

Regressive Politics and Beyond: Towards a Revised Theory of Collective Learning

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Abstract

Why do reactions to a certain constellation of variables sometimes take the shape of an inclusive and democratic collective actor, whereas reactions to similar constellations of factors result in authoritarian and regressive actors? This is our starting question. To answer it, we propose a revised theory of collective learning which draws on Habermas' classic proposal, but shift the focus (at least partly) away from argumentation and deliberation towards storytelling, towards the narrative form and its implications: they organise feelings, shape the social bond, emplot events, actors and objects by resorting to recurrent modes of emplotment/narrative genres, and prescribe actors how to behave. Our hypothesis is thus that tragic or (better) ironic stories as well as stories which are scripted in a network governance script have the potential to facilitate collective learning processes, while romantic or comic stories tend to block the possibility of collective learning. These ideas are *indicated* by drawing on examples from present-day left- and right wing politics.

Keywords collective learning, public sphere, narrative, populism, communicative action