they are serious. First, we have to define what we mean by 'emotion'. This is not trivial, since our sources name a plethora of words that acquire different meaning in different historical and social contexts. We have to be very specific about our usage of 'passion', 'sentiment', 'feeling' and so on. Second, we should be clear that we can only deal with expressed emotions—expressed through oral or written language, expressed through music and visual material. Those expressions are by no means ahistorical but rather bear a very specific and highly cultivated character. They are learnt and socialized, they are nurtured or repressed. This leads some scholars to suggest that those expressions are not identical with what a person 'really' feels. But how to find out if there is a 'real' emotion hidden behind the one that is shown? Third, and closely connected, we have to reflect about the power of language to engender and shape emotions. Are there emotions that cannot be named? What does the labelling do to the 'felt' emotion? Here, we need the help of psychologists and neuroscientists—even if their findings are difficult to generalize and might not present 'universal truths'.

**Confino:** The important thing about applying a concept, a method or a new body of work to a given historical topic is this: does it reveal factors previously unobserved? And this is the case when we think about modern German history with emotions and sensibilities. The sources are there. I wonder whether there is indeed a source that does not reflect, in some way or another, something about human emotions. The key is to ask the right questions in the sense that 'history exists only in relation to the questions we

pose it', as Paul Veyne remarked. The research questions have to be tight enough to pose a historical problem, as discussed at the beginning of my answer to the second question, and open-ended enough to reflect the malleability of the topic. I therefore wonder whether a tight definition of 'emotions', as proposed by Ute Frevert, is indeed a useful approach. With such a definition we cannot capture the looseness and fluidity of emotions, which is precisely what characterized them. Uffa Jensen is on the mark when he underlines the importance of moods. A broad definition of emotions is sufficient to get the historian going. Ultimately, what is important is how people in the past defined emotions; the historian's best move is to start with their understandings.

But, it has to be said, exploring emotions just is a difficult task. It requires close and sensitive reading of diverse sources, knowledge of several disciplines and sub-disciplines, and a sensitivity and imagination that comes not only with the historian's craft but with the topic itself, with those feelings, intangible, that are hard to define yet influential in so many different ways. In short, an appropriate new topic of research in modern German history.

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