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Living in the Age of Anger.
Representing 'Negative Solidarities' in Contemporary Global Culture.
An Introductory Note

1. History Accelerated

Our 'call for papers' for the *Special Issue* of *Anglistica* on "*Living in the Age of Anger. Representing 'Negative Solidarities' in Contemporary Global Culture*", went out in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021 horror that unfolded when the US Congress was attacked by a mob of Trump supporters. The January 6 insurrection represents not only a political and democratic crisis in the United States, but reflects the ominous rise in authoritarian populism and a diminishing civil society, globally, one fragmented by illiberal forces. This general climate of rage and misdirected hostility and commensurate violence has become a universal affliction affecting democratic societies globally, and one that has been presciently described in Pankaj Mishra's influential 2017 publication, *Age of Anger*. The subtitle of Mishra's work, *A History of the Present*, chronicles a paroxysmal increase of events historically and globally, that individually and collectively convulse the precarious order of our globalized millennium, now into its second decade. In the *Preface* to his book, Mishra recalls the historical context of his work that was produced following the 2014 Indian elections that brought the Hindu supremacist, Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (the BJP) to power in one of the largest democracies in the world; the British Tories' anti-immigrant and nationalist shift to agitate for a withdrawal from the European Union leading to the June 2016 referendum in favor of Brexit; and by the time his book went to print in 2017, Donald Trump had been elected to power in November 2016 as the 45th President of the United States of America.

Our own work on this *Special Issue*, has occurred in the context of three more historically significant factors (in addition to the January 6 insurrection), each a catalyst for actions and reactions pertinent to the hate politics our authors elucidate: the global pandemic, the SARS Covid19 coronavirus further aggravated by anti-scientific factionalisms and conspiracy theories; the soaring threat of a global climate crisis that accentuates socio-political and economic anxiety, violent pessimism, and irrational superstition; and the pugnacious Russian invasion of Ukraine with its new waves of aggressive ultra-nationalism and a threat of nuclear confrontation, at the doors of Europe.

Taken together, the aforementioned events have clearly shaken the edifices of liberal democracies, they continue to foster an ever harsher climate of intolerance and constant turmoil. The accelerated pace of undemocratic history that had set Mishra's book in motion, seems to have acquired an even more frenetic pace; it appears that we may be frantically heading to a possible and perhaps even an imminent breakdown of the democratic consensus. Fear and anxiety, connected with a sense of frustration and powerlessness, seem to predominate and mark a crisis that imperils social pacts at large, in a violent way.

2. The Quick End of the 'End of History'

Three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the possibility of a global sociopolitical model premised on liberalization, democratic progress, and international cooperation has long since proved as much fleeting as delusive. Substantiated by the predominance of free market and a corresponding

and inevitable economic growth guaranteed to all, the 1989 final crumbling of the Cold War order was initially viewed as the great victory of western liberal democracies and matched two conjoined demises: a supposed 'end of history' going hand in hand with a supposed 'end of ideologies. The age of global discontent was soon to ensue and everything went tragically wrong.

The 2001 attack on the World Trade Center triggered a dramatically different system of demises. The collapse of the Twin Towers, with its price in human lives, signified, in symbolic reverberation, the ruinous fall of that very same illusion of free commerce and liberalism as vehicles capable of assuring humankind an automatic access to secularism and general wellbeing. The metaphoric flag of neoliberalism hailing individual freedom, individual enterprise, and individual happiness – the holy trinity of the westernization of the world invested in the mission of unifying the future of human *(non)*history – had to be lowered and arguably furled away. Not even the 'Clash of Civilizations' mantra, with its gross oppositional setting of the global South against the global North, or East against West, with a manufactured binary of religion vs reason or even barbarism vs civilization (*sic*), that is still voiced in daily populist propaganda, has never been able to seriously address this contemporary Great Discontent.

3. Revised Modernity

With the rise of autocrats in liberal democracies that now appear to trend towards an authoritarian system, the western liberal idea of modernity as a pathway to enlightened progress appears to be atrophying in front of our very eyes. Instead, what we see is a revisionism of such liberal values; and hence our search for the causes of our age of anger pervasive in capitalist democracies (that have only theoretically, and not in praxis, been grounded on inclusive and pluralist principles). Sociologists, economists and political scientists have regularly warned that access to resources, social mobility and real freedom of choice is not equally attainable by all (Durkheim, Homer-Dixon, Nussbaum, Sachs, Sen) under the current economic and political structures. Consequently, historical and cultural counternarratives about universalism and liberalism have concentrated on highlighting all the harshness of certain aspects of modernity from colonialism and the slave trade to corporate greed, from racial determinism to imperialist militarism, and from estrangement from nature to ravenous exploitation of the land, blind developmentalism, etc. (Hall, Gilroy, Bhabha, Chakrabarty, Spivak, Mbembe, Appiah, Ghosh to name a few).

What is unique and significant in Mishra's historical analysis is the focus on a zeitgeist of distrust and contempt that has become socially pervasive and permissive. Mishra identifies how the sense of exclusion and frustration is disseminated among a large majority of the unprivileged (whether real or imagined), seething in resentment and stuck in perpetual transition to a modernity which has proved elusive or unable to keep its promises of social empowerment and economic affluence.

Not only has there been inequity and disparity in access to wealth, health, education and social status in both the Global North and the Global South domestically within the state, but there has also been a resurgence of a new global disorder – a new 'cold war' – with the muscle flexing of Russia's Putin in the international arena. The rise of far-right extremists and violently anti-immigrant neo-Nazi groups on both sides of the Atlantic is a consequence of the rise of autocratic, chauvinistic and authoritarian trends in liberal democracies. They give rise to the specter of an onslaught on civil liberties, religious and sexual rights, women's freedom and minority rights. Indeed, police violence, racial violence, gender violence, all facilitated by easy access to assault weapons are likewise

propelling the privatization and socialization of aggression,[1] rendering our world more dangerous, and thus calling for those securitarian answers that in turn feed new forms of state-sponsored repressive violence.[2] As Mishra illustrated, the beginning of the twentieth century has by and large marked the birth of a new faith in the redeeming power of violence while forms of solidarities, prevalently grown on the negative base of common hate and shared 'ressentiment', tend to become dominant forms of social aggregation.

4. Negative Solidarities

The concept of 'negative solidarity', upon which this *Special Issue* rests, was coined by Hanna Arendt as early as 1957 (well before the current use of the term globalization) in "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?"[3] where she reasoned that an improved technology of European origin had brought the world together in a globalized unit kept together by fear rather than by responsibility. She understood humankind, for the first time in history, as something that for all preceding generations had been no more than a concept or ideal, suddenly becoming a sort of "urgent reality" (82). But this humankind was not deriving its existence from "the dreams of the humanists or the reasoning of the philosophers" (82); instead, it had not found its cement in politics, its creation was due "almost exclusively to the technical development of the Western world" (82). Arendt, moreover, was convinced that the poisonous mix of fear and technology would not be a guarantor of a common secure future: "Technology, having provided the unity of the world, can just as easily destroy it and the means of global communication were designed side by side with means of possible global destruction". (83) While Arendt directed her attention to the nuclear threat, ("This negative solidarity … based on the fear of global destruction"), she was prophetic in understanding the paralyzing effect of a pervasive state of negative solidarity, as she suspected that its nihilistic consequences would prove in the long run a dangerous trigger of "political apathy, isolationist nationalism, or desperate rebellion against all powers that be" (83).

Today, a very similar burden seems to weigh on the shoulders of many isolated individuals, who deprived of the old sustaining bonds supplied by previous organic communities, experiment new convergences in this prevailing feeling of ineffectuality taking the form of suspect and generalized resentment: everybody against everybody else, the lonely wolf against the crowd, the mob against the casual target, majorities or weak minorities equally the goal of manifold forms of aggression. As the delusions of neoliberalism become more apparent, the result has been less an urgency to reform the system, and more a generalized anger towards anyone constructed and construed as connected one way or another with our sense of meaninglessness, powerlessness, and inadequacy. Since the old forms of politics seem completely deprived of their capacity to offer solutions or future perspectives to this general sense of disposability, an escalation of the enraged sense of injustice pervades society and fuels the current predominant sway of hatred of everybody towards everybody else. We are indeed experiencing a new mode of reacting. Not only a particular climate and social disposition, more a

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[1] See on this, for example, J. Peter Burgess, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of New Security Studies* (London: Routledge, 2010); Robert O. Keohane, "The Globalization of Informal Violence, Theories of World Politics, and the 'Liberalism of Fear'", *Dialogue IO*, 1.1 (2002), 29-43.

[2] See for example John R. Hibbing, "Populists, Authoritarians, or Securitarians? Policy Preferences and Threats to Democratic Governance in the Modern Age", *Global Public Policy and Governance*, 2 (2022), 47-65.

[3] "Karl Jaspers. Citizen of the World?" appeared for the first time in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers (The Library of Living Philosophers)* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957). The text is now collected in Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1968). The quotes here are from this edition.

'structure of feeling' in Raymond Williams'[4] terms, an embodied experience under the sway of deep seated affects, and what is more, more than ever before, amplified by a technology of communication which has restricted the world and opened new ontological dimensions.

5. Hate in Social Media, Appropriative Mimicry and Scapegoating

Technology has dramatically invested (and infested) the world of social communication exponentially, by expanding the dimension of the public sphere, changing the way of inhabiting the social scene, and thereby enhancing every kind of negative solidarities. If indeed it is true that the digital revolution has cleared a space for more intense opportunities of social participation, it has adversely led to a new technical proficiency that has more often than not paved the way for incivility, verbal aggression, and unchecked forms of social bullying. While offering relief to isolation and frustrated anxiety, digital media have facilitated by themselves the unleashing of the wider ever range of 'excitable speech'[5] towards innumerable possible targets of discrimination and intolerance. Anonymity and lack of accountability have helped develop a sense of omnipotent agency towards any perceived 'other' construed as the enemy. Screen culture has unquestionably augmented the human penchant to envy and resentful comparison, finding in digital platforms new environments for very old elementary social mechanisms of scapegoating and mimic desire.

Appropriative mimicry, the logic of emulation that interlocks fascination with rivalry, or the even more archaic social mechanism of scapegoating, are indeed more and more becoming the defining features of social media communication. Online socialization has unexpectedly validated the insights of René Girard,[6] inspired at first by the observation of pre-industrial societies. The conception of humans as 'tribals' whose desires are triggered and modulated by the desires of others, and whose hatred is sparked off by the necessity to find a guilty party for their sense of humiliation and angst, however applicable to old forms of social organization is so much more apparent and relevant in the new digital public sphere.

What had commenced in the eighteenth-century salons as civic discourse with face to face urbane and civilizing conversations, aimed at finding the best options in pre-political confrontations, are now substituted in their digital manifestation, by every sort of racist, sexist, and chauvinist aggressions camouflaged under the guise of personal opinions. Hate of elites, sex and gender discrimination, the demonization of the other, of the migrant, of the disabled are all paradoxically based on a mimetic, frustrated, desire for social status. The seemingly virtual equality of digital media becomes the ideal environment for raging against the actual unequal distribution of wealth, power and social relevance which makes people go through status anxiety imagine a status angst and feel deprived of what they perceive as their due, in a society that promises everything to everybody but doesn't honor its advertised pledges. The model in an advertisement is admired in that s/he shows what is important to have, what is desirable; the model is hated because s/he displays what is denied to the yearning subject. Mimetic desire becomes mimetic rivalry. Enmeshed in media platforms, the craving follower becomes the enraged everyman who sooner or later metamorphoses into the hater looking for targets. At the other end of the social ladder, the foreigner, the refugee, the disabled, women and LGBTQ+ people are seen as threatening even the lowest standard of social status: 'stealing' jobs, benefiting from the enfeebled welfare state, and thereby emasculating the *pater familias*. Objects of hatred, as always during times of crisis, are so essential whereby the rich and the powerful (the elites) just like

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[4] Anticipating the affective turn in cultural studies, Raymond Williams coined the expression 'structure of feeling' in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1977) to take historically and critically into account the affective elements of consciousness and relationships.

[5] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[6] In particular as developed in *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972) and in *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

the poor and the destitute (the havenots) are both convenient embodiments of the scapegoat. As victims themselves, of neoliberalism, hatemongers find convenient scapegoats in those from a different religion, ethnicity, race, or provenance – such targets for their hate are available everywhere. The basic mechanisms of victimization, historically and mythically examined by Girard, are thus again visibly at play in our contemporary mediatic agora.

6. Storytelling through Facts and Fiction

It is through the affective component of representation that the age of anger can be explored and analyzed. In this *Special Issue* of *Anglistica*, in keeping with the journal's interdisciplinary orientation, we have covered a wide range of geographies and disciplines. We have identified four principal categories that provide multidimensional perspectives on attempting to understand the phenomenon of the age of anger. These are: philosophical reflections on principles (article by Rajesh Shukla); on rhetoric and communication with an emphasis on social media (articles by Marina Niceforo and Heba Ahmed); on fiction and images (articles by Daniela Vitolo; Giuseppe De Riso; and Brian Crim); and on politics and society underscoring facts and actions (articles by Mara Matta, Monia O'Brien Castro and Bradley Bullock).

Rajesh Shukla's contribution to this *Special Issue*, titled "Citizenship, Solidarity, and the Common Good", tackles the disruption of Enlightenment ideals of citizenship and solidarity, in three liberal democratic states – India, Canada, and the United States – due to the unleashing of the architects of the age of anger. Shukla takes three recent social movements, the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, No One is Illegal movement in Canada, and the protests in India against the 2019 Citizenship Protection Act (*sic*), to exemplify three movements of solidarity that are people-driven to counter state-driven actions that fuel the negative solidarities of anger and hatred against minorities. He optimistically argues that reinforcing the virtues of egalitarianism, human rights, equality and justice, despite the hatemongers and violence, one can "envision solidarity in the sense of a complete and compassionate engagement with fellow citizens where one is willing to make some reasonable accommodation for the welfare of others, including noncitizens and immigrants".

Using mathematician Nicolas Taleb's 'Black Swan' theory as a framework to analyze social anxiety, Marina Niceforo, in her contribution to this series, "Soothing the Green Anxiety. A Critical Analysis of Negative Feelings in Social Media Discourses about the Environment", explores 'eco-anxiety' in social media discourse to explain negative solidarities in the age of anger. Niceforo offers "a linguistic assessment of recurrent themes and language patterns in selected posts and comments to the purpose of identifying and textually locating a number of reported negative feelings and emotions". She cleverly integrates qualitative and quantitative methods of social media analyses by deploying Critical Discourse Analysis' *Sketch Engine* tool to Teaghan Hogg's (2021) multidimensional scale for measuring four categories of eco-anxiety and ten consequential symptoms among youths frustrated with the inadequate political and corporate response to addressing the global climate crisis.

Heba Ahmed, in her quantitative study and qualitative analysis, deftly outlines how the global coronavirus pandemic of Covid-19 was weaponized by right-wing Hindu fundamentalists, who espouse the Hindutva (Hinduness) ideology, by castigating the Muslim community as agents of infection and contagion. Hindutva proponents coined the term 'Corona Jihad' to expressly link the vicious virus to Muslims, and especially a religious conference arranged by a Muslim organization, the Tablighi Jamaat. At a time when the Indian government was recalcitrant about testing for Covid positive cases, the social media propelled discourse steered by Hindutva leaders like Adityanath led to a 'misrepresentation' in media reports that "Over 95% of the coronavirus cases reported over the last two days in India have been found to have links with the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi". A

consequence of such negative solidarity was a disinformation campaign that led to the scapegoating of Muslims and the rebranding of the Covid-19 virus as the 'Tablighi virus'.

Daniela Vitolo underscores the misogynistic anger in Pakistan in her case study of the Aurat March (Women's March), in her article "*Mera Jism, Meri Marzi* [my body, my choice]. Claiming the Body, Where 'Body' Is an Obscene Word". Vitolo focuses on the Women's March that has taken place in major cities in Pakistan since 2018, where mostly cosmopolitan and urban women have carved out a public space for protesting against the patriarchy of the predominantly Muslim state and a patriarchal society. Vitolo's study maintains that "the 'negative solidarity' that unites those who condemn the feminist stance can be understood as born from a widely shared fear that liberal feminists may undermine the Pakistani nationalist narrative". The women from the March are castigated by male leaders as having drunk the proverbial Kool Aid of western values, and therefore considered as vulgar and obscene and ergo un-Islamic and anti-Paksitani. Vitolo explores the feminist 'artivism' of three visual artists – Shehzil Malik, Hiba Schahbaz and Misha Japanwala. The Pakistani artists' works celebrate various forms of women's bodies; they thus counter the objectification of the female corpus by the raging 'men of resentment' through their creative 'artivism' (activism through art).

How are queer identity, sexuality, and self-affirmation of marginalized populations in South Asia navigated through socioethnic and neoliberal dynamics, given our age of anger, is a problem that Giuseppe De Riso tackles through the lens of two novels: Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). De Riso undertakes an analysis of the complex duality of the oppression of economic inequities with social discrimination and scapegoating, that reinforces a magnified masculinity in a heternonormative society. The rapid and rampant urbanization and westernization of Sri Lanka (in *Funny Boy*) that boasted of "American-style supermarkets" and "exotic food like hamburgers", De Riso writes, stood in sharp contrast to the hordes of the homeless. A similar dynamic is identified in India where the nation had prostituted itself to neoliberalism, and then mobilized the instrument of the state, the police, to 'clean the streets' of slums and the poor. Both novels have protagonists who are caught in the interstices of a predictable political and ethno-religious conflicts: the Sinhalese majority against the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, and the fundamentalist Hindu majority against Muslims with the pretext of rescuing a temple that had been alleged to have been replaced by a mosque. It is in the capacity of storytelling to create an antidote by means of empathy by redirecting emotions towards understanding and compassion and realizing a form of communication in order to be able to counteract.

In his exploration of two works by the brilliant spy novelist, John le Carré, *Absolute Friends* (2003) and *A Most Wanted Man* (2008), Brian Crim articulates the radical shift not only in pop culture but especially in le Carré's writings from the Cold War period to the post-9/11 period as reflecting the author's resentment of the Western security state that began to embody in its extrajudicial torture and violence the very enemies that it sought to suppress. Al Qaeda's angry young men had unfortunately succeeded in not only bringing down the twin towers of the World Trade Center but had brought out an "angry and fearful American public" that demanded a surveillance state which would unabashedly tear down the 'civilized' norms that distinguished the West's democracies from autocratic regimes elsewhere. Crim expertly shows how even great novelists like le Carré are not immune to the zeitgeist and reflect their "angrier and more nihilistic" selves in their creations, but theirs is an anger in protest against a security state that is explicitly unraveling the norms of human rights and humanism.

Our final thematic category of the reality of politics undermining the societal fabric begins with Mara Matta's contribution: "The *Danse Macabre* of Bangladesh: Humayun Azad's Creative Interruptions in an Age of Anger" is a "homage to Azad's creative interruptions and literary interventions against fear, anger, and … [other] resentful feelings". Azad, a poet and secular activist, died in Germany in 2004 after having been repeatedly stabbed by a group of Islamic fundamentalists in Dhaka during the presentation of one of his more controversial novels. Matta presents and analyses

not only his radical and provocative poems, but juxtaposes his works in the context of the shifting sands of Bangladesh's politics from a secular democracy to an intolerant and Islamism influenced society with the 'Talibanization' of civil culture. The actions perpetrated by fundamentalists to silence civil discourse and non-violent protest of intellectuals like Azad, stand in sharp contrast to the label of a "largely moderate and democratic majority Muslim country" that allows the rest of the world to be blind to the "bland fanatics" (as described by Mishra).

Monia O'Brien Castro's "Anger in the City. Negative Solidarities and the Pursuit of the Common Bad in the Context of the 2011 English Riots" describes a further erosion of the ideals espoused by a liberal democratic state. In a provocative and arguably contentious essay, Castro castigates the British state as having deployed negative solidarities in 2011 as a response to that year's English Riots. She posits that, "[i]nstrumentalising 'gangs', the alibi, [and the] manufacturing [of] a moral panic with the help of the mass media may have enabled [then Prime Minister] Cameron to distract people from the damaging social effects of neoliberal capitalism – deep-seated structural problems". Gangs, Castro claims, are racially categorized; and she controversially adds that gangs in England in 2011 act in democratic consolidation of positive solidarity to rage against the ills of society; and that gangs were provoked to stage riots in 2011 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrats led 'Thug State' to unleash their violence to silence and suppress the socioeconomically disenfranchised, when the fruits of neoliberalism were glaringly only benefitting the elite few.

The conclusive article with suggestions for problem solving by Brad Bullock, "Anger and Identity in the Divided States of America", is a marked departure from the aforementioned contributions. Here, the author examines the anger of those desiring to preserve white supremacy in the United States that cut across class lines to empower a Donald Trump in American politics and the subsequent January 6 insurrectionist attack on the US Capitol. Bullock underscores the point that unlike their European counterparts, the populism of Trumpism rests on a white, Protestant Christian religious identity. He argues that such negative solidarities are "less about politics and more about feeling a part of a family or tribe". His is not just a prognosis of the malaise, but a potential pill to help alleviate the symptoms by 'talking to the enemy' to resuscitate our falling democracies that are failing us. Instead of harking back to the mantra of secularism, Bullock articulates a creative and provocative pathway to counter the age of anger that includes "ways to reengage the angry" and he predicts that "this won't happen by writing off religion as either silly or irrelevant".

7. Conclusion

Our *Special Issue* on Mishra's *Age of Anger* and its thematic corollary of Arendt's concept of 'negative solidarities' leaves the reader with multiple perspectives through several disciplinary lenses of examining the causes and consequences of the inflection points that have led to liberal democracies' trend to populism and autocracy. These literary, historical, philosophical, political, sociological, and socioeconomic examinations lay the groundwork for self-examination not only at national and global levels but also on a personal and individual level. To what extent can or should Enlightenment principles of rights, equality, justice, and secularism require a recalibration in a renewed social contract, given our current context of an unbridled social media and egoistic discourse that catapults even the most unreasonable voice, sponsored by billionaires or rogue states to becoming a 'social influencer' and consequently displacing the silenced and hence voiceless underrepresented minorities? That is for our readers to decide on the course of action or inaction that they wish to undertake in leading us out of the age of rage.