Rage and Fear. “The People” and the System in Struggle for Sovereignty

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In today’s chaotic political landscape, reshaped by the global financial crisis, some contemporary phenomena allow us to emphasize the broad role of emotions in politics. The growth of populist parties in Europe on the one hand, and the spreading throughout the continents of the movement of Indignados on the other, can be analyzed as both an illustration of the function of emotions in political life, as well as an indication of popular discontent and disaffection towards political representatives and the financial system. Although political scientists have recently shown increased attention to the role of emotions in politics, we are persuaded that empirical social science methods – especially if focused on electoral behavior – cannot fully understand the function of feelings in politics. Therefore this paper advances some propositions for a theoretical and cross-disciplinary inquiry. Drawing on discourse analysis and political theory, this paper aims to stress the fundamental role played in Western societies by two opposed emotions: rage and fear. In analyzing the historical and the theoretical features of these passions, this paper emphasizes some of their political dimensions: their presence in the history of political thought, specifically with regards to the dialectic between rulers and ruled; their central function in motivating people to engage in political action; and finally, their current role in today’s struggle for democratic legitimacy.

Keywords: Democracy, emotions, indignados, occupy movements, populism, “the people”

I. Political phenomena and theoretical problems

The global economic and financial crisis that started in 2008 and continues today entails a broad series of political consequences. In the present context of redefining and reshaping powers, social scientists have started analyzing a wide spectrum of both political phenomena and theoretical problems, such as the causes of the crisis and its political management, the spreading of protest movements, the relationship between collective action and systemic instances, the theoretical basis of social disciplines – economics in primis – and, more
generally, the relationship between capitalism and democracy. Given these caveats, we will start by focusing our attention on two contemporary phenomena that will enable us to highlight some social and theoretical problems we think to be at the core of the current political situation, namely the role of emotions in politics.

These phenomena are both the growth of populism and neo-populist parties in Europe – and elsewhere – as well as the spreading throughout the continents of protest movements, such as the Indignados of Spain and Europe and the American Occupy Wall Street. With no doubts, there has been a growth of populist parties – mostly far-right ones –, in Europe, and at the same time, there has been a spreading wave of global resistance against the economic management of the crisis, particularly after the austerity programs following the 2008 financial crisis. Although they are not new phenomena, both are at the center of the contemporary changing state of affairs in Western society and politics. Even if they can be seen as opposite and unrelated phenomena, they represent parallel responses, albeit different and complementary ones, to globalization and the neoliberal economic system. More specifically, these phenomena can be analyzed both as indication of popular discontent and disaffection towards political representatives and the financial system, as well as the illustration of the broad role of emotions in politics. This paper will concentrate on the latter.

With regards to the first phenomenon, extreme conservative parties such as the National Front (FN) in France, the Northern League (LN) in Italy, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), the Dutch Party of Freedom (PVV), the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), The Movement for a Better Hungary (JOBBIK) or, last chronologically, the Sweden Democrats (SD), the True Finns (PS) or the Greek Golden Dawn have all reinforced their presence and position in their own country. Although none have so far won a majority in national parliament, their growing support has seen increased influence over more centrist governments all across Europe. Despite their differences, what these parties share is the desire to somehow turn back the national clock. All these parties appeal to “the people” – the national or the regional community – in order to implement policies in defense of the local inside level, against the external-globalized one, often associated to financial imperatives. Moreover, these parties emphasize the security discourse vis-à-vis global migrations and, in so doing, they take often great political advantage and contribute to the spread of social fears and xenophobic convictions. In this light, they yearn for a return to an imagined era before globalization, mass immigration, neo-liberal economics and the European Union. In addition, these far-right and populist parties, as Cas Mudde says, “present a Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes. Opponents are not just people with different priorities and values, they are evil!” (Mudde, 2004: 544; 2007). Indeed, creating a sort of a foundational politics of identity, they have been espousing most of the time anything from Islamophobia, to anti-EU and to anti-market policies. This anti-European
position is articulated through the populist discourse of “the people” versus “the elite”. As well, the populist far-right’s position on immigration is characterized by welfare chauvinism and denials of biologically based racism while advocating the type of “cultural racism” formulated by the *Nouvelle Droite* (Rydgren, 2005: 427). Indeed, the associations made with immigration orbit completely around crime, fear, and impossibility of integration.

On the other hand, protest movements have been gaining strength in Europe and elsewhere over since 2010. Especially in Greece and Spain, somehow in the wake of the Arab Spring¹, there has been a development of numerous acts and forms of protest. The Spanish movement of the *Indignados*, in that sense, represents one of the most notable event of protest and contestation that Europe has recently seen. As a physical proclamation of discontent towards the current political and financial practices – and particularly of an elite sector of the global political economy –, the *Indignados* movement represents an attempt to reconfigure the relationship between the economic and political worlds, through manifestation of moral outrage, occupation, and street assembly and speech. In that light, the Spanish movement has had a broad influence upon other European and global movements, like *Occupy Wall Street*.

Quoting the manifesto of *Real Democracy Now*, one of the many platforms that have played a key role for the organization of the protest on the 15th of May 2011 and the following events, can give the measure of the issue:

Some of us consider ourselves progressive, others conservative. Some of us are believers, some not. Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical, but we are all concerned and angry about the political, economic, and social outlook which we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless, without a voice (Real Democracy Now Manifest, 2011).

Similarly, other slogans reveal that along with the indignation against Spain’s economic and political state of affairs, protesters claimed for democracy – a “real democracy” – which is viewed as opposed to the market and capitalism: “We want a democracy, not a marketocracy”, “We have not voted for the IMF”, and “Listen to the people’s wrath”².

In that light, these movements reveal a deep problem of the current form of representative politics; they show how deep the crisis of political and economic legitimacy is. The current global economic and political system has

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¹ The Arab Spring began as local reaction in Tunisia early in 2011 but has acquired a solidity that has affected political developments in a number of North African Middle East and Europe.

² The original Spanish slogans: “Los mercados gobiernan, los gobiernos se someten, el pueblo reacciona”, “¿Cuándo vais a hacer algo para el pueblo?”, “Escuchad la ira del pueblo”, “El pueblo no debe temer a los gobernantes, estos deben temer al pueblo”, “¡No nos representan!”, “Democracia significa: democracia directa”, “Les gusta cuando callamos porque estamos como ausentes”, “No somos mercancía de políticos y banqueros”, “No es una crisis, es una estafa”, “No es la crisis, es el Sistema”. See also Ramonet (2011: 4-5)
lost its automatic legitimacy. Similarly, the representative political form is increasingly seen as complicit in the emptying out of democracy and in the perpetuation of gross inequalities. Indeed, protest movements directly challenge this paradigm, asking to re-configure democracy as an instrument of the people – “the 99-percent” in the *Occupy* movement’s words – as opposed to the global capitalistic elite, “the 1-percent”. Through a “disorganized” range of direct political actions, they say, the people will be heard as opposed to being subsumed within the discredited “normal” politics.

Given this context, in the past three decades, social sciences have shown increased attention to the role of emotions in politics: resource mobilization, cultural frames and political opportunities paradigms have been overlapping models of understanding the role of emotions in politics and, notably, in protests analysis. Contrary to the main current explanatory paradigms, we believe that these mainstream social science methods – especially if taken alone – cannot fully understand the function of emotions in politics. Therefore this paper advances some propositions for a theoretical and cross-disciplinary inquiry, in which emotions are viewed not simply as another set of variables, but as crucial components of both concrete struggles for power and political concepts theorizing process.

Drawing on a broad cross-disciplinary analysis, this paper aims to stress the fundamental role played in Western societies by two specific emotions: rage and fear. In analyzing the historical and theoretical features of these passions, this paper emphasises some of their political dimensions: their presence in the history of political thought, specifically with regards to the dialectic between rulers and ruled; their central function in motivating people to engage in political action; and lastly, their current role in today’s struggle for democratic legitimacy.

In order to deal with this series of problems, we first need to (1) give a brief overview of the literature on emotions in the social sciences, explaining both their absences and their recent return in the political debates; (2) to get into a short digression in the political thought on emotions, resurrecting the legacy of some political thinkers, and (3) to highlight the current challenges for democracy.

II. Emotions and social sciences. A theoretical framework

Emotions play an evident and omnipresent role in politics. “Politics is about feelings”, writes David Redlawsk in the incipit of his collective essays (Redlawsk, 2006: 1). Politics is awash with emotions: fear, anger, guilt, pity, envy, shame, among other feelings play a part in the formation of social movements, in the lives of every common citizen, in the political parties’ election strategy and so forth. To see somebody truly angry about the government rescuing of financial institutions, someone fearful that his or her party will lose an election or, again, fearful of some alleged external enemy who would
increase criminality, is to see people fill the political world with meaning. In that sense, anger and fear are the lived experience of politics (Tiedens & Leach, 2004). Indeed, there seems to be no reason to highlight that emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, compassion, empathy, and indignation are ubiquitous in individual and social life. In spite of that, the role of emotions has received only little attention in recent political investigations. While central to many aspects of politics and social processes, few current social scientists have explicitly paid attention to these emotions and their political role.

This absence could be explained by several reasons. First should be mentioned the peculiar relationship between modern politics and emotions. From modern rational thought we inherited the general idea that emotions are a kind of excess, usually perceived as women’s dangerous features or human beings’ bodily sensations that distort the rational ability to make choices and ethical judgments. Indeed, in modern philosophical mainstream and in the Western culture in general, there has been a pervasive dualistic construction that opposed mind and body and analogous dichotomies, such as rational/irrational, thinking/feeling; public/private; male/female; outer/inner, pride/shame; conscious/unconscious; controlled/uncontrolled, etc. (Máiz, 2010: 17). Liberalism, as the dominant modern political ideology and economic organization, institutionalized the division of collective and individual into public and private selves. Doing so, liberalism relegates emotions to the private sphere. Therefore, we cannot start into the effort to think emotions better without grappling with the heritage that has produced this idea of emotions and the distinction of these from reason. The tradition of reasoning which we have inherited, in other words, has been built, in part, by putting emotions in a specific and contained place. Although many philosophers, from Thucydides to Machiavelli, from Aristotle to Hobbes, or Rousseau, Adam Smith and others, have linked the role of emotions directly to human action, emotions historically appeared in the “wrong” side of these traditional dichotomies previously mentioned (Calhoun, 2001: 52).

The second reason for the absence of the emotions is the fact that the focus of the scholarly debates in contemporary political science has been reserved for objective facts, and emotions represent the other face of the coin for the rationalistic tradition in which current investigation is based on. Indeed social sciences show many difficulties in analyzing affective and emotional dimensions. Political science dominant trends, focusing in the study of the quantitatively and objectively defined behavior, tend to avoid such dimensions. Moreover, in order to understand what kinds of resistance inquiries into emotions meet, it should be underlined the deep resistance that lies in the implicit behaviorism absorbed by many social scientists and their preference for

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3 In The Passions of the Soul, Descartes proposed the reductive psychophysiology of emotion that informs both romantic expressivism and latter-day sciences of the mind and brain: “The ultimate and most proximate cause of the passions of the soul is none other than the agitation with which the spirits move the little gland which is in the middle of the brain”. 

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more objectivable facts, as incomes, voting, and so forth. In this light, it is worthy to underline the inherently “ephemeral” nature of emotions, which poses major “methodological” concerns for political and social studies. Emotions, because of their vague nature of unobservable inner states, are hard to define, hard to operationalize, hard to measure and hard to isolate from other factors. In much of the literature, emotions have often been viewed as juxtaposed with rationality, the standard baseline of behavioral expectations. Because emotions can distort rationality – emotional people can become both passive and hyperactive – there is no explanation for emotions and therefore, as the logic goes, it is better to stick to the notion of rationality especially when predicting behavior.

Therefore, despite the growing public consciousness of the importance of emotions in social and political life, within academia the study of the relationship between emotion, power and politics has lagged behind practice.

a. Bringing emotions back

The reluctance of social sciences in the study of emotions certainly is something to be deepened, but this is not the focus of our research. Nonetheless, one remark should be made: from the sociological origins – the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment (Swingewood, 1991) – to the early 20th century European and American thought, there was ample space for emotions. In fact, this type of analysis has been successful within different intellectual perspectives – in the wake of Gustave Le Bon and Freudian influence – such as those of Harold Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930) and of Theodor Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), before being eclipsed during the following decades.

In that context, crowd-based theories dominated protest research until the 1960s. The most influential expression of this pathologizing perspective, Gustave Le Bon (1960) described crowds as impulsive, irritable, suggestible and credulous. Given these traits, crowds are susceptible to the emotional appeals of demagogues. Thus, emotions were considered the driving force of all political action that occurred outside normal institutions, when the normal, reasoning individuals could become angry, violent or unthinking under the influence of a crowd. Most of social scientists of the early and mid-twentieth century, including Weber, Durkheim, and Freud accepted some version of Le Bon’s viewpoint. However, in the second part of the 20th century, emotions were erased from social sciences. Whether due to the influence of the rational choice paradigm or simply a legacy of the enlightenment’s privileging of reason over emotion, the role of emotion in politics has been understudied, despite the clear connection between how people feel and how they act.

However, over the last years there have been some signs of change. Toward the end of the twentieth century, a number of social scientists, notably sociologists, took up the struggle to bring emotions into serious consideration within the discipline. Indeed, the role played by emotions in public life is
receiving increasing attention in the broad fields of social, political and cultural studies. In recent years, there have been advances in a wide range of disciplines, such as in neurology (Damasio 1994, 2000, Le Duox, 2002) and cognitive psychology (Forgas, 2000). There has also been an increased interest in emotions by philosophers (Elster 1999), anthropologists (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990) and sociologists (Kemper, 1990). Furthermore, recent work developing theories of affective intelligence (Marcus, et al., 2000) and motivated reasoning (Redlawsk, 2006) have given new prominence to the role of emotions in political disciplines, from political psychology to political science and international relations (Bleiker and Leet, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2001).

The main arguments in the literature point to the weight of emotions in the formation of collective identities and social bonds (Ahmed, 2003, 2004; Berezin, 2002), in the spreading of protest movements (Goodwin et al., 2001; Goodwin and Jasper, 2003), in the process of making political and moral judgment (Marcus et al., 2000; Muldoon, 2008; Nussbaum, 2001), and the influence of emotions in the proper functioning of reason, and even rational choice, (Frank, 1988; de Sousa, 1987). Similarly, there are many sociologists and anthropologists who have argued that emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990; Hochschild, 1983; Katz, 1999). In addition, there is a feminist tradition that is bringing the emotions back to political theory and moral philosophy, underlying in the wake of Aristotle the fundamental role played by the emotions in judgment and in political action (Koziak, 2000; Nussbaum, 1994).

Scholars in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy and feminist theory disagree with each other about how emotions should be valued, but they do agree on the need to oppose two stereotypical views of emotions: that they are purely private and irrational phenomena. As Craig Calhoun (2001) has cautioned, such approach falls into the same modern-thinking trap of dividing and dichotomizing of mind-and-body and reason-and-emotion. “Putting the emotion in their place” as Calhoun says, is to study emotions in such way as to transcend and not reproduce this pervasive dualism. In this light, Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum stress that emotions are important forms of knowledge and evaluative thought (Nussbaum, 1994; Solomon, 1993).

Given these statements, it is important to dwell on some particular emotion we consider to be the essential in the understanding of the present situation.

b. Rage and fear
Among the different passions, there are two emotions that attract our attention, for being inherently expressed by the two phenomena we take in consideration and, simultaneously, for being representative of the current times. These emotions are rage and fear. Skipping the psychological debate on these
emotions\textsuperscript{4}, we want to consider them in order to highlight their political relevance.

Although during the main part of the 20th century – according to the general view of emotions in social science – accounts of fear tended to be individualized and pathologized, in recent years, fear has not fortuitously attracted much interest among social scientists. In the late 1990s and in the early 2000s Frank Furedi’s \textit{Culture of Fear: Risk-Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation} and Barry Glassner’s \textit{The Culture of Fear: Why American are Afraid of the Wrong Things} exchanged Ulrich Beck’s “anxiety” for “fear” and reframed the analysis of risk society. Furedi and Glassner’s position has now become common wisdom: we live in a culture dominated by fear and this fear has damaging social consequences. They both argue that, as this fear is often irrational, exaggerated, or misplaced, it is not simply a reasonable response to the conditions of risk society, but the result of a debilitating obsession with safety or the outcome of a media-produced perception of heightened risk. In this light, the suggestions that politics is encouraging a culture of fear have led to a risk-averse condition that stimulates negative reactions by individuals. The idea that governments are increasingly manufacturing, drawing upon and reproducing fear has become the predominant focus of attention in scholarly works. Some go so far as to state that “fear has become the emotion through which public life is administered” (Bourke, 2006: 10). Others tend to assume the effects of fear results in creating fearful masses (Pain and Smith, 2008). Engin Isin (2004), on his count, argues that Anglophone neoliberal state societies are now governed through neurosis: “the culture of fear” underplays “the fact that people not only conduct their lives with affects and emotions but also in the absence of capacities for evaluating full and transparent information” (Isin, 2004: 220).

As Joanna Bourke argues in \textit{Fear: A Cultural History} (2006), our understanding of, response to, and even subjective feeling of fear are historically determined. That is, although fear is necessarily tied to the somatic – fear is not fear without its sensation –, it is fundamentally constituted through a dynamic process with the social. While it is apparent that the causes and sources of fear have transformed along the historical axis, it is unclear how one would measure its intensity or compare different historical moments. Although much of the work that follows Furedi and Glassner typically posits a shift in the intensification of social fear following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, most argue that the origins of this “culture of fear” can be traced back to 20th

\textsuperscript{4} It is worthy to note that fear, and other terms used more or less interchangeably like horror and terror, in psychological terms, are often taken to be a self-evident emotional response to an external extreme situation. It is normally forgotten that fear is also a social phenomenon: as how people behave in specific circumstances depends upon wider cultural, political and social norms, as well as expectations and beliefs. Similarly, rage or anger, are considered as both positive and negative emotions or, in Martha Nussbaum’s words, as humanizing” and “dehumanizing” tendencies (Nussbaum, 1994: 404).
century developments. There is a plethora of examples, including the increased globalization, the scientific-technological advancements, the lost fundamentalist religious beliefs. So, fear relates to the world “risk society” (Beck, 1999), in which the “unpredictable, uncontrollable and ultimately incommunicable” consequences of risks increasingly circulate at a global scale (Beck, 2002: 40). According to Beck, it is not that life has become more dangerous. It is that risk has now de-bounded, in spatial, temporal and social terms, so that “the hidden central issue in world risk society is how to feign control over the uncontrollable – in politics, law, science, technology, economy and everyday life” (Beck, 2002: 41, original emphasis)

Furthermore, the interest of social scientists for this theme has obviously spread out after a series of contemporary events, most notably the terrorist attacks in the beginning of this century and the so-called “war on terror”. Since 2001, fear has become primarily focused on issues of international reach, like immigration, disease, and terrorism. All this has encouraged social scientists and political theorists to dig into the patterns of fear, highlighting different perspectives of analysis (Bauman, 2006; Bourke, 2006, Furedi, 2005, 2007; Robin, 2004; Schneier, 2003).

Similarly, recent literature has pointed out the relevance of others emotions, at the opposite side of the spectrum of emotions, such as rage, anger, outrage, wrath, fury, hatred and so forth. These emotions have been increasingly analyzed within the field of social sciences. In the Western culture, anger is a Janus-faced emotion, considered to have both socially constructive and disruptive effects. On one hand it is considered as a noble passion of rebellion against injustice or changing the state of affairs; on the other hand it is viewed – and feared – as a losing of judicious thinking. While in the Christian tradition anger represents a capital vice, liberalism has often silenced this kind of emotion because reason is defined as technical rationality (Weber, 1958b; Bodei, 2010).

Simon Thompson notes that there are two distinct and closely related ideas in the study of anger in politics. The first is the notion that anger often leads to mobilization; that is, that anger as an emotion is capable of motivating people into political action and participation. Secondly, we have the idea that the reason people mobilize is to often overcome some form of perceived and real injustice. In this sense, it has been emphasized in recent literature that the capacity to respond with anger is crucial to a sense of justice (Nussbaum, 1994: 403; Solomon, 1990: 242). Although in an era of increased personal and collective sense of insecurity – job insecurity, insecurity civil, economic, etc. – is difficult to turn the anger towards clear goals, to transform it into a constructive political power, anger is viewed as motivating people to engage in political action, fuelling collective struggle for justice and recognition. Thus, if anger is something people feel when they experience injustice, then understanding anger may offer some insight into the nature of injustice itself. If
anger motivates political action, then its study may well offer new insight into the character of struggles for power.

Due to its close association with irrationality, aggression or violent excess, the collective expression of anger has historically been discouraged. Despite, recent studies on social movements have demonstrated that anger motivates and fuels activity and collective struggles for justice (Goodwin et al., 2001; Jasper, 1999). The political value of anger has been seen to lie in its capacity to communicate that an injustice has been committed, and through this anger to question the legitimacy of power (Lyman, 2004: 133).

c. Theoretical and methodological proposal
This recent literature has brought emotions back into the discussion. Even though some critical points – the lack of attention to the theoretical and historical viewpoint, especially in the sociological and in protest movement approaches – a theoretical proposal can be made on the political role played by emotions. Drawing on this ensemble of works, we aim to show the deep importance of emotions in the current political situation. In order to do this, we need to broaden our descriptive and analytical tools, stressing the role of emotions through the theory and history of political thought. Methodologically, we emphasize the need for a broad understanding of society and politics that could accompany the current specialization of knowledge. Thus, rather than relying on a social scientific method alone, we need to implore a greater cross-inquiry perspective, with a particular emphasis on political theory.

In this context, our view is that emotions are not something that only occasionally explode in the political scene, rather they are central to politics itself. In particular, we argue that emotions, notably fear and rage, are central to power, both in its pursuit and its exercise, and as well as in both authoritarian and democratic societies.

In this light, we see the relevance of the growth of populist and far-right parties and protest movements, to be threefold. (1) In regards to the use of language and to discursive horizon, they represent one of the most remarkable examples of the role of emotions in politics; (2) they stand as an immanent critique of the contemporary arrangements of both the political representative form and global politics; (3) since they are a symptom of the declining legitimacy of political and economic institutions linked to the current organization of political world order, they are an expression of the broad and fundational role of emotions in politics, notably for what concerns the creation of political subjects and the redefinition of central political categories, such as legitimacy and democracy.

Given these statements, we need to look more in depth at the relationship between political order and emotion – notably fear – a classic topic from Hobbes to Franz Neumann and Judith Shklar.
III. Lessons from political thinkers

Passion and politics, such concerns are not new. As we have already stressed, political theorists have worried about passion in politics for a long time. Emotions such as fear, anger, wrath, rage, and so forth, have been studied by different traditions of thought, and in some cases a specific theory of passion has been formulated, as by such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Spinoza. Yet, the historical importance of passions in politics has been recognized above all in the phases of revolts or revolutions – their phases of their highest intensity (Marx, 1994)⁵. The French Revolution, for example, has been viewed as one of the biggest expression of people’s ire in European history, since it completed a “democratization” of emotions (Bodei, 2010: 100), especially of ire, which led common and poorest people to the revolution. The indignation about the French crown’s privileges and about aristocracy corruption and injustice is collected by Jacobins: ire was legitimate even in its most violent form of Terror.

Beyond the political consequences of the French Revolution, political thinkers have generally taken in consideration the role of emotions in politics, either to highlight their political and social roles or, as within liberal mainstream, to relegate them to the private sphere. “Why has government been instituted at all?” – asked Alexander Hamilton in Federalist 15 – “Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint” (Cooke, 1961: 110). Here, Hamilton offers a classical liberal articulation in which passion is opposed to both reason and justice. He argues that, left to themselves, the passions of men lead to irrational and unjust behavior. This is exactly one of the reasons why liberals usually identified emotions as the problem for which government is the solution. Likewise, in the wake of modern rational thought, emotions have normally been given a character of irrationality⁶. Indeed, contemporary liberal thinking is for the most part alien to emotional elements, such as fear and rage, essentially because questions about emotions have hardly entered into political science or political theory debates. When they do, contemporary liberalism generally places emotions in opposition of political order. Because of their questioning the legitimacy of power, and because of their challenging the hegemony of the technical rationality⁷ (Barbalet, 2002; 2008).

⁵ Beyond his economistic vision, Marx establishes a direct connection between the collective sensibilities and the “revolutionary energy”.
⁶ In the Federalist Papers there is a repeated use of the metaphor of “fire” in order to describe the expanding speed and violence of emotions. According to this metaphor and argument, if a majority guided by passion takes power, then the chances of a tyrannical power grow.
⁷ Even though traditional social science has regarded Max Weber as the author who more above others has set down the road of associating emotions with irrationality, he famously observed that action in a political community is “determined by highly robust motives of fear and hope” (Weber, 1970: 79).
It is, however, worthy to note that many philosophers and political theorists have been very attentive to the affective and emotional dimension of politics, pointing out their function. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville, while comparing European and American societies, emphasized the importance of the “general and dominant passions”. In this context, the modern and liberal assertion of the rational and calculating search for economic advantage should be critically viewed and analyzed in its historical context. This leads us to ascertain that most of the classical and modern political thinkers were entirely aware that the common human behavior is most of the time noncalculating, habitual, and emotional. In addition, we cannot forget that liberalism was born out of the fires of civil and religious wars, as well as social and economic uncertainty. It should not be forgotten that most of the key concepts of Hobbes, Locke, Milton and others were a set of responses to the violent and fearful conditions in which they lived. As Judith Shklar underlined, the “politics of fear” dramatically informed classical liberal theorizing at the beginning of modernity.

What we want to show in this section is that the political thought of some classical political thinkers can be useful to the understanding of the current political crisis, above all when it concerns the “productivity” of fear in politics and government. In order to deal with that, special attention will be paid to three authors, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montesquieu, and their legacy.

a. Fear and power: the origin of modern politics and contemporary legacy
In the political theory of Machiavelli, there is great space for emotional elements. Indeed, in his view, individual and collective emotions are linked to political action. He builds a social theory of political passions characterized by a broad view of contingent elements like cultural and institutional conditions and political regimes. Moreover, Machiavelli’s deep belief is that the study of political passions can be made through both an historical and sociological method at the same time.

The Florentine thinks about emotions as historical human constants. Despite the broad difference between epochs and between constitutions of governments, he sees emotions to be universal elements which, though their contingency, characterize all people and all cities (D, I). In this context, fear and love are ones of the most important emotions considered by him, directly linked with political and public action.

Indeed, the affective relationship is one of the great means in politics. In particular, religion and the relationship with the Prince are seen by Machiavelli as the most evident phenomena in the powerful role of emotion in politics. Both social phenomena underline the most influential emotions in public life: fear. (D, I.) Why are the people fearful? Machiavelli, arguing against Aristotle and saying that we are not political animals, answers to these questions saying that all cities are founded on fear and that we are driven to live together be necessity (D, I). The people are no more than an aggregation of individuals, united in fear and therefore tending toward constant dissolution.
Machiavelli’s observation on emotions – in particular love and fear – reduces the moral and ethical debate concerning the power to the simple imperatives of command. If the standard is how one should gain followers and be obeyed, then both love and fear are useful, though fear appears to give greater command. The Prince should try to be loved in acquiring rule because it makes acquisition easy, after which they will need to exercise cruelty or terror, directly or by means of laws. When considering whether it is better for a prince to be feared or loved, Machiavelli famously counseled that

One ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult to the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting. Still, a prince should make himself feared in such a way that if he does not gain love, he at any rate avoids hatred (P, XVII)

Here, is the expression of the necessity of fear in politics. Even more, Machiavelli underlines that passions are reciprocally influential for both the people and the sovereign. There is a struggle of emotions between those of the people and those of the sovereign. The love of security by the many – the people – is exploited by the Prince in his desire to command. Unlike the many, who act out of fear, the Prince seems to be moved by love. Thus politics for Machiavelli is essentially a struggle between the Prince – or the few – for the command of a fearful many (D, IV). In same manner, there is a recognition by Machiavelli of the primacy of fear.

In general, the main lesson of Machiavelli is that the use of fear is essential for the safety and continuation of the republic. The unavoidable fact about politics, according to him, is that it is about fear. Indeed, in the history of political thought, Machiavelli’s influence can be discerned in the modern politics of fear, which forms a radical redefinition of politics.

Similar statements can be formulated for Thomas Hobbes. Certainly, it could be said that he notoriously is the author who based his theoretical proposal on the relationship between fear and politics. Hobbes argued that human appetite is a kind of motion towards an object. However, there is nothing inherent in objects that make them desirable. Moreover, there is no end to desire because there is "no such finis ultimus, nor summum bonum" (L, XI). It is the fearful uncertainty of satisfying everchanging desires that forces us to acquire power after power. This fear, along with competition and glory, are the sources of war, which, for Hobbes, is our natural state. Thus, Hobbes' formulation of power is directly linked to Machiavellian love, which is unlimited and without direction, and which leads to competition and war. In this context, the intuition of Hobbes is deducing fear from the universal and legitimate condition of equality between men. Beyond the desire for material objects, there is another reason for war, like the fear of the other and the desire for security. Hobbes somehow emphasizes the fear of the others as the valid and legitimate reason for the conflict, based on the conviction that the life’s safety is an
inviolable natural right. Thus, emerges the relationship between fear and self-preservation: the fear is established as part of the foundational, natural right that men have to resort to all necessary means to prevent painful death. The only way human beings can live together peacefully is by creating “a common Power to keep them all in awe” (L, XIII), the concentrated and absolute power of the Leviathan. Therefore, fear is neutralized and absorbed by the protective function of the Leviathan, but not removed: fear is to counter fear. *Metus hominis* and *metus reipublicae* – fear of humanity and fear of the state – are interconnected and create an implicit statement of a “geometry of fear”, a general law of the conservation both of power and of fear. By transforming itself from fear of violent death to fear of punishment, this feeling changes from reciprocal fear – *mutus mutus* – to common fear – *metus potentiae communis*. The state, called to free men from the fear of violent death, can then guarantee their lives only by becoming itself the producer of fear, in this case like fear of punishment (Esposito, 2009: 21; Strauss, 1936: 16).

The threat of a sovereign sanction is the only means by which it is possible to reduce social complexity and to confirm expectations of order and security. In this capacity to reduce fear by the exercise of fear, appreciated in terms of political realism by both Hobbes and Machiavelli, lies the essential – and paradoxical – foundation of power.

Nonetheless, the relationship between fear and power has some critical elements that have been recognized by many authors, first of all Montesquieu. Generally, the French philosopher is widely-known for his formulation of the separation of powers. Indeed, he condemned the despotic system and bet on the system that allows the exercise of freedom, by providing a division – and consequently reciprocal control – of powers. Similarly, his political theory is characterized by the definition of ideal-types of regimes. One of the essential elements of Montesquieu's typology of political regimes – republic, monarchy, despotism – is the clear distinction he made between monarchy and despotism. The French philosopher, unlike previous theorists like Aristotle or Machiavelli, considers despotism different from monarchy and an independent form of government. (*EL*, II)

For the three types of government that Montesquieu glimpses at, he details their natures and the principles that characterize them. The nature of one regime essentially is its constitutional structure – «ce qui le fait être tel» –; the principle, on the other hand, is the pattern that characterizes the type of government in terms of political action and as a movement - «les passions humaines qui le font mouvoir». (*EL*, III, 1) Describing the different regimes, Montesquieu underlines the difference between despotism and monarchy, saying that the latter is a government in which there remains a lawful exercise of power, while in the former, there is no legal power. Likewise, Montesquieu notes that the despotic government has fear – “crainte” or "terreur" – as principle (*EL*, V, 14), which he defines as the feeling of insecurity that pervades all people living in this type of regime. Unlike Hobbes, Montesquieu rejects the
exclusive view for which fear is the only passion that constitutes politics and its concrete forms. By contrast, the French philosopher formulated the hypothesis that to each of the political systems – respectively republic, monarchy, despotism – shall correspond a dominant political passion: virtue, honor, fear. The republican citizen, for example, is dominated by the feeling of political virtue, love of country and equality (EL, III, 3; IV, 5; V, 2-4); in the monarchy, men are held by honor, and a feeling of pride for their own class; and only in despotism are men governed by the feelings of fear and terror.

In this context, it shall be stressed that modern liberal political thought has been constructed upon this constant reference to an emotional dimension, and therefore, even contemporary thinkers have focused their attentions on this kind of problem. Franz Neumann, for instance, borrowed from modern political thinkers in order to show the presence of “regimes of fear” in contemporary times. He said that dictatorships or totalitarian regimes institutionalize fear and terror through propaganda and crime. (Neumann, 1957) Similarly, Judith Shklar stressed the importance of emotional and psychological dimensions in the structure of power relationships, within the liberal thought. In her view, the end of liberalism, and of politics tout court, is not the pursuit of perfection – the *summum bonum* – but rather the avoidance of the worst possible outcome – the *summum malum* –, which is cruelty and fear. In *Ordinary Vices*, Shklar reiterates Montaigne's statement that we should put cruelty first on the list of vices, that is the “willful inflicting of physical pain on a weaker being in order to cause anguish and fear” (1984: 8). In other words, the hatred of cruelty and suffering should, following Shklar, “remain a powerful part of the liberal consciousness” (1984: 43). Thus, liberalism concerns not with the best hope of perfect and equal world, but with a less brutal and irrational one: liberalism “must restrict itself to politics and to proposal to restrain potential abusers of power in order to lift the burden of fear” (Shklar, 1998: 13).

Considering all this, it is worthy to stress that contemporary debate on complementary themes, such as emotions and politics, risk society, and the foundations of the political order should be analyzed from this deep perspective on the fundamental role of emotions. It seems also important to place a stress on these central elements of the relationship between the emotional dimension and the political order even in today’s context. It has even been argued that every political system is based on anxiety and in its control and, more extensively, that the function of each political system is that of regulating the distribution of social risks – and so the reduction of fear – through the allocation of “security values” (Zolo, 1992: 35-45). Typically, a broad series of protections, such as the physical safeguard of life, military defense, the legal guarantee of property and, more generally, the welfare state, have been the specific mechanisms in contemporary democracies for the reduction of fear. In this context, the assumption that contemporary democracies are fear-less systems is a common misconception. Thus, due to the nature of liberalism itself, and its
faith in the idea of a process of material advancement gained by the elimination of violence domestically and internationally, Western democracies are thought to be the best system for their capacity to sublimate, control and reduce human fears, even through the process of privatizing of them.

Nevertheless, it can be said that the role of fear – and consequently of other emotions – in the political sphere is underestimated in contemporary debate. Especially considering the current relationship between political and economic spheres, there can be found a deep and fundamental function played by emotional factors. In this light, the two contemporary phenomena we consider in this paper – the spread of protest movements and the populist and far-right parties – are concrete examples of the role of emotions in democracies and, at the same time, the manifestation of a deeper democratic challenge tout court.

IV. Contemporary passions and the democratic challenge.

What these reflections show us is the profound interconnection between human emotions and the construction of a legitimized political order. Similarly to what these political thinkers thought about the origins of modern political organization, in the current Western economic and political situation it can be glimpsed at as fundamental role played by emotions, especially when it concerns the democratic legitimacy of the system itself. What these reflections on the political role of fear crucially reveal is that passions are central elements in the construction of political subjects and in their struggle for sovereignty.

After having briefly seen the broad implication of emotion in the political debate – first by stressing the contemporary literature on emotions and social sciences, then by rescuing some modern theory on fear and order –, we have to stress some critical elements that emerge in today’s relationship between these emotions and the political sphere. They are firstly related to the search and construction of the political subject, “the people”; similarly, they refer to a particular place of politics in the global era, and consequently, the same definition of democracy.

a. The search for the subject

Despite the obvious differences between phenomena of protest movements like Indignados and Occupy, and populist and far-right parties, they are linked in their claiming for “the people” as the real political subject. Both these kinds of movements construct “the people” as the political subject in opposition to the elitist politicians, businessmen and bankers, highlighted as enemies that hold power unjustly. In this sense, these movements claim to express the true will of “the people”, as defined by its virtuosity and sovereignty.
In this context, it is appropriate to note the problematic value that the term “people” has always assumed in the political discourse, and these phenomena contribute to underline it again. Indeed, the polysemic value that the term “people” has is emphasized by many authors. Raphael Samuel (1984: 23) notes that the people “is a word whose meaning has as many nuances as applications have the term”. Other authors emphasize the ambiguity and the indetermination of the term: Pierre Rosanvallon (1998: 32) reminds us the words of Mirabeau in 1789, “le mot peuple signifie nécessairement ou trop ou trop peu […] c’est un mot qui se prêta tout”; Margaret Canovan (1984) also underscores the elasticity of the notion of the word “people”. Ernesto Laclau argues that “the people is a concept without a defined theoretical status: despite its frequent use in political discourse, its conceptual precision remains exclusively at the allusive or metaphorical level” (Laclau, 1977: 165).

In regards to populism – whose expression can be found at both ends of the political spectrum (Taguieff, 2002: 84) – its essential character is the fact that it is expressed by parties and movements that claim to be the “true democrats”, the only ones who fight for the sovereignty of the people against the corrupt political class of professionals and bankers or the invasion of immigrants and foreigners. As highlighted by Eduardo Gonzalez Calleja (2002: 967), populism is based on emotional speech that manages to mobilize the masses through its central axis, which is the idea of people as the depositary of social virtues of justice and morality. Others, like Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, in the wake of Ernesto Laclau and Pierre-André Taguieff – who go beyond the social and economic connotation of populism – define this phenomenon as “an ideology that pushes a virtuous and homogeneous people against an elite, or other groups depicted as dangerous, to give voice to the people’s sovereignty, rights, values, property and identity” (2008: 3). Moreover, Margaret Canovan (1999) calls this form of politics the “politics of redemption” and salvation against the “politics of pragmatism” represented by the governmental elite. One of the peculiarities of populism is the discursive construction of society as an antagonistic field in which the people and the oligarchy are facing. In this sense, the category “the people”, according to what Ernesto Laclau notes, refers to a fundamental division of “the totality of the social into two opposing political camps”, which are the people against the oligarchy (Laclau, 1988).

Amplifying the discourse of fear and anger within the political scene, both populist parties and protest movements emphasize the common perception that democratic and institutional procedures are something useless and, in essence, intrinsically condemned to corruption. Thus, the common rhetoric is based on anti-elitism, anti-establishment discourse, and the centrality of the people.

8 Considering all these perspectives, it could be said that, somehow, “the people” is the very absent of the modern democracy, since it appears only as its original legitimazing instance, but is not directly present in the representative form of contemporary institutions.
against those who are perceived as corrupting the original meaning of democracy: the power of the people. Then, although within both protest movements and populist parties there is a complex articulation of beliefs towards the institutional and electoral political participation, they are explicitly against the passive and marginal role that citizens are called to have in public decision-making and in the global economy and politics, often perceived as forces of disaggregation and subjugation.

Furthermore, claiming to represent a broad and heterogeneous “people”, these phenomena place the target not only on politicians and bankers, but also on the representative system, parties, the media and many of the institutions – that is to say, “the system” (Vallespín, 2011: 10). Throught that it can be glimpsed the wider malaise of democracy in facing the global political and economic system (Keane, 2009; López Aguilar, 2011: 25; Putnam, 2002).

b. The place of politics
Given this context, it must be said that protest movements as well as the populist argument are not completely in opposition to politics and its representative forms. Better, they are fighting against the slow collapse of representative democratic governance under the domination of economic imperatives9. In this view, we can emphasize through these phenomena, and their use of emotional dimensions, the fact that democracy is entering a worrying time. Not only in its procedural functioning, but more importantly in its legitimacy and in its relationship with the economic world. Movements such as the Indignados and Occupy draw attention to this concern, through a discourse that underlines moral and civic indignation, the expression of resentment or rage, and through episodes of ire. Considering all this, it can be said that the current “system has lost its self-evidence, its automatic legitimacy, and now the field is open” (Žižek, 2011).

Since two decades at least, and increasingly since the early times of the current financial crisis, there is strong endorsement to the argument of the “there is no alternative” to this system. As basing this assumption on some law of nature, supporters of this view think that politics and collective agency have little to say in the globalized world. Moreover, contributing to the internalization of a sense of vain and useless of politics, this argument is generally linked to negative emotions, such as insecurity, uncertainty, fear and so forth. On the other hand, there is a wide range of antagonists to this political exhaustion. Both protest and populist movements are representative of this denial of the “there is no alternative” argument. Thus, by linking the economic and the political crisis – which are seen as intertwined and seemingly going hand in hand – these phenomena show a broader political state of affairs.

9 It can be affirmed that, after all, “We are the 99%” is a radical representative claim (Tormey, 2012: 134).
Bringing into play the use of emotional dimension, they reveal that there is a general and progressive skew between some of the political institution that manage everyday life, including the state, the nation, and the political parties on the one hand, and the market and the global dynamics on the other. In fact, it is corroborated that these essential factors for democracy fail to cooperate. To the extent that the logics of the modern political institution – the state and the parties in primis – and those of capitalism – the global free market – differ, then the contradictory equilibrium of democracy emerges. In fact, emerges the fact that liberal democracies are being carved out by the growth global institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank and others, whose mechanisms are often unaccountable. Indeed, in the global context, it has been recognized the critical relationship between spatial and territorial politics on the one hand, and the global despatialized market on the other. In this sense, the former has been delegitimized by the latter.

Following what Lipset said on legitimacy, we might say that there is a fundamental problem in the current legitimization of politics, and of democracy in particular.

Legitimacy involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society. The extent to which contemporary democratic political systems are legitimate depends in large measure upon the ways in which the key issues which have historically divided the society have been resolved (Lipset, 1959: 86)

Although there isn’t any relevant theory against the democratic form of government, it seems to be a general belief that democracy is weakened in its efficacy in facing contemporary globalization. At least, what it has been recognized is the fact that modern territorial politics – albeit still existing and still creating conflicts – has to face non-spatialized global economic forces, which first effect is to put light on the weakness of state-democratic political organization. Both liberal and radical democratic theorists are perfectly aware of these kinds of critical issues and, in different ways, they propose possible solutions and alternatives to the state of affairs, in order to rescue the collective action and to find the right place that belongs to politics. Whether putting the focus on the paradigm of justice (Rawls, 1971, 1993), on the communicative action (Habermas, 1984), on the institutions (Sartori, 1987; Dahl, 1998), or on the capabilities (Sen, 1985; Nussbaum, 2000), the variegated horizon of liberal theories puts light on the central role of the state and on the collective action. By constrast, underlying the fundamental contradictions of modern liberal democracy, radical thinkers stress the unavoidable and inescapable role of conflict and antagonism in politics (Little & Lloyd, 2009; Butler, Laclau, Žižek, 2000; Hardt & Negri, 2009). What emerges, beyond all these different
theories\textsuperscript{10}, is the fact that there is a deep awareness of the problems that politics and democracy are facing in these times.

Since the relevance of emotions lies both in highlighting the changing current circumstances and in showing the struggle for power, studying emotions in political disciplines equips social scientists and theorists with useful theoretical tools to grasp the profound problem in the legitimization of politics.

V. Conclusion

Major economic upheavals do have political consequences. The financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 has revealed a broad set of critical elements, whose political effects have attracted our attention in this paper.

In this context, we have started by focusing upon two phenomena, the growth of populist and far-right parties and protest movements, in order to put light on the broad role of emotions in politics and in the critical democratic challenge of today. Understood as one of the most remarkable examples of the role of emotions in politics, especially fear and rage, these phenomena can be seen as well as example of the contemporary vectors through which the struggle for popular and democratic legitimacy is currently led. They represent an immanent critique of the contemporary forms of economic and political power, and a symptom of the declining legitimacy of political and economic institutions. Therefore, stressing their significant relevance in the current situation as well as their use of emotional vectors, we aimed to highlight the fundamental role of emotions in politics, particularly when it concerns the creation of political subjects – “the people” – as well as the definition of legitimacy and democracy.

Consequently, these phenomena force us to reflect upon the relationship between emotions and politics in troubled times. Highlighting the need for more cross-disciplinary inquiries in social sciences – with a deeper historical and theoretical political basis – we sought to stress some political challenges of these present days. Having seen the broad implication of emotions in the political debate – both in contemporary literature and in some modern theories on fear and order – we stressed the relevance of emotions in politics through a linkage with the current struggle for the sovereignty of “the people” – the classical political subject – and with the struggle for the place of politics in the global era.

What both protest movements of Indignados, Occupy Wall Street, and populist and far-right parties – somehow representing a contemporary “bank of rage” (Sloterdijk, 2010) – put light on is the fact that, in the complex international

\textsuperscript{10} These theories cannot be deeply taken in consideration in this brief essay, which aim is different from an overview of literature.
context, democracy is intrinsically contingent. This is why democracy is facing its own permanence and necessity in the future governance of the world.

References


