4. Judgment and Contestation

The Affective Life of Norms

People often feel their way to finding the moral path. What is right should also feel right. However, it is not that simple. Norms easily become a matter of contestation, in everyday disputes just as well as in forms of political protest. And it is not always enough to feel one's way through; what feels right often ends up being morally questioned by others, or what feels wrong to oneself might be the normative ideal in society. The feelings of suspense and confusion about normativity, its negotiation as well as the various attempts to reconcile what feels right with some dominant normative framework point towards the issue at the centre of this chapter: Contestations of normativity and their affective engagements. The social life of normativity is neither simple and 'rational' nor is it opposed to affect and emotions – instead, normativity itself is highly affective. Injustices, power relations or solidarity is nothing that is only experienced rationally, but they come, many times, with intense feelings (Gould 2010). Accordingly, affect and emotions play a decisive role in practices which are directly linked to normativity and reflect on it: either practices which set out to enact certain norms, like those of judgment, or practices which contest and challenge specific norms, like the practices of critique (cf. Bens/Zenker 2019).

Looking closely at both practices of judgment and practices of critique, the following contributions explore the workings of norms with regard to their affective dimension. This perspective on normativity is inspired by more recent work on the role of affect and emotions (Brennan 2004; Berlant 2008). Like the two previous chapters, it also considers works that go against the grain of some widespread assumptions in social and cultural theories. In particular, theories of modernization have presented norms as forces or laws, which work on the social rather than within it. A prominent example is the process commonly referred to as rationalization, famously captured in Max Weber's account of modern bureaucracy and capitalism as the "stahlhartes Gehäuse der Hörigkeit" (Weber 2016: 487).

Long mistranslated as 'iron cage' (re-translated as "steel-hard casing" cf. Weber 2011), the notion refers to the historical formation of norms such as 'efficiency' and 'instrumentality,' that are perceived to be 'unemotional' and work like a container that structures the manifold dynamics of social life from an outside. Of course, Weber's account is more complex; in fact, it does include a whole variety of different 'spheres of value' and normative frameworks, some of which give prominence to affect and emotions. Yet, Weber's powerful metaphor has a polemic dimension and, rather against his own idea of sociology, his critique of rationalization, resonating with other prominent accounts of modernization, has unfolded something like an affective afterlife itself. Later accounts have adopted the opposition between 'rational norms' and 'affective life'; very often this narrative has indeed served as the groundwork for vigorous critiques against regimes of petty-bourgeois conformity, for instance, or against the repressive, binary organization of sexuality.

Over the course of this chapter, we want to challenge the dichotomy between norms and affect. Instead, we conceptualize their relation as one characterized by tensions and dynamics. This relation can be antagonistic, creating oppositions when, for example, feelings about what is right go against structure. Or it can be a relation of commonality, for instance, in feelings of solidarity. Exploring the affective life of norms also means inquiring into the ways norms find their way into people's affective regimes, and how politics and the political are enacted and embodied in social practices. Throughout this chapter, we aim to examine the emotions that accompany the norm, the affect that consolidates people's normative frameworks. We seek to deconstruct the binaries of "rational norms" and the affective realm as well as the emotive judgment that is constantly coupled with its contestation.

The case studies in this chapter therefore represent different layers of tensions. Focusing on practices that are deeply entangled with normativity, practices of judgment and of contestation, our contributions seek to bring to the fore their eminent affective dimensions. Practices of judgment rely on a normative framework that is far from clearly spelled out. On the other hand, we will see that the complex phenomena of aesthetic judgment can be foreclosed by a discursive logic that refers to the very different norms of public political debate. Reconciliatory attempts between affect and norms occur as inner dialogues and self-reflection among people in the same community, and among marginalized groups and the wider society – often negotiating and subverting hegemonic normative frameworks. Finally, contestation in its visceral and bodily form can happen briefly – as an impulse – or it can induce lengthy societal dialogues that might not be resolved. Their sites can vary greatly from everyday encounters to exceptional events.

One vivid example of what it can mean to feel normativity, and even to get a reflexive feeling for normativity, is provided by our relation to language. A central aspect of learning a language lies in 'getting a feeling' for what is 'proper' language and what is the 'proper use' of that language in a certain situation. This capacity to feel what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' spans across those domains which are often perceived to be very basic and somewhat resistant to change, like grammar and syntax, but it also includes less prominent, yet often both highly socially determined and determining domains like register, vocabulary and pronunciation. In these latter instances, to feel an irritation when hearing someone else, or in turn to cause an irritation and to feel that one's way of speaking is that cause, means to feel the normativity of language. These normative frameworks can be very different and, at times, even incommensurable – the language of the classroom is very different to that of the schoolyard; the language of the *Bürgeramt* to that of the subway – yet they always operate on an affective level. As this chapter seeks to show, this includes the discursive practices of aesthetic valuation and critical judgment as well as the negotiation of political critique and, crucially, the bodily dynamics involved in these articulations. We will try to exemplify this in the discussion of judgment, which runs through all of our case studies: whether as the problem of not being able to make an aesthetic judgment and facing an impasse, or as the problem of aesthetic judgment being strictly aligned with projects of social distinction and therefore threatening to foreclose aesthetic experience; whether as the problem of 'translating' felt judgments into a viable vocabulary of political critique, or, this will be our closing example, on the other hand, as the bodily articulation of judgment *in actu*.

MONOLINGUAL AFFECT AND AESTHETIC VALUE: TOMER GARDI AT THE BACHMANN-PRIZE

If language is one significant way norms are felt, the arrangement of language in literature marks a somewhat special case, one which appears to be quite different at first glance. Very often, what irritates our feeling for language in every-day life can be observed to be framed and indeed experienced rather differently when we encounter it in a literary text. One could even go so far as to say that, to a certain degree, the literary irritation of our 'normal' feeling for language is at the very heart of aesthetic experience. Yet, there is a difference between this kind of irritation, aesthetically valued as it is, and other forms of irritations, which nevertheless can also be provoked by a literary text. Here one could think of, for instance, James Joyce's experiments with language and form, which provoke the reader's feeling

for language aesthetically, but which also caused some serious provocations beyond the aesthetic when they first appeared in print. The difference between these notions of irritation can appear as a very marked one, but it can also be subtle and difficult to negotiate – especially when one is prompted to make a judgment.

When Tomer Gardi read his contribution at the Bachmann-Prize in 2016, his performance caused an irritation of that latter kind. Reading an excerpt from his novel *Broken German* (2016), his text challenged the event's procedure: Given the experimental nature of his text, written in 'broken German', the jury's discussion was dominated by an elephant in the room: the question, whether or not an author needs to be able to speak 'proper German' after all. The idea that literary authorship and aesthetic value are tied to the 'natural mastery' of the 'mother tongue' has been thoroughly criticized on the discursive level of literary criticism. Accordingly, the jury's discourse was deeply shaped by this deconstruction of ideas such as sovereign authorship or national literature. The politics of monolingualism, which strictly tie authorship and aesthetic value to a national language community, have become the object of critique for quite some time now. Yet, as this contribution wants to show, the affective life of this monolingual norm still has a ghostly presence at institutions like the Bachmann-Prize.[20]

The Austrian prize for contemporary literature, named after the famous author Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973), follows a singular procedure. Since its foundation in 1976 the prize has been awarded annually. The event, however, is different from other award ceremonies: The reading performances of the shortlisted authors as well as the subsequent critical assessment by the jury are both broadcast live on Austrian and German national television (ORF, 3Sat). This procedure places an emphasis on both the performance of the reading itself as well as on the discussion of the jury, which finds itself in the rare position of being prompted to come up with an elaborate response immediately after listening to the reading. Although the jury members have the chance to read the text shortly beforehand, this situation very much presents aesthetic judgments in the making. Thus, the ways in which this form of aesthetic criticism has to justify itself can become themselves discernible and negotiable on the stage of the Bachmann Prize.

When the Israeli author Tomer Gardi read his contribution at the Bachmann Prize in 2016, his performance and the ensuing jury discussion in many ways resembled an exception to the Prize's standard procedure. Gardi's text does not

20 The following attempt to analyse the ways in which texts are valorised as 'literature' is inspired by a pragmatist sociology of critique and a 'post-Bourdieusian' approach to valuation in the art field (cf. Boltanski 2011i; Beljean, Chong and Lamont 2015; Vatin 2013). For an in-depth analysis of Tomer Gardi's novel *broken german* (2016) which pays special attention to the text's multilingualism see Vlasta (2019).

adhere to some of the grammatical, lexical, and syntactical conventions of standard German, as the very first sentences he read made clear:

Am Ende von diese Flug verlieren ich und meine Mutter unseren Koffern. Bei der rollenden Gummiband stehen wir, da mit den Anderen. Schlafentzugt, nikotinhungrig, erschöpft, als die Koffern uns vorbei langsam rollen.[21]

The narrative voice, identified with the protagonist of the episode, unmistakably uses German language; yet at the same time it is far from the standard variety of German taught in schools that is characteristic of literary texts. This use of a German informed and inflected by other languages and therefore constitutively multilingual was at the centre of the jury's discussion. More than anything, much more than the text's plot or its formal aspects, the discussion turned out to be about the status of this particular 'broken German' – and the status of its speaker, the author Tomer Gardi, who was always present. In this context, one of the jury members reflects:

Figure 19. Stills from the television broadcast of the Bachmann prize. Source: ORF/3Sat.

Engl. Translation: …first of all, I'm not sure, whether or not he speaks German, we didn't… [talk to each other]. At this point, Gardi intervenes with a direct answer, something very unusual at the Prize. The camera turns around, as he repeats: ‚I speak German, yes, hello!'

21 The videos as well as a pdf file of Gardi's text can be found online at bachmann-preis.orf.at/stories/2773156/. Latest download November 30th, 2018.

It is important to note that the jury member's argumentation is not one of deliberate exclusion, nor is it driven by nationalist sentiment. Quite the opposite, in the still resonating context of the 2015 summer of migration and its media coverage, all contributions to the discussion can be regarded as advanced liberal positions. These positions are informed by poststructuralist and postcolonial critiques of traditional Western categories such as the nation or the author subject. As one of the jury members was quick to reflect, their quest for the author's linguistic competences proved to be quite at odds with some of the staples of this critical discourse: The deconstruction of the author, the concentration on the text's dynamics and the rejection of a naturalized 'national literature'. Yet, by introducing himself to the jury and the TV cameras, Tomer Gardi still manages to irritate this discourse and thereby responds to the elephant in the room.

If it is indeed obvious that the author reads, writes, and speaks German – how else could he participate in the Prize? – Gardi's intervention brings to the fore that knowledge about the type of relationship towards the language of literature is highly relevant for the process of evaluation. This type of relationship can be situated in the normative framework of what Yasemin Yildiz has called the "monolingual paradigm" (2012). Following Benedict Anderson's seminal study on how the development and spread of print led to an "imagined community" (1991) of writers and speakers of the same language, the monolingual paradigm describes the naturalisation of the relationship between language and nation in the field of modern literature. At the time the literary field reached a 'relative autonomy' (Bourdieu 1995), literary authorship was deeply tied to the ideas of the 'mother tongue' and a 'national literature', thereby forming an "affective know" (Yildiz 2012: 10). Romanticism's idea of a male original author-genius worked in conjunction with the autonomy of art and that of the nation state, and formed a powerfully prevailing standard configuration for the production and evaluation of literature. The indicated relationship between author and language here is one of sovereignty: For texts to be valorised as 'literature', and writers to be regarded as 'original authors', the perceived 'mastery' of one's 'mother tongue' establishes itself as the very precondition.

In 2016, however, the jury's rather uncomfortable discourse showed that the monolingual norm had been problematized, since, the jury members were influenced by critical theory's deconstruction and rejection of monolingualism's categories and dichotomies. Certain jury members' discussion about the impact of 'the postcolonial' on European literature also attests to that influence, although it was awkwardly out of place in the case of Gardi, who was born in a Kibbutz at the Lebanese border and later moved with his parents to Vienna. Simply put, in 2016

national belonging and the sovereign mastery of an author's 'mother tongue' could not be mobilised as criteria for critical assessment of literature quite so easily.

Yet, monolingual affect still played a decisive role in the jury's discussion. This becomes especially evident when looking at how Gardi's text is contextualised in the canonic literary tradition. Many avant-garde texts have purposefully 'broken' or 'played with' the rules of German grammar and syntax, introduced neologisms and unfolded an aesthetics of estrangement of the sort mentioned above. Some commentators were quick to link Gardi's writing to that tradition, describing his discourse as a *Kunstsprache* (art language). Defending Gardi against those who reject his text for its deviance from standard German may be benevolent. Yet the *Kunstsprache*-argumentation cannot cease to reproduce a particular binary of aesthetic judgment and its temporal structure. In this evaluative framework, mastering the rules, understood as something an author 'naturally' does, precedes the artist's transgression, which is only ever valorised after the fact Ascertaining whether or not Gardi masters German 'as a native' became quintessential information for the jury. The difference between the 'natural mastery' of one's 'mother tongue' on the one hand, and the sovereign alteration and transgression of the rules on the other hand, emerges as the sine qua non distinction for passing aesthetic judgment.

To sum it up in simple terms: The old adage that one must first master the rules to be able to break or play with them' haunts the discussion at the Bachmann Prize. The norm to 'master the rules of language' stays implicit. Yet as the elephant in the room, the presence of monolingual affect has deep political implications. If one can only ever become the master of one's 'mother tongue', literary authorship in a particular language is then the privilege of 'native speakers'. The imagined community of the nation thus is tightly linked to the notion of sovereign authorship. The jury's inability to form an aesthetic judgment is due to the fact that this connection is contested today. Their impasse therefore expresses a double bind: On the one hand, after the critical deconstruction of the categories which traditionally underlie literary criticism, and which centred on the notion of sovereignty, a justification of aesthetic value in terms of autonomy and national belonging is out of the question. Yet, on the other hand, determining the very nature of the author's relationship to language still proves crucial for making an aesthetic judgment. To envision – or better, to sense and feel – this relationship as one of sovereignty adheres to the same normative framework that was deconstructed. The jury's debate about whether or not Gardi 'masters' German is indeed a moratorium on whether he qualifies as an author of literary texts in the prestigious avant-garde tradition. As such, the Gardi case vividly captures the persistence of the politics

of monolingualism at the beginning of the 21st century, and their ongoing affect on the processes of aesthetic valorisation.

If this first case study revolves around the affective and political preconditions as well as implications of withholding aesthetic judgment, the second example aims at demonstrating how the activity of making judgments is bound up with the emergence of different, and often conflicting, public spheres. Taking the experience of cinematic images as its subject, it analyses how aesthetic judgment connects processes of affective exchange between bodies to the circulation of ideologies and world-views in political discourse. Finally, the contribution inquires into the status of the political for a society that is construed, theoretically, as an "affective society".

ON THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

If one posits the political problem of living together in terms of affective relationality, it follows that our conception of the function of public discourse has to be reformulated. If one wants to leave behind easy dichotomies between rational and emotional (that is, irrational) exchange, discourse cannot be treated exclusively in terms of a more or less accurate representation of facts. Instead, one has to take into account its affective dimensions, its power to move and agitate people and to transform opinions. This provokes questions like the following: How are the fantasies and images generated that drive the affective dynamics of public discourse? And what role do media, especially cinema and television, play in this regard? This section will be concerned with outlining the interplay between discourses on migration and the production of audiovisual images in the case of the so-called "Turkish German cinema". It aims to show, in exemplary fashion, how the relations between discourse and images are produced in a plurality of different competing and conflicting publics where affectively charged encounters between cinematic movement-images and socioculturally situated practices of perceiving these images take place.

The emergence of these relations can be understood as a practice of making aesthetic judgments. One can argue that aesthetic judgment and taste are insufficiently understood if taken only in their function to (re-)produce social distinctions. Instead, the "aesthetic disposition" (Bourdieu 1984) that manifests itself in judgments has a genuine political purpose: it makes visible the fact that cinematic images (or other works of art) are not self-evidently "readable" in a commonly shared manner. Rather, the way audiovisual images intervene into the affective dynamics of a society depends on practices of seeing and hearing (cf. Goodwin

1994), which in turn contribute to the establishment of potentially very diverse kinds of communities and publics.

The public and academic debates around the TV film *Rage* (German: *Wut*, Züli Aladağ 2006) are exemplary for what can be called the discursive production of "Turkish German cinema". The film deals with a violent conflict between Can, a young Turk living in Germany, and the members of a bourgeois German family, ending in the German father's killing of Can. The film's broadcast on television was initially postponed when critics on the left denounced it as racist. Soon, conservative politicians demanded the decision be reversed, as the "truth has a right to be shown" (Prager 2012: 109) – meaning the "truth" that there is a danger emanating from young migrants in Germany. Eventually, the film was broadcast at a later hour, accompanied by a talk show discussing the problem of young criminal migrants. To counter these various acts of discursive usurpation, academic debate on the film has insisted on the complexity of its staging and has claimed that it critiques "both sides": the criminal Can and the family he attacks (cf. Berghahn 2009; Prager 2012; Güneli 2013; Figge 2016).

But the problem remains: in the face of strong conservative support for the film's supposed "message" (migrant youth represent a serious social problem), it appears unsatisfactory to defend the film against the accusation of racism, no matter how legitimate this defence may be. Both alternatives (affirmation or critique of the film) seem to lead to misunderstanding: both impose a reading that unduly objectifies the movement-images of the film to extract a statement about society, whether this statement is understood as progressive or as reactionary. This dilemma, one might argue, is inherent in the term "Turkish German cinema" itself, as this term groups together films based on the ethnicity either of their makers or of the fictional characters represented in them. As soon as this paradigm of representation is introduced, the films can be judged in terms of how accurately they fulfil their supposed social function. How exactly does this dilemma come about and what are its driving forces?

Reading the film as "Turkish German Cinema" is intricately linked to the emergence of the dilemma of aesthetic judgment. In order to understand why one and the same film might give rise to so blatantly conflicting readings, and in order to gain insight into the political function of these readings, which are neither arbitrary nor simply expressions of ignorance or difference in opinion, it is helpful to briefly reflect on the way cinematic images (including films shown on TV) relate to the perceptual activity of spectators. Cinematic movement-images are far from artefacts. As Vivian Sobchack (1992) emphasizes, the experience of film consists in two interlocking acts of perception: one carried out visibly on the screen, one happening invisibly in the darkness of the auditorium. Hence, spectators do not

only relate to the world they see and hear before them, but always also to the manner in which this world appears. Spectators do not surrender passively to what they see and hear but rather actively embody the way the fictional world unfolds before their eyes and ears. Their perception is being stylized according to the manner in which the cinematic images realize a specific way of being-in-the-world.

Still, in order for a film experience to emerge, it is not enough for spectators to become affectively involved in a composition of expressive registers (light, colours, sounds, movement, dialogue, textures, etc.). In the course of being affected by what they are seeing and hearing, they develop a feeling for their own bodily involvement. It is on this level that something like the feeling of sharing a common world may emerge – a sense that one is not alone in perceiving the world in this specific way. With reference to Richard Rorty (who in turn refers to Kant's idea of a *sensus communis*), this feeling can be understood as a "sense of commonality" (Rorty 1998: 101). It is also on this level that the concept of aesthetic judgment can be introduced – with the *sensus communis* referring to a public sphere at which a judgment like "this is beautiful", or "this feels wrong" is aiming. Such a statement only makes sense if it is addressed to others, who are presumed to share the same world with the one who is rendering the judgment. In this perspective the cinematic movement-image can be understood as a matrix for processes of community-building (cf. Kappelhoff 2018).

The *sensus communis*, as Hannah Arendt emphasizes in her interpretation of Kant, is not simply common sense understood as sound reasoning. It is rather "an extra sense – like an extra mental capability […] – that fits us into a community. […] The *sensus communis* is the specifically human sense because communication, i.e., speech, depends on it" (Arendt 1992: 70). On the basis of the *sensus communis*, all individuals in their physical and sensory existence gain access to a commonly shared world through an individual subjective sensibility. Thus, following Arendt, the political does not begin with factual problems and differences (such as the distinction between rational and irrational), but rather with the possibility of living together at all. This position corresponds well to the project of our essay as a whole, namely, to question some of the binary distinctions introduced customarily into the study of politics and affect. According to Arendt, the core of the political does not lie in actions, but rather in that public sphere to which these actions refer, a sphere that gives every action space and meaning (cf. Grotkopp 2017: 59–60). It is in this sphere that actions (as well as works of art) become visible in the first place.

As Arendt emphasizes, works of art depend for their existence on being accessible to communication – on expressing something in terms that are "generally communicable" (Kant as quoted in Arendt 1992: 63). This communication is

nothing other than the realm of public discourse constituted by the activity of judgment. Since this judgment always implies others, spectators – who are rendering judgment – exist only in the plural. And the only thing these multiple spectators share is their ability to judge. The rendering of judgments (without prematurely equating political and aesthetic judgment), then, has to be regarded as a prerequisite for the emergence of a sense of commonality upon which a community can potentially be based. The encounter between audio-visual images and an audience can create a public sphere, in which a plurality of differing and potentially conflicting aesthetic judgments coalesce around a shared aesthetic experience.

What follows from this is that processes of community-building can easily come into conflict with each other. The example of *Rage* demonstrates this: competing descriptions of "one and the same" film as either racist, a bearer of truth, or a complex work of art, testifies to the coexistence of emphatically divergent ways to make sense of aesthetic experience. This divergence, in turn, corresponds to conflicting senses of commonality. The affective experience provided by a film's dramatic structure does not determine a specific reading of the film's narrative, let alone a political statement about the social relevance of depicted fictional events. The political potential of cinematic images therefore does not lie in the representation of more or less desirable models for living together. Rather, it lies in the way such models are experienced affectively and evaluated emotionally through aesthetic judgments. In this way, such models are made publicly accessible – and contestable. In the encounter between screen and audience, a (potentially public) space of experience emerges in which the film's manner of unfolding a fictional world is referred back to the concrete social and cultural circumstances in which the spectators' lived-bodies are situated.

The creation of such a space depends on an act of appropriation (de Certeau 1984), in which seemingly passive consumers take the products provided by an all-pervasive capitalist system to bring forth something that is potentially new. Such an appropriation can respond to the composition of affective intensities inherent in a film's staging; it can aim at emphasizing the plurality of perspectives offered by a film's poetic strategies; or it can attempt to highlight one specific perspective over several possible others. Such is the case with the label "Turkish German cinema" and with most approaches that operate within its discursive logic. This comprises not only those approaches that follow a more or less easily identifiable political agenda (left or right); also, the majority of academic discourse effectively works to objectify the cinematic movement-image by treating it as a text and making it say something. With the help of specific practices of "professional vision" (Goodwin 1994), sensory phenomena are made readable and utilizable for a number of purposes, not least of all the constitution of (professional, but also

cultural and political) communities. This procedure of objectification involves arresting the image and evaluating it according to its represented content. This content may be a narrative (a young criminal Turk harassing a German family), a model of sociality (Güneli), or a structure of racism (Figge) – in each case, the act of actually perceiving these audiovisual movement-images and being affected by them is cancelled out and disappears from the analysis. Aesthetic judgment is transformed into the interpretation of a political message.

The term "Turkish German cinema" lends itself to projects that, wittingly or unwittingly, enforce a certain idea about what the reality of Turkish-German social relations looks like, and how it should (or should not) be shown on the screen. However, defending a film like *Rage* against the charge of racism by demonstrating its aesthetic complexity can only serve to reinstate the divide between a supposedly enlightened academic discourse and the public sphere. This approach is doomed to fail because it misunderstands the nature of the public sphere as a rational exchange of arguments – which is precisely the model we aim to challenge with our collection of vignettes. Such an approach does not recognize that the cinematic image does not harbour a definite truth but depends on being affectively embodied and appropriated by spectators.

In contrast to this stance, focusing on the affective basis of aesthetic judgment suspends the objectification of cinematic movement-images and makes it possible to consider their unique way of shaping our fantasies: by addressing us not only as cultural and social beings, but at the same time as bodies that affect and can be affected. An analysis based on this principle will focus on the way cinematic images become entangled with diverse media practices of appropriation and objectification. These practices can themselves be describes as affective, as they not only rely on the embodiment of affective intensities but also aim to evoke feelings of outrage, approval, fear, or pleasure. From this perspective, the activity of making aesthetic judgments does not only fulfil the function of (re-) producing social distinctions. It also points to the multiple and often contradictory ways through which people inhabit shared worlds and make sense of their experience. Reducing it to the first function would ignore the affective potential – the potential for creating something unforeseeable – inherent in the encounter between screen and audience.

The affective navigation of felt contradictions – that is, the activity of rendering judgments – is relevant not only with regard to works of art. Moreover, it becomes political not only in the form of a pronounced conflict between different communities. As the next section shows, the case of religious communities provides a powerful medium for the negotiation of affective dissonances. Organized religion offers not only advice on preferred attitudes towards the world, but also a

set of affective practices through which these attitudes might be embodied and shared.

DOING JUSTICE TO GOD AND THE WORLD – A SHIA RITUAL IN CONFLICT

A young Shia sheik is about to finish his sermon. He was talking about the emotional challenges and duties that those who are well-off face towards the existence of others living in dire poverty. He then starts to read out one of the traditional stories about Imam Hussein, prophet Mohammad´s grandson who died in the year 680 for his faith in the battle of Karbala (today Iraq). The story is sad, but also inspiring for recounting acts of adamant faith and sacrifice in light of domination and oppression. This brings the sheik to conclude and emphasize how important stories like these are to bind the Shia community together emotionally. He then starts to sing in Arabic, his community joins in and they say a prayer together. Now the traditional lamentation of *Matam* starts. Around fifty young women and men dressed in dark clothing stand up. A man comes to the front and starts to sing a song of lament in Farsi. The community again joins him in soft tones striking their right fist or flat hand on their chests. The room fills with the muffled rhythm of the chest-beating, the wailing melody, and timid sights of moaning, accompanied by gently moving bodies.

This is a scene from a young urban and multicultural Shia community in New York City that observes one of their most important rituals: the ten-day long *Muharram*. As any other religious ritual, enacting the *Muharram* not only means reproducing a symbolically rich and long-standing narrative. It also means working towards specific emotional experiences. In the case of the *Muharram* this traditionally is the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, and comprises a multi-layered repertoire of emotions: from mourning loss and praising God, to cultivating the strength to fight injustices.

But what happens now if – as in this case – a young urban Shia-American community tries to intertwine and connect this age-old emotional repertoire of commemoration with contemporary economic inequality? One might be inclined to think that from felt injustices in the past it is a rather short and easy path to a staunch critique on the widening socio-economic gap in the present. But, as this case study will show, in this community, performing the *Muharram* under the topic of economic inequality rather gives rise to an interactional dramaturgy of emotional conflict and contradiction – ultimately hindering the community from articulating economic inequality as a blatant injustice of contemporary society that requires action.

The community is part of an inter-religious centre for Muslim encounters at a New York university. In contrast to many ethnically organized Muslim communities in the city, the centre practices and cherishes a multicultural and inclusive approach to community service. Members come from a vast variety of ethnic, confessional, national and linguistic background. Being students or young professionals from a middle to upper-middle class background, most of them are first- or second-generation Muslims with South Asian migration background. By constantly trying to connect the Islamic traditions with everyday experiences, the centre also aims at building a community for young Muslims that enables them to experience their religion as part of American culture – an understanding many young American Muslims struggle with due to discrimination in post 9/11 America (Kabir 2014; O'Brien 2017). So even though the imam and most members are Sunni, the centre also serves to a significant Shia community, giving them the opportunity to observe their Shia specific rituals such as the *Muharram*.

The *Muharram* goes back to the so-called *Battle of Karbala* in the year 680 AD. For many, this battle also marks the definitive break between Shiites and Sunnis of Islam. In the battle was an encounter between the two concurring parties of the right to succeed the prophet Mohammad. Within ten days, the far more powerful second caliph of the Umayyad dynasty Yazid I killed prophet Mohammad's grandson Imam Hussein together with his family and companions. Both Sunnis and Shiites regard the dead as martyrs. But since Shiites consider Imam Hussein as the legitimate successor to Prophet Mohammad, the battle and its subsequent narratives play a far more central and tragic role in Shia history.

Shia Muslims traditionally commemorate the tragedy of Karbala each year at the first ten days of the Islamic month of *Muharram* culminating on its tenth day in the *Day of Ashura*. In this American student community, observing the *Muharram* means gathering for these ten days in the evening hours for around four to five hours. Following the bottom-up approach of the centre, the ritual is organized from members for members. This way, they aspire to create an experimental, inclusive and participatory observance of the *Muharram*, adapting and embedding the traditional elements of the ritual to the American and multicultural setting of the community. For example, in order to really affect the community members, they perform most of the practices of the commemorations in English. At the same time, some recitations remain in Arabic and members can use other languages for their contributions such as Farsi, Urdu or Hindi.

Traditionally, the *Muharram* involves several different practices. Besides the acts of collective praying and mourning, a major part of the ritual is also reserved for aesthetic and artistic performances. These commonly include big public processions, theatre plays and recitations of poems that display and recount the

tragedy of Karbala. The New York community follows this idea at the beginning of their gatherings. Members recite traditional poems, but also share self-written poems and other reflections about how the *Muharram* informs their lives today. Furthermore, the ritual also serves to transmit and debate religious knowledge. To follow this tradition and to keep up with the experimental and participatory aspiration, the New York community chooses to hold the *Muharram* each year in light of a specific topic. Each year they invite a different Islamic clergyman who gives a series of sermons on a chosen topic and discusses it with the members. That year they invited a young American Shia scholar who suggested to observe the ritual in the light of "poverty – a challenge for humanity" – a topic whose socio-political dimension is readily apparent. The question arises: How does the community enact both the narrative of Muharram and find an answer to this "challenge of humanity"?

During the ten days, an unequal world emerged as part of recounting the stories of the *Muharram*, from Shia theological reflections as well as from the community member's own experience on economic privilege and poverty. Some members, like Cecilia, a young Hispanic-American convert, included inequality in their artistic contributions. In Cecilia's self-written poem she compared the "revolutionary personalities" of Che Guevara and Imam Hussein and explained how both talk to her "revolutionary heart" for their unconditional commitment to justice. Che Guevara worked against various forms of "isms, capitalism, imperialism, colonialism", whereas Iman Hussein together with his companions proved tremendous courage to fight for the cause of god against a giant regime of oppression. But whereas Che Guevara only saw this world, Imam Hussein's fight for justice was ultimately motivated by his "love" for "Allah" and thus intensified this "lucha" by adding a transcendental spirit to it. Referring to Che Guevara and connecting his legacy to the symbols of the Muharram, Cecilia evoked ideas such as solidarity with the poor, equality and radical social change, and filled the room with a semantic of revolution, indignation, and injustice as well as a call for action.

Most important were, however, the lectures from the sheik. Every day he illuminated a different theological aspect of economic inequality which then became the basis for follow-up discussions and chats during dinner time. The sheik also contributed to an affection of injustice and indignation towards inequality. Being foremost governed by this-worldly and un-Islamic principles, he said, egoism and materialism would cause a tremendous suffering both for rich people who suffer from empty hearts and for the poor who struggle with hardship. Several times, the sheik called for action. Muslims would have a religious duty to give, he reminded the audience. This would entail alm-giving (*zakat*) and cultivating compassion for the poor.

At one point, Karim, a young Shia student from the centre, shared his thoughts and feelings:

I don´t know… it´s just so horrifying to see all the suffering in the world, when I am back in India, you see the kids on the streets, … in lumps, … but also here in America, such a wealthy nation, but … how to deal with all the beggars? Working families buying their dinner with food stamps. ... I mean… […] we as Muslims praise giving. But also, where is God, … I don´t know.

Karim expressed his negative emotions in the face of suffering, which he recognizes in either bodily exposure to scarcity or an unworthy standard of living in a wealthy context. He further raised the question of responsibility to act and connected it with the Muslim practice of distribution. Articulating an unequal world as an injustice meant for the community to acknowledge at one point that the world was imperfect, to identify power relations and violated norms, and to address responsibility. This also filled the ritual with negative feelings about the world, such as anger, frustration or despair for the felt injustice. However, Karim ended his reflection with: "Where is God, ... I don´t know." This points to an orientation which was also present during the ritual and which encompassed emotions, ideas and norms about the world that thwarted the indignation. For example, even though the sheik condemned the current state of the world, he, at the same time, presented theological ideas that relativized inequality as unjust. For instance, he said that an ideal Islamic order also knows inequality: "Poor and rich are both people of God. The goal is never equality, as for example in socialism."

Furthermore, notions of God as almighty and merciful were also important symbols during the ritual, but they attenuated the negative feelings towards the world. At one point the sheik said:

We cannot always see the wisdom in [the hardship of poverty]. But we know: He is all-powerful and all-merciful. He is all-wise. So, if he has chosen to cause some pain, then I should try to understand it.

God is almighty because everything derives ultimately from him, including the inequality. And he is merciful, because he loves his creation and thus ultimately everybody can experience God´s love and mercy if he or she only follows the path of god. But seen from this perspective, inequality turns from an issue of injustice to a foremost spiritual challenge. Thus, engaging in the unequal world was for the community constantly connected with praising God in his almightiness and mercifulness, and focusing on the spiritual connection to him. This orientation towards

God also brought with it a different set of feelings. Anger, indignation or despair were then not righteous emotions towards God's creation. Instead, love, acceptance and cultivating spirituality appeared as ways to engage salvation in the hereafter. In this effort, however, lay a different affective mode, one of reconciliation and accepting the conditions for what they are; that is, a zeal to cultivate a positive attitude towards the world, being compassionate, thankful and fulfilling the religious duty of giving according to one's social standing in the world. The sheik concluded: "We have the choice to become [these] spiritual people. That is the goal. God's system is not unbalanced. Social justice is important, but more important is to become godly, spiritual people. Our goal is to become godly people".

How to think and feel about inequality as a Shia? How does the faith require action in an American context? Many times in Shia history, the justice-sensitive ideas of the *Muharram* have played a role in political strategies (Aghaie 2004). But this small community of Shia Americans hesitated to perform the *Muharram* as a collective affective moment of injustice towards inequality. Interactive situations are multi-vocal and complex. In that sense, a gathering like the Muharram can never be reduced to one specific collective meaning, emotion or problem that produces social order and coordination (Goffman 1964). However, concentrating here on the political and its interplay with affect and emotions, our suggestion is to recognize how engaging inequality through both the prism of social justice and a spiritual relation to God, made this ritual an ambivalent one: On the one hand, a collective expression of indignation and unease and, on the other hand, one of love, gracefulness and reconciliation with the world. A consequence of doing justice to both orientations and affective modes ultimately hindered the community from expressing a clear-cut judgment on economic inequality as an insupportable injustice.

This collective incapacity or dilemma of two rather contradictory emotional regimes is known as the problem of theodicy, and lies at the heart of many religious traditions: How can suffering happen if God is good and almighty? In explaining this dilemma, an urban Shia American community is likely to have more mechanisms in play than this theological problem. It is also likely that the overall individualistic culture (Bellah et al. 1996) or the fact of being a discriminated minority (Grewal 2013) may prevent the community from wanting to sound too political. A missing voice of injustice might also have to do with class and one's own privileges. However, ultimately, this ambivalent discourse hindered the community from creating a moral and affective common ground for collective action.

This account shows how a multitude of subtle emotions, idealized norms, as well as perceptions of the world may create contradicting or parallel voices,

symbols, and orientations that block a straightforward judgment on a political matter. However, such collective expressions should not be condemned as 'irrational', even less so due to their religious dimension. It appears more appropriate to us to read these observations and interpretations of the Muharram as a common everyday struggle to bring affect and ideas to awareness and to find the right words and vocabularies. It proves the multi-layeredness of affective engagements with the world, and thus of the political itself – which sometimes comes with conflict, speechlessness or contradiction.

The Affective Impulse to Protest

Social movements theorists often take for granted the assumption that political protests result from rational grievances that translate into people's readiness to engage in such movements. Even when studying the role of emotions in protest movements, they often rationalize these affective and emotional dynamics (Gould 2009). In juxtaposition, activists often describe their participation in such protest movements as affective impulses. Following an affective societies approach to the political, an understanding of how reason and affect work together is needed in order to view the protestor not only as a rational actor but also as a thinking, sensing, feeling and remembering being. This could help in examining how reason and affect intertwine in processes of politicization, and opens up a new way of thinking about the seemingly sudden political impulse to participate in a protest, especially under authoritarian regimes where organized political action is not always possible.

The following is a data excerpt from an Egyptian activist detailing the moment when he first heard the chants of protestors and decided to join the mass protests of 25th of January 2011.

I woke up to the sound of many people shouting as one. Not shouting but chanting, a very strong chant. A chant I have not heard before. I did not know what they were saying exactly, but of course, I knew what they wanted. I felt my entire body shaking and I was moved. Their sound was as beautiful as the call for Eid prayers. But with Eid prayers, you can get lazy and miss it but going down this time was mandatory. It was the fastest I would ever jump out of bed and maybe the happiest. In a blink, I was jumping out of bed looking out of the window at the people and opening my closet to grab something to wear. I opened the closet and stood there, what should I wear? I do not have revolutionary clothes… I put on my clothes and ran to the door… My mom stopped me: "S. do not hurt yourself, you know

how much I need you". I promised her not to get hurt but I did not know if I would be able to keep that promise… I went down.

What makes one jump out of bed to participate in a protest? What makes one run towards danger and not away from it? How much rational thinking was involved in this decision? There is definitely sensing (hearing the chant), feeling (moved by the chanting), a corporeal reaction (his body shaking), remembering (the sound of Eid prayers), knowing (what the people want even if he cannot understand exactly what they are saying) and a momentarily decision to act (he jumped out of bed and went down). This is just a sample of many other narratives that describe the decision to join the mass protests as an 'impulse'. An impulse that we are not able to fully comprehend, but which was nevertheless experienced as 'rational', even 'logical'. Below is another quote from a protestor that highlights the interplay between rationality and emotionality during the protests.

Taking to the streets was an impulse. I was there and I saw it and I understood the logic behind it. Those were people who were facing death fearlessly. It's like you did some sort of filtration and put the most decent people together in one place and gave them high hopes, empowerment and collective hope and that affected those around them as well. I do not think of this as romanticizing; it was pure logic. If a social experiment was conducted where this was all repeated, they will definitely create a Utopia. For me, there were magical moments. But it was also logical. People didn't take to the streets to demand the downfall of the regime, but then someone started chanting and everyone joined in the chants. People were collectively encouraging and empowering each other. And of course, the courage of one individual is different from that of 10 people. Ten individual cowards can walk together then suddenly together they become very courageous. At the beginning, we really didn't know what will happen. There were no guarantees to our safety of any kind. Afterwards, when the danger and threat of gatherings and sit-ins being attacked or dispersed passed, everything was different from how it was during the 18 days. People took to the streets and found safety in being together.

The central question becomes: What makes one run away from or towards action? One thinks, senses, feels and acts, and sometimes concurrently. However, what if one, drawing from one's memory and relevant pool of information, does not have the corresponding association? It is sensible to assume that one simply would not move. To be clear, the argument is not about the ignorant masses who only need to be educated to move. Rather, the point is that not everyone can see the car (sense); and even if they do, they do not necessarily feel the same way about it (danger); and even if they do, they might think and act differently based on their

memories and varying pools of information. The protestors saw the car, but they did not walk away; rather, they walked right towards it. Perhaps this was the case because they perceived a greater danger (Mubarak's regime), or because they were simply called to action drawing from their memories and relevant pools of information, realizing that this was the opportunity and that they needed to act. All happened within an instance. The protestors saw the car coming and acted intuitively, not irrationally, but beyond reflected reason. This is what makes political uprisings so unpredictable, especially under authoritarian regimes where organized actions are suppressed.

This is not at all meant to suggest that a political impulse is a sudden relapse of judgment. The following is a narrative about a march of protestors who had to travel from one governorate to Cairo to join the revolution. Some of them have never left their villages before; some of them did not even know where Tahrir square is.

> While we were trying to enter Cairo, the roads were blocked, so we were dropped off by the exit of the ring road. Someone asked where we were going and if we were going to Tahrir Square. Most people answered that they were heading there and there was a suggestion that we should go there in a march. And indeed a march started from there until Shubra metro station. We took the subway until Sadat metro station. A lot of people did not know Tahrir Square; they went there for the sake of the revolution, they didn't normally go there or go to Cairo in the first place.

These excerpts indicate that the temporality of the political impulse to act is variable. It could be a momentary impulse, or it could motivate actors to move beyond all obstacles and fears to participate in political action. It all depends on the intensity of the moment and, as the excerpts have also shown, on the relational dynamics of the collective.

Hence, there is a need for an understanding of political impulses that goes beyond rational thinking, and that can help us learn more about political action. We need to take into consideration that the political actor is not just a rational agent, but a thinking, sensing, feeling and remembering being. Moreover, we need to account for the crucial role context and memory play in informing our political decisions. This allows us to see the constitutive contextuality and temporality of an impulse, which is central in explaining the unpredictability of political uprisings.

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The felt quality of norms is part of their affective power; it is how they become entrenched and internalized. Therefore, contesting hegemonic norms can be a painful process: One might reject norms with which one disagrees on an affective level, at times without rationalizing the process. In this context, emotions might be an emancipatory tool forms contest dominant norms, and affective, bodily sensations might form the foundation of collective political action. At the same time, however, emotions might be used as a way to regulate and enforce norms. For instance, shaming can be an effective tool to oust those who do not adhere to social norms. The interplay between emotions, affect and norms is part and parcel of their creation, perpetuation, subversion, and contestation. Affect, emotions and norms can constitute and reinforce one another, or affect and emotions can be used as a tool to dismantle normative frameworks or to recreate new ones with different affective entanglements.

Starting this chapter with a second look at the binary opposition between normativity and affect that informs some powerful traditions in social theory and critique, our contributions inquired into these messy and sometimes rather subtle entanglements. In this sense, we understand the practices of judgment and contestation, which were at the centre of these analyses, as practices that attempt to make sense of these entanglements. This should not be reduced to purely rational or discursive reactions, however, as if sense would exclusively refer to a rational operation after affect. Instead, to sense a situation or to get a feeling for something from the start involves the negotiation of norms. Feeling one's way, in this regard, implies a complex dynamic of sense-making; it might mean to enact normativity, to silently struggle with it, or to affectively reflect upon it.

The affective life of norms appeared in various ways throughout this chapter. In the case of monolingual affect, it made itself felt as an elephant in the room; something actors could not quite put a finger on or articulate, but which nevertheless made its normative force felt in the discussion. In fact, this feeling provided a structuring element for the negotiation of aesthetic value. In our theoretical argument, judgment also figured as a way of forming communities through aesthetic experience. The case of "Turkish German cinema", however, showed how the politics of labelling and the polarized public discussion about migration foreclose these situations of aesthetic experience. Instead, making sense here implies discursive frameworks of identity and tries to align judgments accordingly. This is an example of how the aesthetic dimension of judgment, which might assemble heterogeneous communities of taste, might also become effectively disentangled from the workings of normativity. In a similar way, the Shia ritual of Muharram

also entailed a fraught relation between affective experience and discursive articulation: Here, it was rather the case that strong normative claims – claims of social critique in a particular vocabulary – were not made due to the actor's conflicting affective engagement with the normative frameworks of religion and social justice. Whereas the affective practices of contestation and critique, in this regard, lie in the shared experience of this negotiation and its complex sense of community, contestation and protest can also have a more impulsive side. The impulse to protest, in the case of the Egyptian activist, was crucially involved in lifting bodies up and getting them on the streets, thereby making a strong case for the visceral and material dimensions of normativity.

Coming back to the politics of affective societies, our reflections on the affective life of norms, despite their very different foci, have something in common. They are all inquiries into that which is not yet articulated, which is somehow foreclosed or unfolds a ghostly presence. As such, they locate politics and the political within the social practices of judgment and contestation, and in their relation to normativity. Our argument attends to the messiness and unevenness of these relations, to the attempts at making sense and to how sense can be imposed on a situation. These foci are highly relevant to the diagnoses of contemporary crisis discussed in the introduction. Rather than focussing on the notion of an increase in the intensity of affect, as if it could be located on a quantitative scale, our aim was to inquire into the various qualities of affect as a form of relation – a relation that always implies a political dimension.

This includes a good deal of elaborate silence, of non-articulation or of sensed, rather than well-defined obligations. Simply put: The affectivity and messiness of norms is not something positive, as the traditional juxtaposition between 'norms' and 'feelings' might imply. Likewise, it has not been our attempt to debunk the workings of normativity by showing that, behind its orderly appearance (Weber's "steel-hard casing"), normativity would prove to be affective and lively. This would reinstate the model of critique that favours 'affective life' over 'non-emotional norms'. Just as we are skeptical towards the crisis-diagnosis of a dramatic increase of affect, and would rather look for a change in quality, a change in ways of making sense, with regards to the politics of affective societies, we are also cautious of this post-romantic model. After all, the cases in this chapter show that it is exactly their 'affective life' that makes norms so pervasive and powerful. This goes for monolingualism just as it goes for solidarity.