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

Edited by Rossella Ciocca and Sabita Manian

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Rossella Ciocca and Sabita Manian

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

[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

[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.

Rajesh Shukla

Citizenship, Solidarity, and the Common Good

Abstract: Despite the liberal democratic insistence on citizenship and solidarity, we see a sharp rise in divisive politics, aggressive posturing, and social and political fragmentation in many countries. Moreover, it has been argued that the commitments regarding social solidarity in democratic states have either not fully materialized or have been replaced by "mutual hatred and resentment" (Mishra 2017, 14) in the general populace. Addressing the above challenges necessitates a fresh reflection on democratic priorities and principles. A meaningful realization of liberal democratic citizenship and solidarity, I contend, requires an agile notion of the common good, encouraging citizens to come together in the pursuit of their collective goals and projects, making necessary accommodations for the welfare of not only their compatriots but also noncitizens, immigrants and marginalized individuals who inhabit the same social and cultural space. To the above end, I draw upon liberal universalism and egalitarianism, emphasizing the principles of equality and human dignity, to show that any formulation of the common good must be consistent with well-known democratic ideals. Accordingly, I suggest that the social and cultural commitments of democratic citizens should be reimagined to adjust to liberal values of citizenship, solidarity, and the common good.

Keywords: *citizenship*, *solidarity*, *the common good, immigrants*, *marginalization*, *discrimination and resentment*

While the common good is ideally supposed to regulate the formation of all social and political associations in some ways, my focus in this paper is going to be primarily on its manifestations in the context of citizenship and solidarity in liberal democratic states. Unlike autocratic states, liberal democracies are normatively and ideologically committed to advancing the interests and welfare of their citizens. A meaningful realization of the above goals, I contend, requires two things. On the one hand, it necessitates a cultivated conception of citizenship which accords equal rights and obligations to all citizens, without discriminating against them on contingent grounds of race, religion, ethnicity, and caste; on the other hand, it also demands a strong sense of solidarity among its people. However, even a perfunctory look at the contemporary global realities shows that if anything the ideals of liberal democratic citizenship and solidarity have not fully materialized and that they have come under severe strain in the past decades as "there is pervasive panic [regarding their efficacy], which doesn't resemble the centralized fear emanating from despotic power. Rather, it is the sentiment, generated by news media and amplified by social media, that anything can happen anywhere to anybody at any time".[1] The above sense of intensified contingency, Pankaj Mishra shows, is accompanied by failed liberal politics and promises of universal rights, opportunities, economic growth, and personal advancement – or an overall realization of the common good that can bind citizens together, and has led to "tremendous increase in mutual hatred and somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else or resentment".[2] Building on Mishra's articulation of the liberal democratic failures and their implications for democratic theory and the common good, I argue that one way to overcome this challenge could be perhaps to look at the democratic priorities and practice in a historical and cultural context, situating them within liberal democratic states such as India, Canada, the US – and other democracies too, without subordinating them to intense aspirations and theoretical insurgencies that question, even discredit, the very core of democratic egalitarianism, replacing it with an animated view of ideological politics. More strongly, even in the age of anger, rage, and resentment, I hope to

[1] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Picador, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 10.
[2] Ibid., 14.

show that the classical virtues of social solidarity and citizenship can still bring citizens together and infuse a renewed vigor in the pursuit of the common good.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I discuss the nature and scope of the common good in the liberal democratic states, arguing that traditionally they have assumed a broad political and cultural consensus among their citizens and sought to address their differences in procedural terms.[3] However, Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the US, No One Is Illegal (NOII) in Canada, protests against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 in India, and similar social movements in other parts of the world have shown that people are getting more and more impatient and divided over their collective goals and projects, and that their understanding of the common good is turning out to be much differentiated, even fragmented, reflecting their race, gender, ethnicity, marginalization, immigration status, and overall lived experiences.[4] Next, I analyze how immigration and radical religious and cultural diversity associated with the arrival of newcomers is causing a moral panic in a segment of Western society, and its impact on the construction of the common good.[5] Given that globalization, social media and technology have intensified the movement of people from one place to another, I ask specifically if immigration can be viewed as an integral and constitutive part of the emergent notion of the common good; and also how do we stop pathological mistrust and revulsion among some native citizens against immigration, easing, if not completely addressing, the "swamp of fear and insecurity"[6] among them. Insisting primarily on egalitarian rights, equity, and justice for all people in a given society, I argue in the third section that social solidarity must not only mediate relations among citizens, but also between citizens and noncitizens, communities of color and 'locals', and natives and immigrants.[7] Going beyond its political formulations, I 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. Finally, I conclude in the fourth section by emphasizing the value of cultural and ethnic commitments in the making of a citizen, arguing that such commitments should be recognized in public policymaking and aligned with liberal egalitarianism and social solidarity, and not treated with distrust and hostility.

1. The Nature and Scope of the Common Good

Although there are deep divisions in the philosophical formulations of the common good, and its nature and scope, some thinkers have emphasized the distinction between private and public spheres to elucidate the above issue.[8] The vast array of things that human beings desire and want to possess in our social world, they argue, can be categorized under the broad categories of public and private good, corresponding to the two spheres of human life and action. The things that belong to the public sphere must be pursued in association with others while all private pursuits are left to the individual's own choices and preferences. That is to say, in their private sphere, individuals have full freedom to act as

[3] Ibid., 133-134.
[4] Drawing attention to these omissions regarding the contemporary notions of the common good, Michael J. Sandel remarks: "Today, the common good is understood mainly in economic terms. It is less about cultivating solidarity or deepening the bonds of citizenship than about satisfying consumer preferences as measured by the gross domestic product. This makes for an impoverished public discourse". For details, see Michael J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?* (New York: Picador, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 29.
[5] Liav Orgad, *The Cultural Defense of Nations: A Liberal Theory of Majority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017), 72-73.
[6] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 19.
[7] Peter A. Hall, "The Political Sources of Social Solidarity", in Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, eds., *Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017), 219-223.
[8] Amitai Etzioni, *The Common Good* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 1-6.

per their will, but in the public sphere, they must respect the common good. Castle and Davidson illuminate this issue thus:

> The modern citizen who emerges from the French Revolution – unlike his Greek forebear – divides his life into a public and private realm, the second being most important. 'Freedom from' exists in the private realm. The public is a collective space where he unites with others as a people in designing laws for the common good. Unity is only expected in that public space of the republic.[9]

Acknowledging that it may not be always easy to draw a clear line between the two spheres and that their boundaries may overlap at times, we should not miss the core point. The common good deals with those issues and ideas that impact the interest and welfare of all citizens and that are not individual-specific in a private sense. In other words, all matters of collective importance constitute the common good in some sense as per their merit and strength. Such matters may take the form of building roads and bridges in a city, enhancing police and community services, improving air and water quality, adjusting fiscal policy, raising awareness regarding employment equity, social justice, and fairness, or something else, but in their different manifestations, all of them symbolize the common aspiration to serve everyone's interest. In other words, "It [the common good] connotes those goods that serve all of us and the institutions we share and cherish – for instance, national defense, a healthy environment. The common good is much more than an aggregate of all private or personal good".[10] Etzioni is saying that the common good encompasses the good of community as a whole and that it is more than the sum total of all private goods put together. The good of a community, as Etzioni conceives of it, symbolizes a comprehensive understanding of all relevant issues and public policies, including much needed goods that a flourishing human life requires. These goods are social, economic, cultural, moral, religious and spiritual, and even non-religious and non-spiritual as a community is marked by diversity of commitments and conflicting values. Recognizing that normative strains can lead to social tension and conflict, Etzioni, along with other communitarians, anchors them in a historically rooted political tradition and culture that sustains them.

Moreover, the common good is more than the sum total of all goods because political community represents intergenerational interests, building on collective accomplishments, history, culture, and tradition, going into posterity. It is a mistake, communitarians argue, to view citizens in the sense of raw and excessive individualism where one is willing to pursue one's interests even if they run counter to broadly understood common good. More strongly, the synching of personal interests with the common good requires a fundamental shift in the outlook of citizens such that they come to view their collective interest as more important than their personal good. Etzioni remarks: "Membership and participation in community is at once fundamental to human functioning and essential for the development of identity and character and human flourishing, from which emanates a moral obligation to nurture and sustain community and the particularistic obligations without which it cannot exist".[11]

The view that political community plays a crucial role in human flourishing has critical implications for any theory of solidarity as well as the common good. If a political community shapes the identity and character of citizens, it will have a far reaching impact on their lives and sympathies, and also on the goals and projects that they may want to pursue or set aside. In this view, citizens will be naturally as well as morally obligated to care for the community that creates them in its own image. Etzioni cautions that this thick engagement should not be construed in an excessive sense which can compromise the universal liberal democratic commitments to freedom and equality of all people, but

[9] Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson, eds., *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 37.
[10] Etzioni, *The Common Good*, 1.
[11] Ibid., 12.

in a non-excessive sense that respects liberal values and constitutionalism, human rights, global solidarity, and dignity of person.[12] However, even a non-excessive thick sense of collective identity can have far reaching implications for citizenship and solidarity.

The non-excessive thick sense of identity and character runs counter to the dominant liberal view that sees society as a contractual or mechanical device to deliver justice and fairness in the public arena. Against contractarian tradition, communitarians emphasize the role of culture, language, moral values, and common social and political heritage of citizens; contending that the public life and institutions should be formed on the basis of some ethical unity and the common good. To put it concretely, while the obligations of solidarity are more manifest in the context of citizenship, they acquire a different and somewhat contrived connotation in immigration, impacting negatively ethnic minorities as well as the 'communities of color'.[13] When it comes to taking immigrants or excluding them from entering a particular political society, i.e. the state, elected governments alone can make those decisions: "Admission and exclusion are at the core of communal independence. They suggest the deepest meaning of self-determination. Without them, there could not be *communities of character*, historically stable, ongoing associations of men and women with some special commitment to one another and some special sense of their common life".[14] A successful immigration to such societies would probably require complete assimilation, accepting prevalent norms and values and adopting them as one's own. Walzer supports citizenship rights and states' control over immigration on the grounds of 1) cultural distinctiveness and 2) distributive justice, arguing that they either assume or involve the idea of an enclosed political community. Interestingly, both of the above reasons have been lately used to demand more rights and justice for immigrants in their adopted countries; and Walzer himself seems to be very supportive of such demands. Cultural distinctiveness has been defended across political spectrum on different grounds. Indeed, communitarians believe that culture is intrinsically valuable and that once you remove cultural elements, a lot is removed from human personality, social theory, solidarity, and citizenship. Culture shows us what is common and valuable for a people, how they live their lives, and what are their regulative ideals and realities. In other words, the constitutive core of human personality may be contained in an individual's (or society's) primary source of self-image, i.e. its culture. Given this mirror image, it is not surprising that people would naturally want to protect and enhance their cultural distinctiveness, opening the doors of immigration and citizenship to those who share in their cultural narratives and not closing it for others. Moreover, this decision can be supported on the grounds of self-determination of a people; however, the ethical justifications of the above mirror image remain deeply questionable, needing more thinking and reflection.

Next, for Walzer, distributive justice constitutes one of the most important functions of a political society. When people live together in a shared social space, conflicts arise regarding the just distribution, needing clarifications regarding what is just and what is unjust, and what mechanism should be adopted to ensure justice and to address the grievances arising out of injustices. In order to answer these questions though, every society must determine first who belongs to it and who does not belong; or more precisely, who is an insider and who is an outsider? In this sense, the membership of a society itself becomes most prized primary good; and the society must distribute it in a purposive way to safeguard its own interests and continuity: "The idea of distributive justice presupposes a bounded world within which distribution takes place: a group of people committed to dividing, exchanging, and

[12] Ibid., 24.

[13] In *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Live Right Publishing Corporation, 2019), Kwame Anthony Appiah illustrates the historicity of communities of color on an international level, tracing it to Du Bois's work: "One reason race continues to play a central role in international politics, is the politics of racial solidarity that Du Bois helped to inaugurate in the Black world, in cofounding the tradition of Pan-Africanism" (132).

[14] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 62.

sharing social goods, first of all among themselves. That world ... is the political community, whose members distribute power to one another and avoid, if they possibly can, sharing it with anyone else".[15] Membership of a democratic society opens the doors for the exercise of power over all citizens in a collective and participative way, has meaningful implications for its formulations of the common good; and for these reasons, it can be constrained according to the principles of mutual aid and political justice.[16]

On an individual level, the obligation of solidarity toward others in need is widely recognized. The weight of this obligation is strongly felt towards near and dear ones, one's family, friends, relatives, and religious and cultural institutions, but it gets weaker with diminished familiarity and increased distance. However, the obligations regarding mutual aid for aliens, including potential immigrants and refugees, are to be located in the political community and/or public institutions that make decisions regarding extending residency rights and citizenship to them, and not necessarily in the individuals who happen to occupy an office. A democratic state is in some way obligated to help the necessitous strangers, particularly if they are living under torturous conditions and badly need support, such as refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of internal strife, cruel economic deprivation, and war. Recognizing that we live in a deeply unequal world, and that there will always be millions, even billions of people, falling in the category of necessitous others, lacking in political freedom and economic opportunities in their home countries, Walzer does not press the obligation of mutual aid strongly. Instead, he prioritizes the principle of self-determination over mutual aid on a theoretical level, making sure that helping necessitous others does not overtake the core interests of a political society.[17]

Respecting the reasoning that a political community must secure its interests prior to accommodating others, one may still argue that recent social movements, such as Black Lives Matter in the US, No One Is Illegal in Canada, and protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 in India, draw out its weaknesses, highlighting the mistreatment of poor and marginalized, as well as communities of color and religious minorities in different countries. The Black Lives Matter movement started in the aftermath of the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2013 and acquired a new force and momentum after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 26th May 2020, soon engulfing the whole of the United States. Floyd's death due to a long chokehold by police officer Derek Chauvin became a rallying cry against police brutality and violence against African Americans in particular, giving rise to renewed solidarity and fellowship among Blacks in America. However, on a deeper level, BLM protests signify a massive failure in the realization of the common good in the US, insisting that even though African Americans are full-fledged Americans in terms of citizenship rights and law, they have not been able to obtain the same levels of equality, parity, and respect as their white compatriots.[18] Likewise, No One Is Illegal and the protests against Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 in India raise similarly troubling questions in the Canadian and Indian contexts, demanding a more symbiotic relationship between the obligations of citizenship and the realization of the common good involving the Indigenous communities, immigrants and the communities of color. Starting as a network that supported the rights of migrants having no legal status in Canada, NOII has evolved into a social movement that champions the rights of poor, vulnerable, and stateless individuals and

[15] Ibid., 31.
[16] Ibid., 45-63.
[17] Ibid, 51.
[18] While recognizing the mistreatment of African Americans by police, some have also raised questions over the controversial tactics adopted by Black Lives Matter to silence its critics and underme the common good on a more fundamental level. Mark Lila argues, for instance, that "there is no denying that movement's [BLM] decision to use Mau-Mau tactics to put down dissent and demand a confession of sins and public penitence (most spectacularly in a public confrontation with Hilary Clinton, of all people), paid in the hands of the Republican right". See Mark Lila, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2017), 129-133.

sympathizes with the suffering of the Indigenous peoples in Canada.[19] Much of the Canadian history has been marked with the oppression of the Indigenous in Canada, and now it is widely recognized that the Canadian state might have engaged in the cultural genocide of the Indigenous. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) has shown beyond any doubt that the established policy of the Canadian state, for a century or more, was to eliminate the Indigenous culture, forms of life, and modes of governance, forcing the Indigenous peoples to assimilate and conform to the European culture and value.[20] NOII seeks justice for the Indigenous, working for the realization of equity and fairness against the oppressive structures of state power, colonialism and painful legacies of the past.

Similarly, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 in India show that when the public policy of a democratic state does not keep pace with its political philosophy and constitutionalism, citizens feel compelled to challenge it in their own way. The CAA accorded citizenship rights to the refugees and migrants who belonged to Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Buddhist religions and had come to India from a list of countries where religious persecution was high, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh but remained silent regarding assigning similar rights to the Muslims coming from these countries. Even though the mentioned three countries are Islamic states, their oppression of minority Muslim sects is well known. This is particularly true of Ahmadiyyas who constitute 0.22 percent of the whole Pakistani population and were declared as non-Muslims in 1974 by a constitutional amendment and their faith was criminalized in 1984 by Ordinance XX issued by President Zia.[21] Insisting that CAA 2019 has a historical context, going back to the partition of India in 1947, the Indian government has so far refused to accommodate persecuted Ahmadiyya Muslims, arguing that they can also apply for Indian citizenship if so desired and that their applications will be reviewed as per the process laid out in law. While the legal basis of the CAA has been challenged in the Indian courts, its moral and humanitarian claims have been discredited by the anti CCA protesters.

2. Citizenship and the Common Good

Champions of privileged citizenship have used the communitarian arguments regarding communities of character, human flourishing, and distributive justice in a bounded political society to justify the restrictions of immigration, arguing that culturally divergent immigrants can in some cases cause a dislocation among people and undermine their rights of self-determination and citizenship. Needless to say that, for some, the character of community is meant to be embedded in the character of citizens, almost like an accent, and that a community and its citizenry must mirror each other in significant ways. More strongly, citizens can only flourish in a political society that provides them with optimal conditions for their moral and material fulfillment. Beyond theoretical stipulations, it is extremely doubtful if any liberal democracy, including the US, the UK, India, and Canada, can defend such an extensive involvement of citizens on constitutional grounds. Moreover, John Rawls has shown that contemporary liberal conceptions of citizenship are political and that they avoid, even resist, any comprehensive engagement among citizens, underscoring the importance of reasonable pluralism and deep diversity over communities of character.[22] Reinforces the above elements of Rawlsian differences, Gerald F. Gaus writes: “Comprehensive and general doctrines cover a wide range of

[19] Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press/Institute of Anarchist Studies, 2013), 208-222.
[20] Scott Hamilton, “Where Are the Children Buried?”, *NCTR*, *www.nctr.ca*.
[21] Ewelina U. Ochab, “Life Could not be More Difficult for Pakistan’s Ahmadi’s?”, *Forbes* (2018), *www.forbes.com*.
[22] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1993), 36.

topics, values, and ideals applicable to various areas of life while, in contrast, the scope of the political is narrow".[23]

When we look at the functioning of liberal democracies in the past some decades, we notice a growing emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy, moving away from the collectivist cultural constructions of the common good and citizenship. This is not to deny that collective conceptions can add meaning and value to the lives of many citizens who share in such goals and projects, but to say that for many others they can have a corrosive and provocative impact. Consider, for instance, the right wing characterization of immigrants in many countries in extremely pejorative terms, calling them underserving and lazy recipients of welfare or even worse "rapists and murderers".[24] Once we portray a section of society so negatively, we excuse ourselves from any potential moral burden to show solidarity towards them or simply to engage with them: "Fear of bushy bearded activists continues to motivate in the West to shun them, even when they are democratically elected".[25]

Freedom, as Kant has shown us, consists in a voluntary and rational determination of one will without any external persuasion or hindrance. In other words, collective involvement may not be necessary to build moral character or develop positive social solidarity. On the contrary, it runs the risk of stifling an individual's own initiatives and vision regarding her life. If I want to become a good citizen and act in a just and honorable way, full of genuine solidarity, the best way to do that would be probably to draw upon the available personal and social resources in agreement with my freedom and autonomy.[26] Moreover, time has shown that an individual's freedom is consistent with lesser collective involvement and that many collective responsibilities performed by citizens earlier have been parceled out to non-citizens now, particularly in the field of military and security, raising questions against the communitarian notions of privileged citizenship and the common good as well: "To the degree that recruitment for battle and participation in war has disappeared as a general citizen obligation in the West, and to the degree that the professional soldier has replaced the citizen soldier, the historical engine of citizenship rights and of strong citizenship identities has irretrievably died, luckily so one must add".[27] The substitution of citizen soldier by professional soldier has led to the recruitment of immigrants and undocumented in the armed forces of developed countries, making a stronger case for their political and social inclusion and citizenship rights.

A decline in citizenship rights and identities, Joppke is saying, has weakened the links of distributive justice in the bounded political communities as well as the claims of solidarity associated with them. Moreover, citizens of Western liberal democratic states rely on immigrant labor in different sectors of economy and social life, making it difficult for them to think of themselves as a closed community of compatriots. This dependence on immigrant labor has been a point of appreciation and contention at the same time, depending on the empirical and philosophical standpoint of the participants. Different states have taken different measures to tackle the new reality of documented and undocumented workers within their territories. While some states accord some social and economic rights to undocumented immigrants, others emphasize full solidarity, while some still practice exclusion. In any case, they have to manage the presence of immigrants on their territory who may or may not be bona fide but are crucial to their workforce and productivity. Walzer has argued that when immigrants live in a country on a long term basis, they must be given appropriate rights and

[23] Gerald F. Gaus, "Reasonable Pluralism and the Domain of the Political: How the Weakness of John Rawls's Political Liberalism Can Be Overcome by a Justificatory Liberalism", *Inquiry*, 42 (2010), 263.
[24] It has been recorded that collectivistic conceptions of the common good often lead to selective solidarity among a group, excluding marginalized others. For details, see Edward Anthony Koning, *Immigration and the Politics of Welfare Exclusion: Selective Solidarity in Western Democracies* (Toronto: Toronto U.P., 2019), 109-111.
[25] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 130.
[26] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice* [1797], trans. by John Ladd (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 76.
[27] Christian Joppke, "The Inevitable Lightening of Citizenship", *European Journal of Sociology*, 51.1 (2010), 17.

a path to citizenship.[28] Or the society will get divided into citizens and serfs, resulting in unacceptable modes of exploitation and harm.

However, the difficulty is not simply the lack of citizenship or legal rights for immigrants, even though these are mammoth challenges impacting millions of people without legal status in different countries, but also the practical realization of such rights once they are granted. Research shows that immigrants and racialized individuals suffer from many kinds of inequities and systemic challenges even after becoming citizens, and that the same problems persist in the subsequent generations. Conversations on systemic discrimination are uncomfortable and hard to have even with 'open minded' individuals in a given society. This is because a public awareness of such discrimination can go against the political image of a given society, putting a question mark on its historical foundations and injustices. As a result, the exposure to such discrimination is filtered and lacks in historical understanding and context. For instance, the US immigration law in the first half of the twentieth century encouraged immigration from Europe but discouraged it from other (colored) parts of the world. Now someone may want to justify such laws in the name of economic productivity, logistics or assimilation policy, but their ethnoracial underpinnings are too visible to put them under the rug. This law was reversed in 1965 with the passing of the US Immigration and Citizenship Act and removal of discriminatory quota system.[29]

It is also problematic to overemphasize the political and legal equality of immigrants in terms of actual equality or equality of opportunity realized. Nowhere the above discrepancy is more obvious than in the public sector employment in the developed countries. Public institutions and different layers of government tend to be an important source of gainful employment, providing more than 15% of total available employment. However, the representation of immigrants in such jobs is scant, and not reflective of their demographic make-up. There could be many reasons for this gap. Public sector hiring requires merit and specific skill sets, language proficiency, and availability of candidates at a given time and place. It is possible that many first generation immigrants do not possess all the required qualities and as a result their representation in the public sector jobs and government institutions suffers. Unfortunately, even the second generation immigrants continue to suffer similar disadvantages in the public sector employment, reinforcing the point that there may be something more to the underrepresentation of immigrants in the public sector jobs. The situation is much different in the private sector where immigrants excel in different capacities, and lead the rate of job creation in small businesses and entrepreneurship. For instance, Statistics Canada report in 2019 showed that immigrants excel against locals in job creation and small businesses: "With regard to gross job creation and gross job destruction, the results revealed that private incorporated immigrant-owned firms were much more likely than firms with Canadian-born owners to be job creators than job destroyers".[30] It is equally true that many immigrants have difficulty breaking the glass ceiling and are disproportionately caught up in low paying service sector jobs.[31]

Similar to their underrepresentation in the public sector jobs, immigrants lag behind in the political leadership roles. Electoral success of political candidates in democratic countries depends on multiple factors, including their work, credentials and likeability; but none of these factors matter if one does not get proper backing and support of party leaders and colleagues at the grassroot level. The inclusion of immigrants in political processes has been marked by politics of convenience in many countries

[28] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 60.
[29] Richard Alba and Nancy Fonner, *Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2017), 25.
[30] Garnett Picot and Ann-Marie Rollin, "Immigrant Entrepreneurs as Job Creators: The Case of Canadian Private Incorporated Companies", *Statistics Canada* (2019), *www150.statcan.gc.ca*.
[31] Silas Amo-Agyei, *The Migrant Pay Gap: Understanding Wage Differences between Migrant and Nationals* (International Labor Organization: Geneva, 2020), 50-58.

where political parties have calibrated their responses according to the voting pattern in a given electoral constituency. Rafaela Dancygier has shown that confronted with the reality of immigrant votes and politics, the first reaction of many parties has been that of exclusion, never mind the rhetoric of "equality and non-discrimination".[32] It is only when the population of immigrants in a given riding reaches a critical mass where their votes can have an impact on the election outcome, political parties take them seriously. Reaching such a critical mass is difficult, and even undesirable, as the formation of ethnic enclaves has its own drawbacks, resulting in regressive notions of the common good and citizenship.[33]

The relative absence of immigrants from the corridors of power deprives them from having a meaningful say in the understanding and formulation of large scale public policy. This is because the policies regarding the common good are adopted on a political level, and implemented on a bureaucratic level. Neither of them seems to have an adequate presence of immigrants. Every once in a while we have a success story in immigrant politics, highlighting the achievements of a particular candidate, but on an institutional level, immigrant candidates still face considerable barriers in finding jobs and electoral success: "Discrimination by party elites presents a significant hurdle for minorities seeking to enter electoral politics. Ethnic-minority office seekers, even when they possess very similar socioeconomic or educational characteristics to those of the majority population, face substantial barriers when trying to run for elected office, receiving lower returns on income and education than do natives".[34]

The issues of discrimination, inequity, and exclusion arising out of liberal democratic societies pose serious questions in the context of immigration, citizenship, and the common good. Given that the common good is supposed to reflect the good of all members of a given society and that many Western societies have a significant immigrant population, it would follow that immigrants should benefit equally from the pursuits of the common good. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this has not happened and that racial and ethnic immigrants continue to suffer inequity and exclusion unknown to natives. While the marginalization of Muslims in Europe and elsewhere is well-known, other ethnic groups such as Mexicans and Asians have their own challenges. African Americans and Indigenous peoples have suffered a historical wrong and its harmful impacts are visible even today. These injustices, I will argue in the next section, have led to heated political argumentation, social activism and violent protests, questioning the ethical, and political foundations of democratic societies and their articulations of the common good as well.

3. Citizenship, Solidarity, and the Common Good

Even though liberal democracies tend to justify limited access to citizenship in the name of distributive justice and preserving social solidarity among citizens, their political, economic, and social configurations show that immigrant labor is essential to supporting the above goals.[35] Moreover, while democracies view every citizen as free and equal in terms of law and policy, when it comes to the practice of these ideals hardnosed political calculations take over. Indeed, under the impact of globalization, new technologies, multinational companies, and their ownership structures, many governments have felt compelled to open up their markets and transfer manufacturing and services to developing countries, increasing pressure on the 'locals' in developed countries, and causing further strains on the known modes of solidarity. Some political leaders and demagogues have capitalized on the problems confronting common people and the 'flooding of domestic market by foreign goods',

[32] Rafaela M. Dancygier, *Dilemmas of Inclusion: Muslims in European Politics* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2017), 6.
[33] Doug Saunders, "Britain Has an Ethnic Problem: The English", *The Globe and Mail* (2013), *www.theglobeandmail.com*.
[34] Dancygier, *Dilemmas of Inclusion*, 81-82.
[35] Joppke, "The Inevitable Lightening of Citizenship", 13-16.

contending that local workers in developed countries are robbed of opportunities and that they are working for less. It's also true that the wage and living standard of these workers has declined in comparison to their parents' generation, causing pent-up feelings and resentments against immigrants.[36] Surveys show that a young American or Britisher is less confident about her future today in comparison to a young Indian or Indonesian who shows more exuberance thinking about her future and economic prospects.[37] Overlooking the complexity of causes responsible for the above decline, demagogues have created a backlash against immigration, undermining the much needed mutual solidarity among the natives and immigrants: "If local workers lose their jobs, and find their social security and environment declining, they blame the alien influences that are undermining the nation: hating immigrants helps maintain an illusion of national unity and pride".[38] One may say that hate is an extreme pathological response and that Castle and Davidson have overstated the tension between immigrants and local workers. Lost jobs can lead to a reassertion of ethnic awareness among the native population and sympathy for the people who are at risk economically. When ethnic awareness becomes a form of coping mechanism, systemic discrimination and racism are bound to occur. Moreover, it is impossible to escape such negativity if an individual's personal, social and economic narratives are grounded in racial prejudice, ethnicity, and blame. Moreover, Pankaj Mishra has shown that such biases are found in all ethnic groups to some extent, including Whites and non-Whites; but since institutional structures and demography in the West are still predominantly Caucasian, immigrants can be at the receiving end of social exclusions: "As globalized and volatile markets restrict nation states' autonomy of action, and refugees and immigrants challenge dominant ideas of citizenship, national culture and tradition, the swamp of fear and insecurity expands".[39] Clearly, globalization has accentuated perverse solidarity among a group of citizens.

Faced with institutional discriminations and biases – real and perceived, many immigrants turn to ethnic enclaves and religious groupings to find equality, acceptance, support, and genuine solidarity. Ethnic enclaves bring people with similar experiences together and help them in reconstituting the social world left behind in the country of their origin. This reconstitution of cultural norms and values of one society in another can be a matter of celebration as well as conflict. It reinvigorates immigrants' life by recreating their social groupings, interactions, language, and culture. However, it can also be a potential cause of conflict, not only between the natives and immigrants but also among progressive and orthodox immigrants themselves. Indeed, many cultural values that have been revised or abandoned in the country of origin continue to hold sway among many immigrants and expatriates in the West. This is especially true of orthodox religious and cultural beliefs that are said to be the glue among many immigrant groups in European cities, leading to their civic isolation and radicalization of some young men at the same time.

Confronted with the presence of immigrants on their territories and also their isolation and radicalization, Western governments have re-emphasized the importance of integration policies in the host societies, insisting that immigrants' refusal to integrate can diminish their job prospects, opportunities, and acculturation. The thinking is that once immigrants are fully integrated, social and economic gaps between the natives and racialized groups will be significantly reduced, strengthening the bonds of social solidarity among them. I have argued earlier that while second generation immigrants do better than first generation on the employment index, they too suffer relative

[36] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 108-114.
[37] Claire Cain Miller and Alicia Parlapiano, "Where Are Young People More Optimistic? In Poorer Nations", *The New York Times* (2021), *www.nytimes.com*.
[38] Castles and Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration*, 145.
[39] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 19.

disadvantages in comparison to their native peers.[40] In other words, enhanced linguistic skills and cultural adaptation of immigrants may not be able to resolve the systemic issues outlined in the integration paradox: many Western societies and governments demand integration from immigrants but frustrate concrete steps in that direction such as induction of qualified and willing immigrants in the public sector jobs and institutions. Yet the integration paradox should not be allowed to overshadow other predicaments.

A plausible solution to the above predicaments must recognize that the constitutional commitment to freedom and equality of citizens is not enough and that liberal democracies need to develop a more equitable and solidaristic understanding of the common good. Most restrictions on immigration and global movement of people were put in the last century and overlook, rather conveniently, colonialism and the European occupation of the world. In other words, the nation-state model of governance that staunchly protects the interests of sovereign states over others is relatively prejudiced and fails to take note of historical injustices and exploitations. Immigrants come to the West from different parts of the world now, only because their countries and resources have been plundered earlier. Colonial history can no longer be ignored and should be used as a tool not only to cultivate social solidarity with immigrants but also to illuminate our understanding of the common good. Or to put it another way: "while the common good can be considered for a single nation, the scope of the common good is ultimately larger than one nation. It is concerned with all people and is ultimately universal; thus any local common good must ultimately be referred to the universal common good".[41]

To overcome the divisions and rifts regarding citizenship and the common good, we need to build on their ethical potential and solidarity. Ideally, the local common good must be in agreement with the universal common good. Global problems require global solutions, but that is beside the point. The fundamental point of contention here seems to be the territoriality of states and moral claims regarding nation-states. Territorial boundaries of various states have been arbitrarily drawn and redrawn, and are reflective of global power relations, and may have little to do with the 'communities of character'. Given that the frontiers are arbitrarily constructed, one may say that it is immoral to use them to deny entry to precarious and vulnerable people who want to go to rich and prosperous Western states in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

Restrictions on the freedom of movement, it can be argued, put an excessive weight on the "solidarity from above" which excludes immigrants from the institutional benefits of a democratic society, forcing them to rely more on the "solidarity from below" which develops by "creating links and feelings of closeness between people from very different origins as well as with different interests and perspectives".[42] 'Solidarity from above' is inconsistent with core liberal values of freedom, equality, citizenship and should be rejected. While these arguments are theoretically strong, they seem to bypass the practical purposes and justifications associated with the functioning of modern nation-states.

Practical justifications of bounded political communities are to be found primarily in the distributive justice and welfare functions of states that allow citizens to benefit from their common associations and are crucial to the manifestation of social solidarity and the common good. Unrestricted membership is going to have a compromising impact on the welfare functions, and any argument to the contrary must be evaluated on empirical grounds. If a state does not assume welfare functions or keeps them to the minimum, it will have higher chances of having open citizenship and

[40] Rosita Fibbi, Arnfin H. Midtbøen and Patrick Simon, *Migration and Discrimination: IMISCOE Short Reader* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 2.
[41] Ann T. Bedard, "Us versus Them? US Immigration and The Common Good", *Journal of Society of Christian Ethics*, 28.2 (2008), 118.
[42] Helge Schwiertz and Helen Schwenken, "Introduction: Inclusive Solidarity and Citizenship along Migratory Routes in Europe and the Americas", *Citizenship Studies*, 24.4 (2020), 409.

free movement of foreigners on its territory in conjunction with social and economic realities of the day. Indeed, libertarians and free market economists often support open borders and limited governments, ignoring the elements of social solidarity and redistribution. Limited government allows them to highlight the value of unimpeded human freedom, market economy, and individual endeavors. Yet such governments cannot deliver the social services and welfare functions that are also championed by the critics of bounded communities. This reinforces the merits of Michael Walzer's arguments regarding self-determination and citizenship.

It is undeniable that in the passing decades' immigration has become economically necessary and socially divisive in many countries and that pressure points are more visible now than ever before. On some occasions freedom of speech seems to clash with religious sentiments; but on other occasions, economic and social inequities and discriminations can have disruptive implications. Given that immigration is economically productive,[43] and economy seems to have a major say in the lives of modern citizens, one would think that democratic states should be able to forge a social consensus on this issue. Some states have done it more successfully than others. Canada, for instance, shows substantial support for immigration year after year, but Denmark's reaction is more guarded.[44] Despite the economic benefits, once the arrival of newcomers starts clashing with a society's self-image and culture, we see a blowback against immigration. To avoid this reaction, it is important to manage the friction between the natives and immigrants wherever it occurs, ensuring that fault lines are not aggravated and that social sensibilities of both are respected as much as possible. This implies respect for the cultural values of immigrants and multiculturalism on the one hand, and reinforcement of the liberal democratic values of freedom, equality, and dignity of persons on the other. Moreover, this respect must be marked with solidaristic mutuality and concern for each other's welfare that comes with living together in a given society or being an inhabitant of a state.

Any realization of the above goals would require a reconceptualization of the common good and citizenship to include the interests of immigrants on a core human and political level without predicating them on the sovereign rights of democratic states.[45] A political society cannot view itself as closed or bounded without inserting a strong notion of alien-others, i.e. immigrants, and excluding them from its conception of the common good and citizenship rights. Political perceptions of a community have an impact on the thinking, behavior, and collective self-image of its people. Given the composition of Western democratic states, it seems obvious that the idea of a strictly bounded community is problematic on empirical as well as theoretical ground. Most of these states are multicultural, multiracial, and politically diverse. It is essential then to ensure a fair and equitable inclusion of everyone, including the immigrants, in their conception of the common good.

Next, the idea of a bounded political society needs to be recast significantly to keep pace with the mobility of people in the age of globalization and related changes in citizenship rights. This means that liberal democratic states, in principle, should be open to accommodate more people on their territories if their resources allow such accommodations. Lack of resources coupled with the arrival of new inhabitants causes acrimony and friction and can be a source of potential tension and conflict. An open and welcoming attitude will cultivate a culture of respect and accommodation towards new immigrants and transcend many barriers associated with closed-historical communities: "Solidarity [for

[43] Picot and Rollin, "Immigrant Entrepreneurs as Job Creators".

[44] Irene Bloemraad remarks: "As striking, Canadian public opinion has been supportive of immigration for a long time and support has been increasing over recent decades, a time of economic uncertainty and concerns over foreign terrorist". For details, see Irene Bloemraad, *Understanding "Canadian Exceptionalism" in Immigration and Pluralism Policy* (Washington: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

[45] Kwame Anthony Appiah has carried this aspect of citizenship, emphasizing "what binds citizens together is a commitment, through Renan's daily plebiscite, to sharing life of a modern state, united by its institutions, procedures, and percepts". For details, see Appiah, *The Lies that Bind*, 103.

immigrants] could involve expanding one's horizon to the lived experiences of others as well as to reflecting on one's own social position, which could itself transform self-perceptions and subjectivities in the process".[46] It will also be consistent with liberal universalism that prioritizes freedom and equality of all people irrespective of their race, creed and ethnicity.

The justifications of the common good arising out of liberal universalism need to be celebrated and modified appropriately to respond to contemporary challenges, including the issues of bounded citizenship, increased immigration, racism, and a sense of anxiety and loss among the ethnically White working class. By taking individuals as the units of political calculations and decision making, universalism accounts for everyone's interests equally on a theoretical and philosophical level without differentiating between immigrants and natives on racial grounds, and practical challenges can be probably resolved by an honest and committed pursuit of theoretical aspirations.[47] Moreover, a refusal to engage in the politics of identity and/or 'communities of character' that emphasize the historical embeddedness of human life should not be confused with any lack of respect for citizens' identities and their cultural and religious attributes and mooring. Quite the contrary, modified universalism takes the issues of racial inequity and colonial exploitation seriously without submitting to their overarching narratives in opposition to the values of freedom, equality, dignity, and solidarity with all. The politics of contestation and differentiation does well in highlighting the failures of liberal universalism and its economic and cultural fault lines, and can be instrumental in cultivating an alternative conception of the common good in the spirit of universal solidarity with all people.

4. Conclusion and Public Policy Suggestions

Reflecting on the growing economic and moral tension – even panic – among a sizable section of the Western population, it has been argued that the failed promises of liberal universalism, diminished opportunities, and resentments against globalization and immigration are primarily responsible for the above phenomenon. Building on Michael Walzer's idea of 'communities of character' and Pankaj Mishra's thoughts on the ongoing political discourse regarding citizenship and solidarity, I have argued that the idea of the common good must not only include the interests of all inhabitants of a given state but also their egalitarian and solidaristic aspirations as well. Furthermore, I have shown that the pursuit of the common good is essential to liberal democratic citizenship even though opinions differ regarding its precise meaning and connotation. I have defended a historical, cultural, egalitarian, and universalistic understanding of the common good.

I contend that some of the problems that plague liberal democracies and their policymakers, causing resentment among many citizens, arise due to a contrived conception of the common good and social solidarity. To overcome this difficulty, it is essential, I suggest, to rethink our conception of the common good in such a way that it encapsulates the social and political realities of our times, including racial inequalities, discrimination against immigrants, and minority groups. This suggestion, if taken seriously, will have at least three important policy-making implications in the context of citizenship and solidarity First, while formulating their conceptions of the common good, liberal societies and governments need to be mindful of their historical encumbrances and ill-treatment of ethnic minorities, and should not attend to them as an afterthought or political proxy to advance an already established goal. A strong case can be made that such a historical awareness will strengthen social sympathy and solidarity, going much beyond the politics of accusation and blame that have

[46] Schwiertz and Schwenken, "Introduction", 417.

[47] Binary formulations of the common good in terms of universalistic and culturally specified goods fail to capture its full potential. While defending cultural sensitivity and formulations, one must also recognize their limits. For details, see Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 2001), 284-291.

become so endemic to democratic political processes and governance. Second, the public sensitivity toward marginalized groups and people needs to be ethical and contextual, recognizing their plurality and contradictions without imposing a binary view of political attachments and preferences. Some immigrants and minorities, for instance, have done well in education and engineering in the US, and this awareness can be used to frame appropriate policies to reward them and provide economic and social incentives to those who are currently lagging behind so that they too can catch up. Third, even though cultural commitments and economic benefits have become crucial components of the common good – and identity politics in the West, they should not be allowed to overshadow the virtues of citizenship and solidarity in the public policy-making process. I have shown that liberal egalitarianism is ethically and politically obligated to support the welfare of all citizens and groups, marginalized groups in particular, but it cannot privilege *per se* any group over an individual in its policy-making endeavors. More strongly, if liberal democracies want to overcome the pervasive resentment and anxiety among their citizens, they must revamp their understanding of liberal egalitarianism to support their notions of citizenship, solidarity, and the common good on a practical level.

Marina Niceforo

Soothing the Green Anxiety. A Critical Analysis of Negative Feelings in Social Media Discourses about the Environment

Abstract: In the last few decades, individuals and communities worldwide have increasingly experienced feelings of anger, anxiety, and frustration concerning environmental issues such as climate change, sustainability, or pollution, and the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated such social fears on a global scale. In this context, popular environmentalist movements, together with other influential individuals, are giving voice to those feelings, offering a safe space for sharing negative emotions, and supporting people with guidance and information through social media. The present study focuses on the discursive construction of negative feelings in social media posts by environmental organisations and eco-conscious people. The term 'eco-anxiety' and other relevant keywords are used to assess the presence of eco-anxiety topics in online discourses by looking at recurrent verbal elements and language patterns. While qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis is the privileged methodology, the analysis adopts the Hogg's scale for eco-anxiety measurement to investigate the sense of urgency and negativity shared by social media users. The analysis is reinforced by data obtained through the corpus analysis tool *Sketch Engine* outlining points of contact among keywords and collocations, and validating hypotheses on eco-anxiety as a discursive theme.

Keywords: *eco-anxiety*, *environmental discourse*, *social media discourse*, *online communities*, *critical*, *discourse analysis*

1. Introduction

When Hannah Arendt observed the 'dark times' the world's society was living, in the first half of the 20th century, she made a prophetic consideration about the illuminating role of certain public figures who, with "their lives and their works", could be more helpful than many "theories and concepts" in giving hope to the world.[1] Such intuition cannot but recall, if applied to our contemporary times, the great influence that social media (also SM from now on) have granted people around the globe; while we cannot know whether the legacy of current public figures will stand the test of time, the possibility to reach large numbers of people through social media has surely enhanced forms of mutual help and support during difficult times. Although the 21st century has not been marked by global conflicts so far, the number and type of issues affecting our societies appear to be even more overwhelming due to the magnifying power of globalisation and social media. In the last few decades, the fierceness of social and economic crises, the disenchantment caused by the failure of governments and democratic systems around the world, and the plague of climate change have shaped and reinforced the 'age of anger' theorised by Pankaj Mishra.[2] As a consequence, the forms of social fears, panic, and anxiety affecting especially younger generations are today countless, and it is often left to individuals, informal groups, and communities to deal with them.

In 2020, the advent of Covid-19 marked the start of another traumatic chapter in recent global history. While the medium- and long-term consequences of the pandemic on all areas of human activity and the environment are still being assessed, the phenomenon has already earned the status of a 'Black Swan' event. This evocative label, originally coined by mathematical statistician Nassim

[1] Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), ix.
[2] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Macmillan, 2017).

Nicholas Taleb,[3] indicates rare and extremely impactful events, usually with negative repercussions on large systems and societies. In response to the sudden changes and traumas engendered by such disrupting situations, affected people and social groups naturally tend to gather and build communities for sharing negative feelings and emotions. It has been observed that Covid-19 is having a profound impact on people's mental health, including that of children and adolescents.[4] In a broad sense, it is no exaggeration to say that the scope of environmental issues such as climate change or pollution is similar to that of a Black Swan event, especially if considering their current and future effects on the world; the environmental crisis, however, lacks the theorised unpredictability of proper Black Swan events.[5] What remains in this forced yet incisive analogy is the need for certain communities and groups of people to get together and find safe spaces to give voice to their negative feelings. Indeed, the so-called 'eco-anxiety' is defined as "a chronic fear of environmental doom [or] mental distress or anxiety associated with worsening environmental conditions ... or anxiety experienced in response to the ecological crisis".[6] Emerging scientific evidence[7] on the subject suggests that eco-anxiety as a condition has similar symptoms as Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD);[8] it has been noted that "[e]xperiencing the effects of climate change first-hand is psychologically traumatic, and this shows up as a direct and severe impact on mental health outcome figures, including for rates of suicide, PTSD, depression, and extreme distress".[9] People in the broad age group 16-34, in particular, are more likely to be affected by forms of eco-anxiety.[10]

Given the rapid popularisation of the phenomenon, the term is also gaining official linguistic recognition. Last October 2021, the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) released an update to the list of new and revised entries: among the almost one hundred compounds of 'eco-', the OED now lists 'eco-anxiety' as "unease or apprehension about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change".[11] Similarly, one newly added sense of the lexeme 'climate' reads: "as a modifier, designating emotional or psychological states arising from concerns over the impact of climate change and global warming, as *climate anger*, *climate anxiety*, *climate depression*, *climate fear*, *climate grief*, *climate optimism*, *climate pessimism*, etc."[12] The OED's project to "broaden and review its coverage of vocabulary related to climate change and sustainability"[13] shows the rising interest in environmental language and discourse, and validates prospective studies in the field.

[3] Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).
[4] See, among others: United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health* (New York: UNICEF, October 2021); OECD, *Tackling the Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis: An Integrated, Whole-of-society Response* (Paris: OECD Publishing, May 2021).
[5] See, for example, John Drake, "Was Covid-19 a Black Swan Event?", *Forbes* (2021), *www.forbes.com*.
[6] Yumiko Coffey et al., "Understanding Eco-anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps", *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 3 (August 2021), 1.
[7] Thomas J. Doherty and Susan Clayton, "The Psychological Impacts of Global Climate Change", *American Psychologist*, 66.4 (2011), 265; Panu Pihkala, "Climate Anxiety" (Helsinki: MIELI Mental Health Finland, 2019); Tsvetelina Filipova et al., "Mental Health and the Environment: How European Policies Can Better Reflect Environmental Degradation's Impact on People's Mental Health and Well-Being", Background paper by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) and the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (IS-Global) (2020).
[8] Teaghan L. Hogg et al., "The Hogg Eco-anxiety Scale: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Scale", *Global Environmental Change*, 71 (2021), 102391.
[9] Emma Lawrance et al., "The Impact of Climate Change on Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing: Current Evidence and Implications for Policy and Practice", Grantham Institute Briefing paper 36 (May 2021), 8.
[10] For a comprehensive overview of existing studies, see Coffey et al., "Understanding Eco-anxiety", 2.
[11] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "-eco", *www.oed.com*.
[12] Oxford English Dictionary, "climate", *www.oed.com*.
[13] Oxford English Dictionary, "The Language of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability: The OED October 2021 Update", *www.public.oed.com*.

The present study aims to explore the recently acknowledged link between environmental and mental health issues by analysing the discursive construction of eco-anxiety feelings on social media. It is assumed that more and more SM accounts by environmental groups and influencers are offering psychological and emotional support, thus giving eco-conscious individuals the possibility to vent and ease their forms of stress or anxiety as "a healthy psychological adaptation and response to threat".[14] The proposed analysis investigates the sense of urgency and negativity shared by environmentally conscious people and realised in online discourses. In the discussion that follows, the term 'eco-anxiety' – together with other keywords – serves as the starting point for 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. More specifically, the paper looks at various, sometimes subtle discourse markers to highlight the presence of eco-anxiety topics in user-generated content. The chosen methodology combines qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis and interdisciplinary frameworks from the fields of Psychology and Sustainability Studies, in particular Hogg's multidimensional scale for eco-anxiety measurement, of which more will be said in section 3.

2. Social Media Communication and Critical Discourse Studies

Since their appearance in the early 2000s, global social media have provided an inexhaustible source for linguistic research thanks to the impressive quantity and quality of textual material available for analysis, to the extent that it would be quite complex to give a comprehensive list of existing approaches and thematic foci on the subject. In the field of Discourse Studies, Majid KhosraviNik outlined the discursive possibilities offered by the online channel, highlighting the various communicative outcomes deriving from user interaction. Following his definition:

> Social Media Communication is viewed as electronically mediated communication across any electronic platforms, spaces, sites, and technologies in which users can: (a.) *work together in producing and compiling content;* (b.) *perform interpersonal communication and mass communication simultaneously or separately – sometimes mass performance of interpersonal communication and*; (c.) *have access to see and respond to institutionally (e.g., newspaper articles) and user-generated content/texts*.[15]

In this sense, social media – especially social networking and blogging sites – represent a convenient database for observing how communicative practices and discourses around different themes are shaped, and challenge researchers to trace the boundaries between small-scale interpersonal communication and largely-shared discursive practices. Gwen Bouvier, among others, reflected on the construction of identity between the online/offline worlds.[16] While this is not the locus to further explain these concepts, research in social semiotics has tried to examine how "social practices happening in the 'material world' are reformulated in texts and discussions".[17] Actually, it is still unclear whether the resulting discursive practices are born 'offline' and then transferred online, or they are created from scratch according to new and different communicative criteria;[18] such distinction may

[14] Coffey et al., "Understanding Eco-anxiety", 3.
[15] Majid KhosraviNik, "Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS)", in John Flowerdew and John Richardson, eds., *Handbook of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2017), 582.
[16] Gwen Bouvier, "What Is a Discourse Approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Other Social Media: Connecting with Other Academic Fields?", *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10.2 (2015), 149-162.
[17] Anton Törnberg and Petter Törnberg, "Muslims in Social Media Discourse: Combining Topic Modeling and Critical Discourse Analysis", *Discourse, Context and Media*, 13 (2016), 135.
[18] Darren G. Lilleker et al., "Informing, Engaging, Mobilizing or Interacting: Searching for a European Model of Web Campaigning", *European Journal of Communication*, 26.3 (2011), 195-213.

indeed be central to understand how shared information is received and interpreted by user groups, and it is certainly in line with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) – which studies precisely the functions of language in social settings, as "the domain of meaning making associated with forging social bonds as interpersonal meaning".[19]

Among other topics, the meaning making potential of online interaction has been at the centre of several studies adopting Corpus Linguistics[20] as the privileged methodology, for example to investigate "probabilities, trends, patterns, co-occurrences of elements, features or groupings of features"[21] in a number of texts and corpora. More will be said about the applications of corpus-based discourse analysis in the Methodology section. At the opposite end, alternative frameworks[22] have foregrounded users so as to privilege "the practice where the text is used",[23] rather than the text itself as the starting point of investigation. In short, it is the communicative exchange among specific user groups which determines the discursive features of a text, hence the users' external context is given more relevance than other co-textual elements. Studies in Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)[24] have pointed out that the online channel may be another influencing contextual factor – with communications being heavily influenced in their form by the digital medium –, while computational linguists[25] have used sentiment analysis to group online communities based on shared language patterns. As a matter of fact, some of the difficulties of research on social media lie in attributing valid definitions in the first place, following the idea that "notions such as 'community' and 'genre' are familiar and evocative, yet notoriously slippery, and unhelpful (or worse) if applied indiscriminately".[26]

From the point of view of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), all the above-mentioned approaches can be selected and combined to highlight problematic or power-related aspects of social media communication: as noted by KhosraviNik, "Social Media can and have provided new spaces of power for citizenry engagement, grass-root access, and use of symbolic resources".[27] Since CDS is "a

[19] Michele Zappavigna, *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web* (London: Continuum, 2012), 11.

[20] Michael Stubbs, "Grammar, Text, and Ideology: Computer-Assisted Methods in the Linguistics of Representation", *Applied Linguistics*, 15.2 (1994), 201-223; Winnie Cheng, "Corpus-based Linguistic Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis" in Carol A. Chapelle, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2014), 1353-1360; Paul Baker et al., "A Useful Methodological Synergy? Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics to Examine Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press", *Discourse and Society*, 19.3 (2008), 273-306; Lynne Flowerdew, "Corpus-based Discourse Analysis" in James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2013), 174-187.

[21] Teubert Wolfgang and Ramesh Krishnamurthy, eds., *Corpus Linguistics: Critical Concepts in Linguistics* (London: Routledge, 2007), 6.

[22] Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis: Discourse and the Emerging Internet* (London: Routledge, 2004); Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* (London: Routledge, 2003); Rodney H. Jones and Sigrid Norris, *Discourse in Action: Introducing Mediated Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2005); David Barton and Carmen Lee, *Language Online: Investigating Digital Texts and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[23] Barton and Lee, *Language Online*, 14.

[24] Susan C. Herring, "Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis: an Approach to Researching Online Behavior", in Sasha Barab et al., eds., *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2004), 338-376; Susan C. Herring and Jannis Androutsopoulos, "Computer-mediated Discourse 2.0", in Deborah Tannen et al., eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Second Edition (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 127-151; Jannis Androutsopoulos and Michael Beißwenger, "Introduction: Data and Methods in Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis", *Language@ internet*, 5.2 (2008), 9.

[25] Anatoliy Gruzd et al., "Analyzing Social Media and Learning Through Content and Social Network Analysis: A Faceted Methodological Approach", *Journal of Learning Analytics*, 3.3 (2016), 46-71; Anatoliy Gruzd and Caroline Haythornthwaite, "The Analysis of Online Communities Using Interactive Content-Based Social Networks", *DalSpace* (2008), *www.dalspace.library.dal.ca*; Federico Neri et al., "Sentiment Analysis on Social Media", 2012 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (IEEE, August 2012), 919-926.

[26] Herring, "Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis", 338.

[27] KhosraviNik, "Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS)", 583.

socially committed, problem-oriented, textually based, critical analysis of discourse",[28] it can be exploited also to analyse both environmental and social issues, such as the phenomenon of eco-anxiety, as they appear online. In terms of users' empowerment, CDS can be chosen to look for direct links between participants' discourses and power relations: as members of pro-environment communities express their negative feelings and frustration through social media posts, comments, and other written samples, they also gain communicative spaces and contribute to spreading counter-narratives on established views, thus challenging and confronting dominant groups. For the same reason, critical approaches can help to highlight power-related issues by decoding recurrent language features and pointing out politically-loaded discourse. Relevant studies in the field have dealt with the democratisation process occurring between producers and receivers of information, for example in the dissemination of news,[29] or the more generic changes in information production, distribution and reception through social media.[30]

Concerning the topic of eco-anxiety, a growing body of literature in Discourse Studies and Communication is emerging;[31] interdisciplinary research in the areas of psychology and sustainability[32] is also bringing significant contribution to the discussion by disseminating important knowledge and information. Eco-critical Discourse Studies, in particular, are looking into the issue with reference to youth mental health and ecological awareness, focussing on specific case studies from the fields of news and media coverage and representation of environmental events.[33] Such body of research aims at critically describing the mental health impacts of (social) media narrations of ecological issues on conscious readers, thus reinforcing evidence on the relationship between eco-fears and anxiety disorders. In this study, the examined textual material is provided by user-generated content, rather than top-down communications; moreover, reference is made to widely renowned frameworks and models for classifying the symptoms of eco-anxiety, as illustrated in the Methodology section.

[28] Ibid., 586.

[29] Gwen Bouvier and David Machin, "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Challenge of Social Media: the Case of News Texts", *Review of Communication*, 18.3 (2018), 178-192; Matt Carlson and Seth C. Lewis, eds., *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation* (London: Routledge, 2015); Sarah Niblock and David Machin, *News Production: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2014); Michele Zappavigna, *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media*.

[30] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992); Majid KhosraviNik and Johann W. Unger, "Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media: Power, Resistance and Critique in Changing Media Ecologies", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (London: SAGE, 2016), 205-233; Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory* (London: Polity, 2010); Johann W. Unger et al., "Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media Data", in David Silverman, ed., *Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2010); Gunther Kress, "Gains and Losses: New Forms of Texts, Knowledge, and Learning", *Computers and Composition*, 22 (2005), 5-22.

[31] Timothy Clarke, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of How Language Use in British Newspapers May Be Causing or Exacerbating Eco-Anxiety", *DiVA Portal* (2021), *www.diva-portal.org*; Brittany Bloodhart et al., "Be Worried, be VERY Worried: Preferences for and Impacts of Negative Emotional Climate Change Communication", *Frontiers in Communication*, 3 (2019), 63.

[32] Hogg et al. "The Hogg Eco-anxiety Scale"; Panu Pihkala, "Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-anxiety and Climate Anxiety", *Sustainability* 12.19 (2020), 7836; Coffey et al., "Understanding Eco-anxiety"; Steven Taylor, "Anxiety Disorders, Climate Change, and the Challenges Ahead: Introduction to the Special Issue", *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 76 (December 2020), 102313; Panu Pihkala, "Eco-anxiety", in C. Parker Krieg and Reetta Toivanen, eds., *Situating Sustainability: A Handbook of Contexts and Concepts* (Helsinki: Helsinki U.P., 2021), 119-134.

[33] Brittany Smith, "Eco-Anxiety: A Discourse Analysis of Media Representations of the School Strike for Climate Movement", Diss. 2020; Laelia Benoit et al., "Ecological Awareness, Anxiety, and Actions Among Youth and Their Parents: A Qualitative Study of Newspaper Narratives", *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27.1 (2022), 47-58; Anna Kelly, "Eco-Anxiety at University: Student Experiences and Academic Perspectives on Cultivating Healthy Emotional Responses to the Climate Crisis", *SIT Digital Collections* (2017), *www.digitalcollections.sit.edu*.

3. Methodology

For what concerns the choice of reliable and accurate methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative analyses of textual material obtained from social media can be risky and full of shortcomings. In both cases, the first problems arise when taking into account "the size and representativeness of data samples, data processing techniques, the delimitation of genres, and the kind and amount of contextual information that is necessary, as well as ethical issues such as anonymity and privacy protection".[34] Considering CDA, some risks include the lack of objectivity and purpose-driven data selection: Baker and Levon, among others,[35] defined such research flaws as "'cherry pick[ing]' or intentionally select[ing] (possibly atypical) data or linguistic features for analysis to prove a preconceived point in CDA".[36] To avoid the pitfalls of partial or biased analysis, and since there is no standardised method for doing research in this field,[37] it might be useful to combine several approaches. This study draws from Critical Discourse Studies in combination with Corpus Linguistics, following the idea that "corpus tools can identify how ... discourses are created incrementally",[38] that is, over time, even though certain features do not appear frequently. It has been noted[39] that "corpus-based CDA studies make use of both quantitative techniques, that is, frequency and keyword lists – complemented by more detailed qualitative textual analysis and combined in such a way so as to uncover the *non-obvious meaning*, unavailable to conscious awareness, in the discourse under investigation".[40] This is also in line with the principle that qualitative approaches "can also be emergent – that is, the researcher does not set out with a clear hypothesis to test, but rather gathers data, and then sees which features emerge as prominent from the collected material".[41]

In addition to these techniques, the present paper takes into account interdisciplinary approaches for the evaluation of eco-anxiety such as the Hogg eco-anxiety scale to outline objective thematic categories of analysis. This model establishes four main dimensions of eco-anxiety (affective symptoms; rumination; behavioural symptoms, and anxiety about personal impact), with a series of correlates, including stress, anxiety, depression, emotion reactivity, credibility of science, and climate change belief. More importantly, the Hogg's scale identifies 13 items or outcomes:

1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying
3. Worrying too much
4. Feeling afraid
5. Unable to stop thinking about future climate change and other global environmental problems
6. Unable to stop thinking about past events related to climate change

[34] Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger, "Introduction: Data and Methods in Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis", 1.
[35] Charles Antaki et al., "Discourse Analysis Means Doing Analysis: A Critique of Six Analytic Shortcomings", *Sheffield Hallam University* (2003), *www.extra.shu.ac.uk*.
[36] Paul Baker and Erez Levon, "Picking the Right Cherries? A Comparison of Corpus-Based and Qualitative Analyses of News Articles about Masculinity", *Discourse & Communication*, 9.2 (2015), 222.
[37] Norman Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2013), 9-20; Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis: Challenges and Perspectives", in Ruth Wodak, ed., *Critical Discourse Analysis Volume I: Concepts, History, Theory* (London: SAGE, 2013), ixx-xliii.
[38] John Flowerdew, *Discourse in English Language Education* (London: Routledge, 2013), 168.
[39] Baker et al., "A Useful Methodological Synergy?"; Gerlinde Hardt-Mautner, "Only Connect. Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics", UCREL technical paper 6 (Lancaster: Lancaster University, 1995); Gerlinde Hardt-Mautner, "Checks and Balances: How Corpus Linguistics Can Contribute to CDA", *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3 (2016), 155-180; Costas Gabrielatos and Alison Duguid, "Corpus Linguistics and CDA: A Critical Look at Synergy", CDA20+ Symposium, University of Amsterdam, 9 (2014).
[40] L. Flowerdew, "Corpus-based Discourse Analysis", 179.
[41] Ruth Page et al., *Researching Language and Social Media. A Student Guide* (London: Routledge, 2022), 51.

7. Unable to stop thinking about losses to the environment
8. Difficulty sleeping
9. Difficulty enjoying social situations with family and friends
10. Difficulty working and/or studying
11. Feeling anxious about the impact of your personal behaviours on the earth
12. Feeling anxious about your personal responsibility to help address environmental problems
13. Feeling anxious that your personal behaviours will do little to help fix the problem.[42]

All the above items correspond to recurrent thematic motifs in the online discourse carried out by environmentalists.

The following analysis comprises a collection of about 200 online posts and comments in English on the topics of eco-anxiety in about 30 international SM accounts of environmental movements and influencers. While the list of global SM pages in English focussing on environmental topics is extremely vast, the selected SM accounts were picked from a larger group of about 50 relevant SM pages after extensive search; in particular, attention was given only to those SM accounts with at least one post on climate anxiety – whereas other pages dealing with unrelated environmental topics were discarded.[43] The study covers the period spanning from 2020 until today, given the already mentioned impact of the pandemic on people's mental health and environmental fears. Albeit small, the corpus of examples fulfils the need for specificity: given the nature of the inquiry and the indefiniteness of the subject, it appeared more on point to limit the data set and look for specific instances of eco-anxiety discourses. In this sense, the study is more concerned with contextual accuracy and thematic coherence, consistent with qualitative CDA.[44] As an additional text-external parameter, it considers only those SM pages and accounts with at least 10.000 followers – the so-called micro-influencers[45] – to provide representativeness; where existent, the same accounts are cross-checked on three major social media networks, namely Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, so as to further enrich the analysis and collect more discourse samples on the same threads. Regarding this choice, it could be argued that other, perhaps more popular platforms (such as TikTok or Snapchat) could be included in the analysis; however, the above SM networks offer more verbal content, compared to other SM where photos or videos are predominant. Further studies making use of multimodal frameworks (for instance, dealing with visual elements as communicative material) may well open innovative perspectives in the field.

At the beginning of data selection, a keyword search was performed through the search bar available on the selected SM accounts. The query started from the reference keyword 'eco-anxiety', and then it expanded to other semantically and thematically related keywords, such as 'climate anxiety', 'environmental anxiety', 'eco-fears', 'environmental fears', 'climate stress', 'eco-grief', etcetera, for a total of roughly 10 keywords. Further studies may well expand the query to include other, less obvious keywords. Keyword annotation enabled to limit the number of posts published in the reference timeframe (from 2020 until to date), which resulted in roughly 1 to 10 posts for each account under consideration. Due to the very specific, and yet linguistically indefinite nature of the

[42] Hogg et al., "The Hogg Eco-anxiety Scale", 9.
[43] For a list of influential environmental SM accounts, see: Jeremy Waite, "Top 66 Climate Change Accounts to Follow on Twitter", *Jeremy Waite* (2019), *www.jeremy.earth*; Alessandra Ciuffo, "Top 15 Climate Instagram Accounts to Follow Today", *Waterfront Alliance* (2021), *www.waterfrontalliance.org*; Olivia Lai, "20 Environmental Instagram Accounts to Follow Now", *Earth.org* (2022), *www.earth.org*.
[44] Lynne Flowerdew, "An Integration of Corpus-Based and Genre-Based Approaches to Text Analysis in EAP/ESP: Countering Criticisms Against Corpus-Based Methodologies", *English for Specific Purposes*, 24.3 (2005), 321-332; Almut Koester, "Building Small Specialised Corpora", in Anne O'Keeffe and Michael McCarthy, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 66-79; Daniel Ross, "Small Corpora and Low-Frequency Phenomena: Try and Beyond Contemporary, Standard English", *Corpus* 18 (2018); Page et al., *Researching Language and Social Media. A Student Guide*.
[45] CMSWire, "Social Media Influencers: Mega, Macro, Micro or Nano", *CMSWire* (2018), *www.cmswire.com*.

research question – how is eco-anxiety constructed discursively by people online? – it was opted for manual reading of the results. However, in order to validate the findings, different search operations were carried out on the corpus analysis tool *Sketch Engine*. After taking note of recurrent themes and lexical items describing negative feelings about the environment (also exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19), the word 'anxiety' was contrasted with 'environment' and 'climate' through *Sketch Engine*'s Concordance tool to highlight attested usage in the English Web corpus *enTenTen*, "an English corpus made up of texts collected from the Internet";[46] this operation was also useful to show shared collocations and frequent modifiers of the lexemes. Subsequently, the Word Sketch tool was used to obtain a comprehensive overview of reference keywords and assess whether reported negative feelings appeared in each wordlist under any category, namely as nouns, adjectives, or verb expressions; to give an example, the feeling of anger matched the adjective 'angry', but also the verb construct 'lied to'. In this sense, all lexemes paired to reported feelings are intended as terminological wild cards for corpus observation.

4. Results and Discussion

At a first glance, linguistic data pertaining to the topic of eco-anxiety appeared rather hidden, with several posts and comments offering limited discussion strictly on the subject. Upon closer examination, it was possible to detect those verbal elements signalling negative feelings and emotions, and to collect discursive material for critical analysis.

Emotions associated with Hogg's item 1, 'Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge', are easier to observe, as this category makes generic reference to a wide range of negative feelings; in this case, social media comments report a number of words, especially adjectives, related to anger ('angry', 'pissed off', 'mad', 'furious', 'outraged'), anxiety ('anxious', 'sick'), or mental exhaustion ('powerless', 'hopeless'). In some instances, these feelings are addressed to older generations or politicians – deemed responsible for the environmental crisis – as the following two examples from the Facebook page of the group *Extinction Rebellion* show: "Mine is more anger than anxiety. I hate the politicians for following big business and ignoring the obvious. The worst criminals of my lifetime in my opinion"; "I am pissed off by boomers who refuse to believe in Climate Change, because they are too attached to their diesels [sic] and steaks!!!"[47] Interestingly, some comments suggest that anger and anxiety are necessary feelings leading to action, hence mitigating their negative emotional impact: "We must FEEL the problem before we ACT on the problem. ANXIETY is the precursor to ANGER which is the precursor to ACTION. It's a natural process";[48] "We need righteous wrath, to mobilize, to force us to use our knowledge in the face of status quo.... We need a force driving us to implement the future we want and need, and not yet another coping mechanism. How about we teach people to act, instead of sedating them? You don't need to 'tackle' feelings, but embrace them, focus them [sic], and ACT".[49]

In general, anger-related feelings clearly express frustration with existing power relations among different social groups; from an (eco)critical standpoint,[50] the discourse carried out in this thematic category provides evidence of the imbalance between older generations ('boomers') or other dominant groups ('politicians' and 'big businesses') and younger people (aged 16-34) when it comes to environmental policy planning and implementing ("I have no hope for the human race. The capitalists will continue to burn fossil fuels until the earth burns. Governments won't stop them and there will

[46] Sketch Engine, "enTenTen – English Corpus from the Web", *www.sketchengine.eu*.
[47] Facebook, "Extinction Rebellion" (2022), *www.facebook.com*.
[48] Twitter, "TRF" (2022), *www.twitter.com*.
[49] Facebook, "Extinction Rebellion".
[50] Arran Stibbe, "An Ecolinguistic Approach to Critical Discourse Studies", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 11.1 (2014), 117-128.

never be sufficient investment or impetus in green energy solutions. It's already too late").[51] In this sense, the recurrent adjective 'powerless' is emblematic, as it underlines the disappointment over the empty promises made by powerful categories. In one Instagram post, environmental influencer Vanessa Nakate writes:

> We are drowning in promises. Commitments will not reduce CO2. Promises will not stop the suffering of people. Pledges will not stop the planet from warming. Only immediate and drastic action will pull us back from the abyss. The truth is that the atmosphere doesn't care about commitments. It only cares about what we put into it – or stop putting into it. Humanity will not be saved by promises.[52]

As this and the above comments show, this aspect has points of contact with broader environmental justice claims, in which "climate communication reproduces or resists current contexts of sociopolitical power".[53]

At the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, items 2 ('Not being able to stop or control worrying') and 3 ('Worrying too much') are constructed similarly in the observed posts, especially through adjectives such as 'terrified', 'paralysed', or 'overwhelming'. In some cases, worry and concern reach severe forms, and the language becomes highly expressive: "Anxious? They should be absolutely shitting themselves. We all should. If there was ever a time to fight, it's now"; "I'm not anxious anymore I'm desperate"; "Sick to death and pretty helpless".[54] The feeling of being afraid (item 4), often reported with 'scared' or 'frightened', is also associated with sadness, as the adjectives 'sad', the verb construct 'to be in despair', and adjectives such as 'hopeless' and 'helpless' indicate ("I feel helpless, hopeless and frightened for the future"; "Helpless. Hopeless. Fearful for my children").[55] All the above items and their corresponding negative emotions are sometimes linked to general depression – "My depression has worsened with climate change and I have accepted that is [sic] what it will be"[56] –; however, as a coping and comforting action, some users find it useful to share their personal experience with the other readers: "I have been taking a little bit of action in the form of donations and ... I see that may offer me some relief";[57] "Climate anxiety is real and I am fighting it. I am trying to stave off despair by working on my diet (cutting out meat and dairy) and lifestyle (less plastic, fewer clothes, etc), and volunteering for wildlife research and getting to see nature while I still can".[58] In other instances, sadness (similar to anger) is used as a positive push to action: "It's important to let sad news make you sad. Let the gravity and inertia of the crisis overwhelm you just enough to fully realize who you are fighting & why".[59] This latter comment shows the informal coping mechanisms active in these online communities, in which people often share words of comfort to help other users dealing with negative thoughts.

The categories 5 ('Unable to stop thinking about future climate change and other global environmental problems'), 6 ('Unable to stop thinking about past events related to climate change'), and 7 ('Unable to stop thinking about losses to the environment') correspond to the state of rumination reported by Hogg et al.[60] This mental state, involving constant thinking about environmental degradation, is exemplified by the verb expressions "can't help but think" or "can't stop thinking

[51] Twitter, "Greenpeace" (2022), *www.twitter.com*.
[52] Instagram, "Vanessa Nakate" (2021), *www.instagram.com*.
[53] Julia C. Fine and Jessica Love-Nichols, "Language and Climate Justice: A Research Agenda", *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 25 (2021), 460.
[54] Facebook, "Extinction Rebellion"; Facebook, "Mind" (2022), *www.facebook.com*.
[55] Facebook, "Mind".
[56] Facebook, "Extinction Rebellion".
[57] Ibid.
[58] Facebook, "Climate Reality" (2020), *www.facebook.com*.
[59] Facebook, "Extinction Rebellion".
[60] Hogg et al., "The Hogg Eco-anxiety Scale", 4.

about". In particular, negative emotions linked to item 6 stress the disappointment over the delay in responding to the ecological crisis: "I feel it's too late for talking!"; "It isn't something new, now finally the world is taking note!!"[61] In some comments, negative thoughts revolve around dominant groups as opposed to laypeople and scientists: "We have known about it for decades now, successive governments have failed to attempt anything other than the most basic of measures"; "The saddest part of all this that it has been predictable not only by scientists but also by many others for the past 40yrs".[62] Speaking of the role of scientists, they are also part – although in an over-simplified, polarized representation of power relations – of the dominated minorities, given that public scientific concern over environmental issues has often been overlooked by policymakers. Since all four dimensions of eco-anxiety are reportedly "unrelated to trust in the credibility of science",[63] the popular hypothesis that climate change deniers are either poorly informed or not directly experiencing the effects of the climate and ecological crisis gains strength.

Moreover, predictions about future losses to the environment (items 5 and 7) go from envisioning necessary lifestyle changes ("Now it's come to a point where drastic lifestyle changes will need to happen very quickly") to dramatic scenarios for human survival ("Can't help thinking the World will sort itself with weather shifts that will thin us out enough to stop us destroying it").[64] Negative thoughts about having children or about the future of younger generations are also recurrent in these categories, as some comments point out: "I question whether it's ethical to have any children. I'm 33 and that is weighing on me. I feel it will be selfish to have kids largely for my own fulfillment, knowing that by the time they can have kids, it will be a much less viable option";[65] "Rather than worry, it would be beneficial if you stop all fuel travel, refuse plastic and wood products, grow all of your own food and try to breathe less. Of course no more babies please!"[66] Interestingly, quite a few comments in these thematic groups are written by older users who admit being part of the problem ("the baby boomer generation (mine) [sic] has been horrible stewards of our environment and it's downright immoral"; "we older generations must take actions to begin to address climate change, it is an intergenerational project but it is our responsibility to initiate it to give future generations some hope").[67]

Moving towards more severe symptoms of eco-anxiety, items 8 ('Difficulty sleeping'), 9 ('Difficulty enjoying social situations with family and friends'), and 10 ('Difficulty working and/or studying') are more rarely reported in social media discourse. In the first case, comments by users report difficulty sleeping ("I lose sleep over ecological overshoot"; "The truth is, if you're awake to the climate crisis during the day, finding yourself awake at night is a distinct possibility");[68] in the other two cases, the effects of climate anxiety can be more complex, for example leading to forms of apathy and resigned acceptance:

> The solution is to move from denial to acceptance, and not getting stuck in anger, bargaining, depression. For those that accepted climate change years ago, we've come to accept denial from those that haven't been paying attention. The world it seems, is polluted with victims that aren't experiencing the worst of climate change.[69]

[61] Facebook, "Mind".
[62] Facebook, "Greta Thunberg" (2022), *www.facebook.com*.
[63] Hogg et al., "The Hogg Eco-anxiety Scale", 6.
[64] Facebook, "Greta Thunberg".
[65] Facebook, "Yale Program on Climate Change Communication" (2022), *www.facebook.com*.
[66] Facebook, "Extinction Rebellion".
[67] Facebook, "Climate Reality" (2021), *www.facebook.com*.
[68] Twitter, "Trf Climate" (2021), "Dr. Katharine Wilkinson" (2022), *www.twitter.com*.
[69] Facebook, "Climate Central" (2020), *www.facebook.com*.

Other comments mainly reflect upon the general deterioration of people's lives ("No amount of therapy is gonna [sic] help me navigate ... climate change, the fact that there's still a pandemic, and the daily degradation of the lives of my friends and loved ones"), and the fact that, despite suffering from overlapping stress and anxiety, people must continue to work normally ("I have severe depression and anxiety, the climate is unstable, the world is on the brink of war, and I have to log on tomorrow and pretend all is fine and that I like my stupid job and the stupid people").[70] Comments such as the latter mark the social separation between small powerful minorities and the vast majority of people, almost unveiling the futility of common jobs in the face of the ecological crisis.

Finally, items 11 ('Feeling anxious about the impact of your personal behaviours on the earth'), 12 ('Feeling anxious about your personal responsibility to help address environmental problems'), and 13 ('Feeling anxious that your personal behaviours will do little to help fix the problem') have several points of contact with all other categories, as they make reference to subtle forms of eco-anxiety. Some comments in these groups show the same level of intolerance against elite categories as in item 10: "Instead of working people shouldering the guilt and grief of the climate crisis, we need to redirect that blame where it rightfully belongs – squarely at the feet of the global corporate elite and their political allies who have been stacking the deck in their favour for years";[71] "The world is eventually going to fry because of governments' inaction, industry resistance to change, economic growth, the world population explosion, etc." [sic].[72] Many common people experience feelings of guilt for the current climate crisis, and tend to blame themselves for not doing enough or doing little to help fix the problem ("The worst is feeling terrible about the things your [sic] already doing and saying you aren't doing enough"; "I still mess up and make excuses and go into a shame cycle. But just gotta [sic] keep trying!")[73] Existing literature in the field of green marketing[74] has denounced the paradox of consumer scapegoatism, a tendency of companies and corporations to load laypeople with excessive individual responsibility, while covertly promoting consumerism and directly fuelling the ecological crises. Confrontational language and wording is quite frequent in this sense, as some observe: "We certainly are in a David and Goliath situation trying to effectively combat climate change. I struggle with feeling discouraged. Taking action – getting educated, write/call reps, vote ... is key. Connecting with other like-minded people, and spending time in wild places are other ways to stay sane and engaged in this uphill battle".[75] Verbs such as 'lied to' or 'fooled', and adjectives going from 'ashamed' to 'indifferent' capture the full complexity of these latter items, as well as the multiplicity of negative feelings classified under all Hogg's categories.

4.1 *Results validation with Sketch Engine*

As explained in the 'Methodology' section, after observing how the theme of eco-anxiety is constructed in SM discourse, *Sketch Engine* was used to validate the results and obtain a qualitative evaluation of topic distribution. In particular, the tool contrasted the couple 'anxiety'/'environment' in the English Web corpus *enTenTen*; not surprisingly, there appear to be rare semantic points of contact between the two lexemes, thus confirming that the relation between anxiety and environmental issues is still emergent and not clearly established at a discourse level; as shown in Table 1, shared usage is found especially in the words 'stress' (more used with 'anxiety') and 'health' (more used with

[70] Twitter, "Climate Reality" (2022), *www.twitter.com*.
[71] Twitter, "Emma Jackson" (2022), *www.twitter.com*.
[72] Facebook, "Climate Reality" (2021).
[73] Instagram, "plasticfreemermaid" (2022), *www.instagram.com*.
[74] See, among others, Lewis Akenji, "Consumer Scapegoatism and Limits to Green Consumerism", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 63 (2014), 13-23.
[75] Facebook, "Yale Climate Change Communication" (2022).

'environment'), although both collocates may be semantically unrelated to eco-anxiety. While there is no attested presence of 'climate' among the collocates of 'anxiety', there is matching usage of 'depression', 'fear', and 'disorder' with both keywords, although limitedly with 'climate'.

anxiety/environment and/or ...		
worry	6,347	0
insomnia	5,911	0
depression	107,556	73
fear	33,204	167
disorder	11,782	89
stress	50,337	918
health	763	53,056
culture	73	14,568
climate	0	7,428
society	0	11,853
community	0	21,176
economy	0	17,712

Tab. 1: Anxiety/Environment concordance

Among the collocates, the noun 'concern' appears 76 times with 'anxiety', and 442 with 'climate'; as for the nouns modified by 'anxiety' and 'climate' respectively, 'fear' (3,719 vs 70), 'stress' (5,226 vs 289), and 'health' (130 vs 6,031) stand out. In addition, the noun 'adolescent' (27 vs 51) stands out among the 'possessors of anxiety/environment', which possibly suggests that young people are more likely to be affected by several forms of anxiety. Cross-search of the couple 'concern'/'environment' yielded similar results, with the noteworthy collocate 'climate' found 210 times with 'concern' (and 7,428 times with 'environment'). Subsequently, data obtained through the Word Sketch tool confirmed the selection of reference keywords, with the adjectives 'environmental' and 'ecological' found as modifiers of 'concern'.

Finally, the Word Sketch tool was also useful to cross-check feelings linked to eco-anxiety as appearing in Hogg's model. To give some examples, nouns modified by 'anxiety' include: 'depression', 'stress', 'fear', 'anger', 'irritability', 'panic', 'agitation', 'nervousness', 'frustration', 'worry', 'restlessness', 'fatigue', 'guilt', 'sadness', 'loneliness', 'grief', 'tension', 'sleeplessness', and 'distress'. These lexemes – besides corresponding to the main symptoms of climate anxiety described in literature – and their derived forms appear in the observed SM discourses, with users choosing them to describe their negative feelings. Albeit promising, the results yielded through software analysis are by no means, from a quantitative perspective, representative of the discursive links between environmental and anxiety topics. As explained in the 'Methodology' section, qualitative observation enables to focus on specificity and context in smaller data samples, rather than larger ones; the search operations performed through *Sketch Engine* concern single lexemes and pairs of words, indeed no frequency analysis (needed in quantitative studies) is provided, but rather lists of collocates and comparative word sketches; quantitative investigations using larger corpora may deal with representativeness on a more systematic basis.

5. Conclusions

The present paper has tried to highlight how the emerging issue of eco-anxiety is constructed in social media discourse by eco-savvy users wishing to share their negative emotions about the environment. While the study has some, already discussed methodological limitations, further research could adopt enhanced qualitative approaches or corpus-based methods for larger and more systematic linguistic investigation. Despite the lack of robust linguistic evidence on the subject emerging from corpus-aided

search operations, preliminary results suggest that there is a marked, somehow spontaneous relation between eco-anxiety themes and their language patterning. Indeed, the taxonomies of eco-anxiety produced in the field of psychology provide a valid point of departure to investigate this issue within the framework of Critical Discourse Studies: starting from the lists of identified symptoms, it is possible to trace related terminological seeds for linguistic examination.

In conclusion, the observed SM discourses document the varied, widespread negativity about the current state of the world's environment by eco-conscious people who often denounce the unwillingness of dominant groups (such as politicians and big businesses) to change the status quo. It is here that, as anticipated by Mishra, "the modern promise of equality collides with massive disparities of power, education, status and property ownership".[76] In all fields of discussion, social media are giving unprecedented visibility to individual and collective sentiments of anger, disillusion, anxiety, and powerlessness, all adding up to the modern age of 'ressentiment' described in Mishra's book; in ecological terms, the causes for negativity and concern are also clearly and widely stated online, but in fact little progress is being made in listening to the digital cry for help.[77]

Appendix 1 – Corpus

List of SM accounts with relative number of followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The symbol '/' indicates that the number of followers is inferior to 10,000 or that the page does not exist on the selected SM platform.

	NAME	FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
1.	1 Million Women	1,000,000	166,000	18,100
2.	Autumn Peltier	45,100	124,000	/
3.	C40 Cities	37,500	40,400	114,700
4.	Citizens' Climate Lobby	/	16,900	43,500
5.	Climate Central	144,000	/	135,600
6.	Climate Change Committee	/	/	62,700
7.	Climate Group	14,000	15,300	159,100
8.	Climate Reality	960,900	328,000	625,200
9.	Earth Alliance	137,000	877,000	70,900
10.	Everyday Climate Change	/	136,000	/
11.	Extinction Rebellion	438,400	675,000	390,000
12.	Fridays For Future International	39,200	485,000	134,500
13.	Future Earth	/	387,000	/
14.	Greta Thunberg	3,500,000	14,300,000	5,000,000
15.	Intersectional Environmentalist	/	421,000	/
16.	Isra Hirsi	/	97,600	200,900
17.	Leah Thomas	/	233,000	18,900
18.	Little Miss Flint	/	148,000	146,000
19.	Mikaela Loach	/	134,000	10,200
20.	Oceana	1,000,000	2,900,000	470,400
21.	People & Planet	11,570	/	19,750
22.	Plasticfreemermaid	/	112,000	/
23.	Sierra Club	/	364,000	386,600
24.	Slow Factory	/	434,000	11,650
25.	Sunrise Movement	92,800	234,000	288,000

[76] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 31.

[77] Disclaimer on social media data. While the author acknowledges existing protection regulations for data retrieved on social media, all data presented in this paper has been collected from public social media groups or individual accounts of public figures, and has been anonymised to the author's capability. Moreover, all data is reproduced according to the copyright fair dealing for didactic and scientific research purposes.

26.	The Climate Coalition	23,380	15,400	35,300
27.	The Climate Council	273,800	53,300	61,900
28.	The Zero Waste Guide	13,000	868,000	/
29.	Treehugger	1,300,000	112,000	355,500
30.	Vanessa Nakate	/	165,000	253,300

Heba Ahmed

'Corona Jihad'. Examining Anti-Muslim Narratives in India during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Abstract: This article argues that during the Covid-19 pandemic in India, anti-Muslim narratives and disinformation were disseminated through mass media, social media and statements of government leaders. This led to the spread of Islamophobia, as indicated by the use of 'Corona Jihad' as a neologism during the pandemic. As a result, Muslims and Muslim organisations such as the Tablighi Jamaat were scapegoated and blamed for spreading Covid cases. They were targeted through hate speeches, socio-economic boycott campaigns and arrests by police. While several writings (quoted in this article) have explained and critiqued the notion of 'Corona Jihad', this article argues that 'Corona Jihad' is one of the many iterations of *jihad* depicted by Hindu nationalists in Islamophobic conspiracy beliefs against Muslims. These narratives of *jihad* are symptomatic of the essentialisation of Indian Muslims as the internal enemy of the Indian state.

Keywords: *Corona Jihad*, *Thook Jihad*, *Islamophobia*, *hate speech*, *scapegoats*, *Indian Muslims*

1. Introduction

In March 2020, when the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic had begun in India, I received a WhatsApp image of a snake spitting venom and wearing a white skullcap. The symbolic meaning of the skullcap was unmistakable; it was the caricature of a Muslim. The image was part of a conspiracy belief that the Coronavirus infections in India were the handiwork of Muslims, that Muslims were infecting their fellow Indians with projectile spitting. In February 2022, my mother received a WhatsApp video clip, edited to show Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan, popularly known as SRK, supposedly spitting on the mortal remains of deceased singer Lata Mangeshkar. Khan is also a Muslim; after he attended the funeral rites of Mangeshkar, social media was abuzz with images and videos that were captioned, "Did SRK spit on Lata?" Both messages were accompanied by trending hashtags, '#CoronaJihad' and '#ThookJihad' respectively (*thook* is the Hindi word for saliva). Both accused Muslims of spitting, and hence contaminating, non-Muslims/Hindus. Such hashtagged messages contain shock value, which gives them the potential to go 'viral' on social media with its ecosystem of 'fake news' and disinformation that repeatedly targets Muslims. They reveal the predominance of anti-Muslim sentiments in contemporary India.

This paper argues that the uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic in India found a readymade scapegoat in Muslims, the largest religious minority group in India. This scapegoating was denoted by the neologism 'CoronaJihad', and popularised by mobilising anti-Muslim disinformation and conspiracy beliefs on social media. This led to acts of physical violence and social boycotting of Muslims, indicating that the technological/online and socio-political/offline milieus are intertwined. The word *jihad* in this context encapsulates a conspiracy belief fanned by right-wing Hindu nationalists alleging that Muslims of India are conducting a war against Hindus. 'Love jihad' is the earliest version of this conspiracy belief, in which Muslim men are accused of seducing Hindu women and converting them to Islam. But the iterations of *jihad* have expanded, 'Corona Jihad' being one of them. Others are described by compound words like 'Thook Jihad', 'Land Jihad', 'Population Jihad', and 'Naukri Jihad' (*naukri* in Hindi means employment). Depictions of Muslims as *jihadis* or threats to Indians and the Indian nation continue to be invoked in mainstream television channels, social media disinformation campaigns, and even hate speeches by political leaders especially those

belonging to the ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). By tracing the emergence and implications of these narratives about *jihad,* this paper is an attempt at theorising Islamophobia and its components prevailing in India.

2. The Virus Has a Name

The official response to 'Covid-19' by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the government of India, when a sudden increase in cases was detected in March 2020, was to insist that there was no need for indiscriminate testing since the Coronavirus was not a health emergency and there had been no community transmissions. No clear estimate of the number of cases or the growing number of infections could be obtained. A twenty-one day lockdown was declared by the Prime Minister on 24 March; it was "identified as one of the most stringent in the world"[1] and was declared to be sufficient for containing the spread of the virus. This lackadaisical approach of the government and its insistence to not test community transmission of Covid changed when in end March, it was reported that an international religious conference organised in Delhi by the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary organisation, had emerged as the source of 27 Corona positive cases, 37 infections and six deaths. The conference attendees were tracked down and tested, with some state governments even threatening to file criminal cases against those who had not voluntarily approached the authorities to get their Covid infection status certified. As a consequence of this undue focus on the Covid positive cases linked to the Tablighi Jamaat, there were reports in the media which said, "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".[2] These numbers were a misrepresentation by the media; as Shoaib Daniyal wrote, the "sensationalist reporting" of the cases from the Jamaat gathering was the result of "sampling bias".[3] The irony of the media exaggerating and over-stating the number of Covid cases and deaths caused by the Jamaat congregation lies in the fact that the extent of death and disease is perpetually under-counted by the National Health Profile, the central health ministry's official portal for collating statistics on mortality and illness.[4] As Rukmini S. writes, the Covid pandemic "demonstrated the acute limitations of Indian state capacity" regarding transparency about data.[5] The Indian state constantly under-counted the numbers of Covid deaths to keep the official mortality rate low and to lend credence to the central government's notion that India had handled the pandemic better than any other country.

The hyperbole of highlighting the number of Covid cases exclusively linked to the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) had a singular effect. The TJ was declared to be a 'Covid-19 super spreader' and Chief Ministers of state governments such as Yogi Adityanath, a BJP hardliner, said that it was responsible for the spread of the coronavirus. The Union Health Ministry blamed the Tablighi Jamaat for the increase in the number of Coronavirus cases in the country. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs blacklisted 960 foreign nationals who had attended the TJ meeting, cancelled their visas and directed police in different states to file cases against them. An FIR registered by the Delhi Police against Maulana

[1] Reeta Chowdhari Tremblay and Namitha George, "India: Federalism, Majoritarian Nationalism, and the Vulnerable and Marginalised", in Victor V. Ramraj, ed., *COVID-19 in Asia: Law and Policy Contexts* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2021), 175.
[2] Nidhi Sharma, "647 Coronavirus Positive Cases in Two Days Linked to Tablighi Jamaat", *The Economic Times* (2020), *www.economictimes.com*.
[3] Shoaib Daniyal, "Explained: Sampling Bias Drove Sensationalist Reporting around Tablighi Coronavirus Cases", *Scroll.in* (2020), *www.scroll.in*.
[4] Rukmini S., *Whole Numbers and Half Truths: What Data Can and Cannot Tell Us About Modern India* (Chennai: Westland, 2021), 167.
[5] Ibid., 181.

Saad, the TJ head stated, "Mohd. Saad and the management deliberately, wilfully, negligently and malignantly disobeyed the directions ... they allowed a huge gathering to assemble inside a close premise [sic] over a protracted period of time without any semblance of social distance or provision of mask or hand sanitiser".[6] BJP leader Kapil Mishra tweeted that members from the Jamat should be treated like 'terrorists'.

Members of the TJ said in statements to the media that the people assembled at its headquarters in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi had been stranded because of the lockdown and unavailability of transport and the Delhi Police had not heeded the TJ's appeals for any alternate means of transport for them to depart from the premises. The TJ was reckless in overlooking the fallout of inviting foreign nationals during a pandemic, but the overzealousness of the police and the government in placing blame solely upon the TJ displays how they evaded taking responsibility by creating a scapegoat. With criminal cases filed against the TJ and the government reprimanding it in official statements and public speeches, right-wing television channels took the cue, and ran primetime shows to spotlight the culpability of the TJ. Suresh Chavhanke, the head of *Sudarshan News* said, "If India's mosques are posing a threat to Indians, and human bombs carrying coronavirus are roaming around freely, wouldn't you call it 'corona jihad'? We should keenly monitor these *jihadis* and the *jihadis* should be strictly punished under law".[7] Amit Malviya, head of the BJP IT-cell tweeted that the TJ gathering was "illegal" and an 'Islamic insurrection'".[8] On Twitter, 'Coronajihad' became a hashtag, along with 'TablighiVirus' and 'bioterror'. A report by Equality Labs, a South Asian-American human rights and technology start-up, studied the "peak virality" of these Twitter trends, stating that "there were over 293,000 conversations on Twitter with over 700,000 points of engagement.... #Coronajihad Islamophobic content reached 170 million users across Twitter".[9]

The Coronavirus was thus re-named and re-branded as the 'Tablighi Virus' while the scapegoating of the TJ quickly extended to Muslims in India (this is further discussed below). As Arjun Appadurai said, "One of the key features of anti-Muslim sentiment in India for quite a long time has been the idea that Muslims themselves are a kind of infection in the body politic ... there's a kind of affinity between this long-standing image and the new anxieties surrounding coronavirus".[10] Juxtaposing the name of the Tablighi Jamaat with the name of the virus was antithetical to the World Health Organisation's concern to de-stigmatise the name ascribed to the Coronavirus.[11] It gave the virus, a thing 'unknown', a 'local habitation and a name', thus embedding it within nationalist registers of identifying – and safeguarding – the self from the Muslim other.

[6] Nitisha Kashyap, "'They Wilfully Disobeyed': What the FIR Against Tablighi Jamaat's Maulana Saad, 6 Others Says", *CNN News18* (2020), *www.news18.com*.
[7] Ayan Sharma and Chahak Gupta, "Audit of Bigotry: How Indian Media Vilified Tablighi Jamaat over Coronavirus Outbreak", *Newslaundry* (2020), *www.newslaundry.com*.
[8] Ritika Jain, "Covid-19: How Fake News and Modi Government Messaging Fuelled India's Latest Spiral of Islamophobia" *Scroll.in* (2020), *www.scroll.in*.
[9] T. Soundararajan, et al., "Coronajihad: An Analysis of Covid-19 Hate Speech and Disinformation. *The Implications on Content Moderation and Social Medial Policy*" (Equality Labs, 2020), 16.
[10] Cit. in Billy Perrigo, "It Was Already Dangerous to Be Muslim in India. Then Came the Coronavirus", *TIME* (2020), *www.time.com*.
[11] "WHO Director-General's Remarks at the Media Briefing on 2019-nCoV on 11 February 2020", *World Health Organization* (2020), *www.who.int*.

3. Media Censorship and Disinformation Campaigns during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic was designated as "the world's first social media pandemic" when "hate speech related to the virus" was spread online "almost as fast as the virus itself".[12] According to a report by Pew Research Centre, "the seemingly unstoppable manipulation of public perception, emotion and action via online disinformation – lies and hate speech deliberately weaponized in order to propagate destructive biases and fears" is one of the aspects of the "new normal".[13]

3.1 *The BJP government's use of social media apps*

In their study on social media and hate speech in India, Shakuntala Banaji and Ramnath Bhat point out that the current BJP government which came to power in 2014 and then in 2019 made extensive use of social media in its campaign, with PM Narendra Modi being "an early adopter" and "active user of social media".[14] The BJP IT cell comprises both full time workers and supporters of Modi and the BJP who are "notorious for bullying, abusive speech, trolling, doxing and spreading disinformation"[15] to shut down criticism of the government. As Banaji and Bhat write, "social media platforms and apps are regularly 'gamed' by the BJP IT cell to make topics trend or go viral, manipulating opinion through coordinated behaviour. Legacy media (newspapers and television news) then report the 'buzz' uncritically, selectively favouring the BJP".[16]

With India's vast numbers of internet and social media users (see Table 1), there is ample ground for the dissemination of propaganda by online supporters of the BJP. This explains how 'CoronaJihad' and 'TablighiVirus' became viral on Twitter and were highlighted on primetime TV shows. The ease with which anti-Muslim disinformation was propagated on social media through Twitter, Facebook, Vimeo, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp suggests that "disinformation was more successful than truth on social media by almost every known metric".[17] The fact that online social media hashtags were 'gamed' to show hyperbolic content on 'Corona Jihad' contradicts earlier reports which stated that "#coronajihad was likely not a campaign crafted and executed by a single set of operators, but rather one in which individuals participated organically".[18] In June 2020, the Telangana High Court issued notices to Twitter and the government, on the basis of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Advocate Khaja Aijazuddin seeking the "removal of hashtags #Islamiccoronavirusjihad, #Coronajihad, #Tablighijamat, among others, from social media".[19]

		% of population
Total population of India (in January 2022)	1.40 billion	-
Number of mobile connections	1.14 billion	81.3
Number of internet users	658 million	47
Number of social media users	467 million	33.4

[12] Ibid.
[13] Janna Anderson et al., "Experts Say the 'New Normal' in 2025 Will Be Far More Tech-Driven, Presenting More Big Challenges", *Pew Research Centre* (2021), *www.pewresearch.org*.
[14] Shakuntala Banaji and Ramnath Bhat, *Social Media and Hate* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 76.
[15] Ibid., 82.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Megan McBride et al., "The Psychology of (Dis)information: Case Studies and Implications", *CNA* (2021), *www.cna.org*.
[18] Sanjana Rajgarhia, "Targeted Harassment: The Spread of #CoronaJihad", *The Media Manipulation Casebook* (2020), *www.mediamanipulation.org*.
[19] Express News Service, "File Counter on Tweets Linking COVID-19 Spread to Islam: Telangana High Court to Twitter", *The New Indian Express* (2020), *www.newindianexpress.com*.

Tab. 1: Internet and Social Media Users in India (All figures are from January 2022)
Data collated from: Simon Kemp, "Digital 2022: India" (2022), *www.datareportal.com*

3.2 *Censorship by noise and censorship by silence*

As the report by Equality Labs points out, the sheer number of tweets generated on '#CoronaJihad', whether by software bots or autonomous human agents, reflects the problem of "censorship by noise".[20] Censorship by noise occurs when the "volume of content being pumped out by actors furthering a particular narrative dominates users' timelines and worldviews to the extent that no meaningful, competing narrative can break through algorithmic parameters to offer a different – and in this case, less hate-driven and violent – view".[21] Umberto Eco writes about the "censorship through noise" that is practised by the media:

> Noise becomes a cover ... the ideology of this censorship through noise can be expressed, with apologies to Wittgenstein, by saying, 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must talk a great deal'.... To make a noise, you don't have to invent stories. All you have to do is report a story that is real but irrelevant, yet creates a hint of suspicion by the simple fact that it has been reported.... Noise can sometimes take the form of superfluous excess.[22]

The fact that the media selectively reported the number of Covid positive cases spread by the TJ congregation manufactured a conspiracy belief in 'Coronajihad', leading to a climate of suspicion fertile for the spread of TJ-related disinformation, in the form of misleading reportage, social media hashtags and TV debates. As the report by Shweta Desai and Amarnath Amarasingam says:

> the Hindu right-wing ecosystem latched onto the factual elements of the Jamaat case ... to spread misinformation about a grand Islamic conspiracy where Indian Muslims were deliberately defying the government-imposed lockdown to spread the virus.... The Islamophobic commentary on the Tablighi Jamaat has four interconnected dimensions: 1) they are contaminated/contaminating 2) they are 'uncivilised' 3) they are deceptive and 4) they are anti-national.[23]

One of the consequences of this concerted media narrative was that reports about the inadequacy of the state's efforts in mitigating the Covid crisis were muted. As Desai and Amarasingam write, "the Tablighi Jamaat gathering altered the nature of India's COVID-19 briefings, with discussions of the gathering receiving more time in briefings than any other topic raised by reporters, such as questions about personal protective equipment, testing strategies, and community transmission".[24] Hence, "censorship through noise" and "censorship through silence", as observed by Eco, are connected; the 'noise' about the culpability of the TJ was created by a controlled media that was 'silent' about governmental inaction in mitigating the crises of the pandemic.

The control of the media during the pandemic was effected when PM Narendra Modi interacted with journalists and stakeholders from print media in March 2020. Subsequently, news coverage about the pandemic was altered, thereafter containing, as one report says, "little mention of the

[20] Soundararajan, et al., "Coronajihad", 20.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Umberto Eco, *Inventing the Enemy and Other Occasional* Writings [2011], trans. by Richard Dixon (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 87-88.
[23] Shweta Desai and Amarnath Amarasingam, "#CoronaJihad: COVID-19, Misinformation and Anti-Muslim Violence in India", *Strong Cities Network*, *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (2020), *www.strongcitiesnetwork.org*, 11-13.
[24] Ibid., 15.

poor planning and disastrous implementation of the lockdown, or the government's failure to prepare for the pandemic, such as by stockpiling crucial medical equipment for healthcare workers, despite early warnings by the World Health Organisation".[25] Media censorship also involved journalists facing arrests and intimidation during the pandemic. As reported by the Rights and Risks Analysis Group, journalists were arrested for "exposing alleged corruption" and "exposing shortage of food and personal protective equipment (PPE)".[26] Stories about administrative apathy and the inadequacies of medical healthcare were anathema to the state's urge to control the media narrative about the Covid crisis and to ensure that there was no criticism of the state failure's to address the calamitous effects of the pandemic.

The extent of governmental inaction was witnessed during the second wave of the pandemic in 2021. The government failed to adhere to scientific advice and warnings about the second wave, it mismanaged the vaccination programme and failed to "hire enough healthcare workers in anticipation of the second wave and upgrade its healthcare infrastructure to ensure adequate supply of oxygen and life-saving medicines".[27] Instead, the government responded "by filing first-information reports against those who question its vaccination policy, booking desperate family members for posting appeals on social media in order to secure oxygen for a dying relative and harassing overburdened healthcare workers into resigning from their posts".[28] Despite the alarming increase of Covid positive cases during the second wave, the *Kumbh Mela*, a mammoth gathering of Hindu devotees, was allowed to convene at Haridwar in the state of Uttarakhand in northern India. 161,736 new cases were reported during the Mela but mainstream TV news channels failed to report the role of the Mela in spreading the disease.[29] The approach of the media in reporting the number of positive cases from the TJ gathering and the Kumbh Mela is a study in contrast. It highlights the lack of independence of the media from state control and its willing participation in the propagation of anti-Muslim accusations.

3.3 *Inventing the enemy and scapegoat*

The BJP's manipulation of the media to generate Hindu nationalism is an established part of its mobilisation strategy. As Christiane Brosius writes, a "new public consciousness ... emerged with the audiovisual mediascape in the 1980s"[30] when the *Ramayana* serial and miscellaneous videos glorifying the Hindu deity Ram were produced and broadcast on national TV, thus transforming Ram into a national hero. This created fervour for the movement to establish the birthplace of Ram at Ayodhya and antagonism for the Babri Masjid that stood in the same place. Hindutva organisations led a national 'reawakening' to salvage Hindu pride that was purportedly oppressed by Muslim 'foreign invaders', implying that the remnants of invasion would have to be removed. Consequently, the demolition of the Babri mosque was carried out by Hindu nationalist volunteers or *karsevaks* as the culminating spectacle of Hindutva doctrine. Thus, actively engaging in the protection of the nation

[25] Sagar, "Speaking Positivity to Power: Hours before Lockdown, Modi Asked Print-media Owners, Editors to Refrain from Negative COVID Coverage", *The Caravan* (2020), *www.caravanmagazine.in*.
[26] Suhas Chakma, "India: Media's Crackdown During COVID-19 Lockdown", *Rights and Risks Analysis Group* (2020), *www.rightsrisks.org*.
[27] Chahat Rana, "Culpable Carnage: How the Modi Government's Failure to Act Led to India's COVID-19 Catastrophe", *The Caravan* (2021), *www.caravanmagazine.in*.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Aniruddha Jena, Ram Awtar Yadav and Raviteja Rambarki, "Demonising the Others: Vendetta Coverage of Tablighi Jamaat and Kumbh Mela during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India", *Media Asia*, 48.8 (July 2021), 347-48.
[30] Christiane Brosius, *Empowering Visions: The Politics of Representation in Hindu Nationalism* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 99.

is the mark of Hindutva nationalism. But the "master-desire"[31] of protecting the nation, as Achille Mbembe said, requires the constant construction of an enemy. This "desire for the enemy" which leads to a perpetual 'invention' of the enemy underlies phantasmagoric images of Muslims as *jihadis* who caused the Covid crisis.

Examples of anti-Muslim disinformation stories on social media during the pandemic were collated by fact-checking websites such as 'mediascanner.in', altnews.in, and 'boomlive.in'. A reading of these compilations brings out similar tropes in the accusations against the TJ in particular and Muslims in general:

- Muslim vendors spat on fruits to spread coronavirus;
- Muslim restaurant owners and delivery men spat on food;
- Muslims licked utensils/sneezed in unison/spat at cops/contaminated rupee-notes to spread coronavirus;
- Hindus were denied rations in Karachi (in Pakistan);
- Covid-19 positive Muslim nationals from Iran and Italy were hiding in Indian cities like Patna to infect Indians;
- TJ members in quarantine demanded non-vegetarian food, urinated and defecated in the open, attacked health workers and sexually harassed female staff;
- Muslims defied the lockdown and gathered in mosques to spread coronavirus.

The dissemination of these narratives of disinformation portrayed Muslims as a ubiquitous 'threat', even though the nature and the target of the imputed threat varied across contexts – Muslims were accused of threatening or disobeying the government and its order of the lockdown, attacking policemen who were tasked with enforcing the lockdown, disrupting the efforts of healthcare workers and medical staff, infecting individuals living in gated housing colonies, contaminating consumers at restaurants. Each of these accusations is potentially absurd, but when propagated together, with accompanying hashtags and repeated by the entire media ad infinitum, these accusations become what René Girard has called "stereotypical accusations".[32] Through the mechanism of these accusations, as Girard writes, "a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness" is blamed to be "harmful to the whole of society" in times of crisis or disaster, leading to an "appetite for persecution" against religious minorities.[33] Once the blame has been established and the scapegoat personified, any number of fantastical and improbable claims can be levelled against them. These accusations are then accepted as commonplace knowledge about those who have been accused, as claims that do not require verification because they are attributed to those who are always already assumed to be suspect. As Girard writes, "many individual scandals come together against one and the same victim" during a period of "malaise", such that "the accusing group ... views the victim as guilty, by virtue of a contagion ... the members of this group accuse their 'scapegoat' with great fervour and sincerity ... some incident, whether fantastic or trivial, has triggered a wave of opinion against this victim".[34] Girard's delineation of the scapegoating phenomenon is vividly illustrated in the Indian state and media's accusations against the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, Muslim foreign nationals who had attended the TJ meeting, Muslim citizens of India and even Rohingya refugees living in camps in India. The common Muslim identity of the scapegoat is unmistakable. The scapegoating of the TJ by the media was also noted by the Bombay High Court in its judgement dismissing the FIRs against 29

[31] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* [2016], trans. by Steven Corcoran (Durham and London: Duke U.P., 2019), 39.
[32] René Girard, *The Scapegoat* [1982], trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1986), 15.
[33] Ibid., 6-15.
[34] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* [1999], trans. by James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 156-57.

foreign national members of the TJ who had been charged, inter alia, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, sections of the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897, the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Disaster Management Act 2005.

A quantitative study of Islamophobia on Twitter analysed the user bios of Twitter handles which posted anti-Muslim hate speech, and observed that there is a direct co-relation between Twitter members who identify themselves as 'Hindu nationalist' or 'proud Hindu' and accused the Tablighi Jamaat and Muslims of India of being "anti-nationalist".[35] The study also found that "users who posted a majority of hateful tweets ... are clustered closely together" implying that Twitter users who "spread hate closely followed each other".[36] This reflects what Sahana Udupa has written about Twitter being an "affinity space" for like-minded, ideologically motivated net users who "cohere around common themes and issues in ideologically efficacious ways".[37] Udupa uses the term "Internet Hindus" to describe a distinct presence of Hindutva or right-wing Hindu nationalists in the online sphere. As Udupa writes, 'Internet Hindus' "deluge social media platforms with provocative and abusive comments" that project Indian Muslims as "active participants in international Islamic revivalism".[38] Internet Hindus draw upon suspicion and animosity prevailing against Muslims of India and congeal these sentiments in the online sphere, where political discourse about Muslims need not be hemmed in by a semblance of moderation or caution. Thus, the most provocative hashtags become the most viral, explaining why 'CoronaJihad' and 'TablighiVirus' attracted so much traffic on Twitter.

4. Understanding the Nature of Islamophobia during the Covid-19 Pandemic in India

4.1 *The discontents of naming Islamophobia*

Despite extensive academic discussion on the subject, Islamophobia still remains a much-debated term. Sindre Bangstad writes that Islamophobia is contested "not only in far-right circles in the West, but also among liberal elites, and even within academia itself".[39] Nathan C. Lean observes that the debate about the aptness and efficacy of this term has involved "hackneyed deliberations about the possibility of alternative words" that can be used in its stead, such as "anti-Muslim prejudice", "anti-Islam prejudice", "anti-Muslim bigotry" or "anti-Muslim hate".[40] Lean argues that this semantic quibble is unnecessary, because a public understanding has already emerged that Islamophobia is "a form of prejudice that targets Muslims on the basis of their religious identity, and that this form of prejudice is no more acceptable than others that occupy the same mental category".[41] The discourse about Islamophobia in Western states such as the UK has been shaped by initiatives such as the 'Report on the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred' by the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG). The APPG Report contains a definitional trajectory of Islamophobia that began with the Runnymede Trust Report in 1997.[42]

[35] Mohit Chandra et al., "'A Virus Has No Religion': Analysing Islamophobia on Twitter during the COVID-19 Outbreak", *Proceedings of the 32nd ACM Conference on Hypertext and Social Media* (2021), 73.
[36] Ibid., 73.
[37] Sahana Udupa, "Internet Hindus: Right-Wingers as New India's Ideological Warriors", in Peter van der Veer, ed., *Handbook of Religion and the Asian City: Aspiration and Urbanisation in the Twenty-First Century* (Oaklan: California U.P., 2015), 438.
[38] Ibid., 439.
[39] Sindre Bangstad, "Islamophobia: What's in a Name?", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 5.2 (2016), 145.
[40] Nathan C. Lean, "The Debate over the Utility and Precision of the Term 'Islamophobia'", in Irene Zempi and Imran Awan, eds., *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 11-12.
[41] Ibid., 15.
[42] All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, "Report on the Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim Hatred" (2018), 23-25.

In India, there is little agreement about what Islamophobia actually refers to and whether the nature of anti-Muslim prejudice, hate and violence warrants being termed Islamophobia. For example, Ajay Gudavarthy insists that India has a history of co-existence between Hindu and Muslim communities in which periodic outbursts of inter-communal violence are more appropriately labelled 'communalism' and not Islamophobia.[43] Islamophobia is imputed to be a Western neologism for a Western problem. The search for non-Western or 'Indian' words for naming hate and violence is misplaced. Moreover, as the genealogy of 'communalism' in India by Gyanendra Pandey shows, the import of Western/colonialist historiography is discernible even in liberal-nationalistic writings on communalism which perceive the latter in essentialist terms as the primitive Other of the secular modern nation.[44]

Dismissing the need to recognise Islamophobia does not arise merely from semantic quibbles. In March 2022, India's permanent representative to the United Nations objected to the UN resolution to observe March 15 as the international day to combat Islamophobia. The objections may have stemmed from the fact that the resolution was proposed by Pakistan. The Indian representative called on the UN to condemn "religiophobia" rather than "singling out" Islamophobia;[45] he claimed that there is a need to recognise 'Hinduphobia' along with other acts of hatred against Buddhism and Sikhism. He also expressed disagreement with the UN's latest Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS) adopted by the UN General Assembly in June 2021, which sought to extend the meaning of terrorism to include violence committed on the basis of xenophobia, intolerance and violent extremism. The Indian representative's refutation of the GCTS's move to include xenophobic, right-wing violence within the repertoire of terrorist acts mirrors India's own record of anti-Muslim violence, which is staunchly denied by the government and its supporters. As increasing levels of everyday anti-Muslim violence attract criticism from international quarters, government ministers allege that anti-India and anti-Modi forces are bent on maligning the government, while maintaining a political doublespeak about India being a diverse, inclusive nation committed to co-existence and harmony. For example, when UK MP Naz Shah urged PM Boris Johnson to raise the issue of Islamophobia during his visit to India in April 2022, Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi tweeted, "Please, don't convert your prejudiced agenda of 'India phobia' into 'Islamophobia'".[46] In a nutshell, the fundamental act of naming Islamophobia, which is germane to any concern of addressing anti-Muslim violence, is repudiated by the establishment by resorting to whataboutery and counter-narratives of 'religiophobia', 'Hinduphobia' and 'Indiaphobia'.

4.2 *Hindutva and the 'Muslim Enemy'*

The denial of Islamophobia in India is consonant with denying that violence, such as acts of murderous hate against Muslims, has taken place at all. Violence against Muslims in India is framed in a narrative that makes Muslims permanently susceptible to violence and at the same time, 'deserving' of the same. This framing of Muslims as responsible for the acts of violence committed to them is executed by personifying the Muslim as a *jihadi* or terrorist. Hence, despite the involvement of agents of the state such as the police, in acts of violence – lynching of Muslims by *gau-rakshaks* or cow-protection squads, anti-Muslim pogroms, unlawful incarceration of Muslims and torture in jail –

[43] Ajay Gudavarthy, "There is Communalism – not Islamophobia – in India", *The Wire* (2019), *www.thewire.in*.
[44] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford U.P., 1990), see chapters 1 and 2.
[45] Simon Hooper, "France, EU and India Opposed Creation of UN Day to Combat Islamophobia", *Middle East Eye* (2022), *www.middleeasteye.net*.
[46] Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, "@naqvimukhtar", *Twitter* (2022), *www.twitter.com*.

the state continues to act with impunity. Unsurprisingly, the media is involved in synonymising Muslims as *jihadis*. As I have written elsewhere,[47] when Najeeb Ahmad, a Muslim student in JNU was assaulted by the BJP student wing and then disappeared in October 2016, sections of the media reported that Najeeb had searched for information on ISIS, been radicalised, become a *jihadi* and fled to join ISIS. These Islamophobic assertions by the media, contested by Najeeb's mother, swayed public opinion against him. Eventually, the Central Bureau of Investigation's piecemeal attempts to search for Najeeb and restore him to his family were dropped. Najeeb was forgotten and remains missing till date.

In recent speeches by BJP activists which ineluctably descend into anti-Muslim invective, Muslims are invariably referred to as *jihadis*. This provides the context to understand why the term 'CoronaJihad' found public acceptance during the pandemic. The *jihadi* is a fixture of how Muslims are imagined in India today: enemies of the state with doubtful patriotism and hidden links with Pakistan and anti-India forces, disposable lives that can be killed at will in extra-judicial killings euphemistically called 'encounters', beef-eaters who are lynched by mobs of 'cow-protectors' and then charged by the police under anti-cow slaughter laws, permanent suspects for the carceral state which imprisons them on fabricated charges and second-class citizens undeserving of justice so that they languish in prison without trial for years before being acquitted. As Ratna Kapur writes, "The construction of the Muslim as a subject to be feared and who poses a threat from which the sovereign subject requires protection erodes the legitimacy of the Indian Muslim, who is increasingly cast as a foreigner, alien and outsider ... outside the realm of juridical entitlements, legibility, and belongingness".[48]

The conditions of virulent Islamophobia have been engineered by the ideology of Hindutva, popularised by its chief ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. As Pankaj Mishra writes, in Savarkar's worldview, revenge, retribution and hatred were elevated to a "categorical imperative".[49] Savarkar propounded Hindutva as a means of unifying Hindus by inculcating in them hatred for a common enemy. He portrayed Muslims as the enemy or non-self against whom Hindu selves would mobilise to form a strong Hindu nation. He wrote, "Nothing makes Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self. Nothing can weld peoples [sic] into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites".[50] Reminiscent to Savarkar, contemporary Hindutva leaders invest in depicting Muslims as the enemy of Hindus. As Marzia Casolari explains in her work on the connection between Hindutva and fascist Italy, "the theme of the 'internal enemy'" is an "element of affinity" between the ideology of fascism and Hindu nationalism.[51]

The writings of Savarkar, as Jyotirmaya Sharma points out, essentialise the Muslim non-self as the "other" of the Hindu self; accordingly, Muslims are caricatured as "sensuous, lascivious, immoral, unethical and impious".[52] It was Savarkar who etched out the many ways in which Muslims conspire to harm Hindus and Hinduism. His accusations against Muslims provide the grounds on which contemporary followers of Hindutva including online supporters of BJP construct conspiracy theories

[47] Heba Ahmed, "How the Sangh Parivar Framed Najeeb as a Terrorist", *The Companion* (2018), *www.thecompanion.in*.
[48] Ratna Kapur, *Makeshift Migrants and Law: Gender, Belonging, and Postcolonial Anxieties* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 167.
[49] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 141.
[50] Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2007), 91.
[51] Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35.4 (January 2000), 226.
[52] Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (Noida: HarperCollins Publishers India 2015), 70-71.

of Islamic *jihad.* The stereotyping and scapegoating of Muslims that occurred during the pandemic and after are the bequest of Savarkar's distorted anti-Muslim imagery.

4.3 *Analysing 'Corona Jihad' through the components of Islamophobia*

In the preceding sections, the components of Islamophobia have been variously listed as hate, prejudice, bigotry and enmity. These components are often cited as interchangeable phenomena. Another key component of Islamophobia — conspiracy belief — has remained understudied in existing scholarship on Islamophobia. A recent study on the nature of Islamophobia addresses these lacunae and propounds the Tripartite Islamophobia Scale (TIS), which proposes a systematic analysis of Islamophobia according to three "subcomponents, namely, anti-Muslim prejudice, anti-Islamic sentiment, and conspiracy beliefs".[53] The TIS study investigates these components across five countries: India, Poland, Germany, France and USA. The study also tests discrete emotional underpinnings of Islamophobia, namely fear, anger and disgust. According to the TIS scale of Islamophobia, 'anger' and 'disgust' are "significantly stronger predictors of anti-Muslim prejudice in India" when compared with fear. The TIS study analysed anti-Muslim prejudice and conspiracy beliefs to have "larger effects on behavioural inclinations that promote the active and forceful oppression of Muslims and Islamic organisations".[54] It associated conspiracy beliefs with "dehumanisation"[55] and inferred that "Islamophobic conspiracy beliefs were a statistically unique factor" in the countries studied.[56]

The narrative of 'Corona Jihad' proves the TIS study's findings about the prevalence of conspiracy belief, anger and disgust as the components of Islamophobia resulting in the dehumanisation of Muslims and Islamic organisations such as the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) in India. As conspiracy belief about the TJ congregation being a super-spreader of the coronavirus spread through online disinformation, suspicion and anger was intensified against the TJ in particular and Muslims in general. This led to incidents of routine violence, such as the lynching of Dilshad Ali by three men who suspected him of being Covid positive.[57] Another Muslim man, Dilshad Mohammed died by suicide when his neighbours in Bangarh, a village in Himachal Pradesh, a state in northern India, accused him of trying to infect them with the virus.[58] Dilshad had merely given a ride to two TJ members to the village on his scooter, but the stigmatisation and social boycott that he was subjected to resulted in his death. In Karnataka, a state in southern India, a BJP Member of Parliament, Anant Kumar Hegde, denounced the TJ members as "terrorists".[59] This was followed by a spate of anti-Muslim attacks in Karnataka. Sayed Tabrez and his mother Zareen Taj were among "seven Muslim volunteers who were assaulted by a gang of local BJP members" while the former were trying to distribute food to "impoverished people in the Marathahalli and Dasarahalli districts of Karnataka".[60]

[53] Fatih Uenal et al., "The Nature of Islamophobia: A Test of a Tripartite View in Five Countries", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 47.2 (2021), 275.
[54] Ibid., 286.
[55] Ibid., 285.
[56] Ibid., 287.
[57] Bharath Syal, "CoronaJihad: Stigmatization of Indian Muslims in the COVID-19 Pandemic", *South Asia Journal* (2020), *www.southasiajournal.net*.
[58] Aniruddha Ghosal et al., "Indian Muslims Face Stigma, Blame for Surge in Infections", *AP News* (2020), *www.apnews.com*.
[59] Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Shaikh Azizur Rahman, "Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories Targeting Muslims Spread in India", *The Guardian* (2020), *www.theguardian.com*.
[60] Ibid.

In Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, Covid patients were kept in separate wards depending on their religious identity.[61]

Segregation of people on the basis of their religious or caste identity is not a stray occurrence in India. It is built into the hierarchy of caste as the foundational logic of social organisation, which divides individuals according to their caste status into enclaves and excludes the 'out-casts' or Dalits into a state of 'untouchability'. As the anti-caste philosopher, B. R. Ambedkar wrote in his famous work 'Annihilation of Caste', "Religion compels the Hindus to treat isolation and segregation of castes as a virtue".[62] Ambedkar illustrates caste segregation by enumerating instances of Dalits denied entry into temples, forbidden from using village wells and Dalit children prohibited from attending public schools along with children of upper-caste families. As Isabel Wilkerson writes, "In some parts of India, the lowest-caste people were to remain a certain number of paces from any dominant-caste person while walking out in public – somewhere between twelve and ninety-six steps away, depending on the castes in question".[63] The "ritual logic of caste",[64] as Soumyabrata Choudhury writes, involves society in a logic of segmentation and 'distanciation' that is different from the disciplinary logic of 'social distancing'. While social distancing is a pandemic rule necessitated to prevent the spread of the virus from human contact, the ritual distance of caste imposes taboos on human contact to prevent 'impure' beings from 'polluting' the 'purer' ones. Hence, the caste logic of ritual purity and pollution ascribes codes of purity and impurity to higher and lower caste individuals and places the burden of maintaining the boundary between 'pure' and 'polluted' on the untouchable or Dalit caste. As Ambedkar wrote, "the Untouchable was required to carry an earthen pot hung around his neck wherever he went – for holding his spit, lest his spit falling on the earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly happen to tread on it".[65]

The paradox of the sociality of spitting in India is that it is both a ubiquitous masculine habit and an object of revulsion or disgust. In 2016, the Health Minister, while replying to a question in parliament about the "spitting menace" said, "India is a spitting country. We spit when we are bored; we spit when we are tired; we spit when we are angry or we spit just like that".[66] But there are "elaborate do's and don'ts with respect to spit as it relates to contact with food, vessels, cups and so on",[67] as Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai write. The paradox is resolved by implementing the logic of caste purity; all men spit but the saliva of the impure scapegoat must be excoriated because of the 'disgust' it invokes. Accordingly, during the pandemic, Muslims were accused of infecting Hindus by spitting in public, and a propaganda of disinformation alleged that Muslims are spitting on currency-notes, licking food and vessels in restaurants, spreading saliva on fruits and vegetables peddled by Muslim vendors. Muslims became an object of Islamophobic disgust and the narrative of 'Corona Jihad' and 'Thook (spit) Jihad' came into effect.

Anti-Muslim prejudice and caste logic of segregating and excluding the impure scapegoat was carried out to the extent of social and economic boycott of Muslims. During the pandemic, in Delhi, a "self-organised group of residents" banned Muslims from entering their neighbourhood; in Buldhana, Maharashtra, a state in western India, "messages went viral on social media ... urging people to

[61] Sohini Ghosh and Parimal A. Dabhi, "Ahmedabad Hospital Splits COVID Wards on Faith, Says Govt Decision", *The Indian Express* (2020), *www.indianexpress.com*.
[62] B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, ed. by S. Anand (London and New York: Verso, 2014; New Delhi: Navayana, 2014), 155.
[63] Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 81.
[64] Soumyabrata Choudhury, *Now It's Come to Distances: Notes on Shaheenbagh and Coronavirus, Association and Isolation,* (New Delhi: Navayana 2020), 104.
[65] B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste,* 125-126.
[66] Aparna Alluri, "Covid-19: India's Unwinnable Battle against Spitting", *BBC* (2021), *www.bbc.com*.
[67] Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, *Experience, Caste and the Everyday Social* (New Delhi: Oxford U.P., 2019), 54.

boycott the entire Muslim community because 16 out of local 17 Covid-19 patients were Muslim"; people were urged to boycott Muslim-owned shops and "Muslim shoppers were also turned away from other shops"; in Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh, Suresh Tiwari, a BJP Member of the Legislative Assembly asked people not to buy vegetables from Muslim vendors.[68] The segregation and boycott of Muslims from public spaces extended even to public toilets. In Telinipara in West Bengal, where a Muslim tested Covid positive, Hindu residents of the area stopped Muslims from using the public toilet. This led to a local brawl which was halted by police intervention. But two days later on 12 May 2020, a violent mob descended upon the area, attacked and burnt Muslim homes, shops, and vehicles owned by Muslims. Though some homes of Hindu families were partially damaged, ground-level evidence showed that "Muslim houses and shops were singled out and strategically targeted".[69]

It would be appropriate to conclude this section by re-focusing on the Tablighi Jamaat, which found itself at the centre of the storm of disinformation. While the TJ congregation was called a "Talibani crime" and TJ members were blacklisted by the government, arrested by the police and dehumanised by the media, the elders of the Tablighi Jamaat advised their companions to observe "a year of patience".[70] In April 2020, after the TJ members had recovered from Covid, they volunteered to donate their plasma since plasma therapy had been proposed as a possible treatment in Covid. Maulana Anees Ahmad Nadvi, the manager of Tablighi Jamaat in the city of Lucknow said, "The message has reached all the members ... all of them are ready to donate their plasma ... this is true that Jamaatis are being presented as 'villains' after coronavirus spread, but Maulana Saad has asked us to forgive those doing this".[71] By practising patience and humanitarianism, the Tablighi Jamaat hoped to appeal to the conscience of those who had dehumanised them.

5. Counting the Many Iterations of 'Jihad'

The meaning of *jihad* in the Hindutva imagination has been essentialised as Islamic conquest. It entered the political lexicon of Hindutva after the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent War on Terror discourse of securitisation. With the construction of Muslims as security threats and the pathologisation of "Muslim rage", the word *jihad* acquired currency in an international context. In India, where a coherent sense of Hindu victimisation by Muslim aggressors already existed, *jihad* acquired immediate significance. Events and epochs as discrete as the invasion of Hindustan by Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori, the Mughal Empire, the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan were dovetailed into a linear chronicle of Hindu defeat by Muslim outsiders. The themes of Muslim aggression were common: Muslims had destroyed temples, forced Hindus to convert en masse to Islam, and abducted Hindu women for polygamous marriages. This was the long narrative of mythic civilisational decline which Savarkar and his cohorts sought to reverse and avenge.

As Kathinka Frøystad writes, when the neologism of 'love jihad' was coined in 2005 by RSS activist Pramod Muthalik, it "helped *popularise* the Muslim takeover conspiracy rather than inventing

[68] Mohammed Afeef, "Does Law Allow Calls to Boycott Muslims during the COVID-19 Lockdown?", *The Wire* (2020), *www.thewire.in*.
[69] Himadri Ghosh, "Ground Report: What Really Happened in Violence-hit Telinipara, West Bengal", *The Wire* (2020), *www.thewire.in*.
[70] Nikhila Henry, "'Year of Patience': How Young Tablighis Survived COVID-19 Stigma", *The Quint* (2021), *www.thequint.com*.
[71] Press Trust of India (PTI), "Tablighi Jamaat Asks Its Coronavirus-cured Members to Donate Plasma and Shed 'Villain' Tag", *The Hindu* (2020), *www.thehindu.com*.

it out of thin air".[72] Muthalik's motive was to raise the alarm against Hindu women marrying or entering into relationships with Muslim men, and to hold Muslim men guilty of seducing Hindu women, marrying them by force and converting them to Islam. As Frøystad writes, Muthalik's neologism was followed by Hindutva organisations campaigning "to continue the ideological creativity and enhance anxieties that served the Hindu nationalist agenda ... to expand the semantic field of 'jihad'".[73]

The 'semantic field of *jihad*' has been expanded to accommodate a gamut of conspiracy theories about Muslims, and right-wing TV channels are at the forefront of this propaganda. In March 2020, Sudhir Chaudhary, the editor-in-chief of Zee News ran a story on the different kinds of *jihad* on his prime-time show which included absurd specimens like 'Land Jihad' (capturing land to build mosques, madarsas or Islamic seminaries and cemeteries for Muslims), 'History Jihad' (the manipulation of history to glorify Mughal rule), 'Education Jihad' (building 'madarsas'[74] and promoting the Arabic language), 'Secularism Jihad', 'Population Jihad' (Muslim men marrying multiple wives to increase the population of Muslims and outnumber Hindus).[75] In September 2020, Suresh Chavhanke of Sudarshan TV, who had previously spread disinformation on 'Corona Jihad', broadcast a show on 'UPSC Jihad' in which he claimed to have undertaken "investigative journalism" to reveal "anti-national activities" such as the infiltration of the bureaucracy by Muslim students qualifying in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examination.[76] Chavhanke claimed that Muslim students were getting benefits such as relaxation in the criterion of the age limit, more chances to re-take the examination, lower qualifying marks, availability of free coaching centres, and preferential treatment in the interview round at the expense of Hindu students. In April 2022, Chavhanke came up with 'Naukri Jihad' on his TV show, in which he alleged that Pawan Hans, a government-owned helicopter service provider, had hired nine Muslim candidates from Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) University in New Delhi to work as apprentices and excluded Hindus.[77] The channel broadcast a video showing saffron-clad women from Hindutva organisations agitating outside the Pawan Hans office, where Ragini Tiwari, a Hindutva activist with a record of anti-Muslim hate speeches, claimed that the company was against Hindus and acting in collaboration with JMI. It is relevant to note here that JMI being a Muslim minority institute has faced the ire of the government, police batons on campus and even a shooting incident in 2020, for being the epicentre of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

One of the myths that Hindutva ideology has circulated about Muslims is that they enjoy a state of 'appeasement' by secular political parties such as the Indian National Congress and this has resulted in disempowerment and discrimination against Hindus. As Aakar Patel writes, in 2019, after five years in power, the BJP still clung to its complaint against "appeasement of one, at the cost of the other".[78] The accusation of Muslims being accorded the status of being appeased is strange, since it is not borne out by the facts of political representation and socio-economic marginalisation of Muslims in India. As a result of their meagre employment in the formal sector, Muslims have to fall back upon self-employment in the informal sector. It is this arena of employment of Muslims that is being

[72] Kathinka Frøystad, "Sound Biting Conspiracy: From India with 'Love Jihad'", *Religions*, 12.1064 (2021), 3, italics in the original.
[73] Ibid., 17.
[74] A 'madarsa' is a school instituted for secular education along with Islamic knowledge.
[75] Meghnad S, "Bloodlust TV: Sudhir Chaudhary's Campaign of Hate, Powered by Sensodyne", *Newslaundry* (2020), *www.newslaundry.com*.
[76] Pooja Chaudhuri, "Sudarshan News Show 'UPSC Jihad' Riddled with False Claims", *Alt News* (2020), *www.altnews.in*.
[77] Veronica Joseph, "Now 'Naukri Jihad': Sudarshan News is Back to Targeting Muslims over Employment", *Newslaundry* (2022), *www.newslaundry.com*.
[78] Aakar Patel, *Our Hindu Rashtra: What It Is, How We Got Here* (Chennai: Westland, 2020), 94.

targeted by conspiracy theories of 'Thook Jihad', which has resulted in Hindus calling for the boycott of Muslim-owned eateries, the closure of meat shops owned by Muslims, and repeated assaults on Muslim vendors.

In April 2022, when JCB bulldozers demolished shanties and push-carts in the Muslim locality of Jahangirpuri in Delhi, following an incident of communal violence in the area, the demolition drive was hailed on Twitter and JCB was denoted as the 'Jihad Control Board'. Islamophobic conspiracy beliefs of *jihad* and the concomitant measures of counter-terror security have come to a full circle.

6. Conclusion: Towards a Negative Solidarity?

> In the literature of contagion, when society is finally free of disease, it's up to humanity to decide how to begin again.[79]

Hannah Arendt imagined the possibility of solidarity and the conditions needed to build solidarity in the bleakness of a world confronting the terrifying possibility of a nuclear apocalypse. She wrote, "The solidarity of mankind in this respect is entirely negative; it rests ... on a common interest in an agreement which prohibits the use of atomic weapons".[80] Negative solidarity, for Arendt, was founded on the common fear of global destruction. But negative solidarity can acquire true value only when it is "coupled with political responsibility"; as Arendt wrote, "if the solidarity of mankind is to be based on something more solid than the justified fear of man's demonic capabilities ... something more promising than a tremendous increase in mutual hatred and a somewhat universal irritability of everybody against everybody else, then a process of mutual understanding and progressing self-clarification on a gigantic scale must take place".[81]

As Francesco Tava writes, Arendt's idea of solidarity is underpinned by shared "negative emotions" such as anger, resentment and indignation against perceived injustice.[82] Solidarity is then an "intersubjective relation" in which people are united not by their "sense of identity or belonging nor any positive similarity but their negative emotional reaction to something that strikes them as unjust".[83] Hence, while negative emotions may serve as a prerequisite for solidarity, solidarity is needed for its "functional role in motivating compliance with the demands of justice", as Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka write.[84] Negative emotions like anger and resentment can thus be made to unite people in identifying sources of injustice and strengthening the cause of justice.

But here lies the problem of achieving solidarity; as Banting and Kymlicka admit, inclusive solidarity is bounded by an ethical community of citizens within a shared nationhood.[85] This makes solidarity fragile and open to manipulation by the media and political elites. For example, political actors can "mobilise divisions" between the majority population and "historical minorities", thereby endangering solidarity.[86] National identities can be prevented from impeding solidarity between the majority and minority communities, only if national identity itself is thinned out and based on less ascriptive forms of nationalism. On the other hand, if anger, resentment and desire for retributive

[79] Jill Lepore, "How Do Plague Stories End?", *The New Yorker* (2021), *www.newyorker.com*.
[80] Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 83.
[81] Ibid., 83-84.
[82] Francesco Tava, "Justice, Emotions, and Solidarity", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, (February 2021), 10.
[83] Ibid., 13.
[84] Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, eds., *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017), 7.
[85] Ibid., 12.
[86] Ibid., 13.

violence (in other words, Islamophobia) become the hallmark of majoritarian identity and the leitmotif of nationalism, the possibility for solidarity with minorities becomes negligible. Negative emotions then no longer help in identifying injustice; they are misdirected towards the scapegoating of minorities instead. As Sally Scholz writes, solidarity in this instance is akin to "bonds of sentiment" of opposition to a common enemy.[87]

During the Covid pandemic in India, the unjust apathy and malfeasance of the state in curbing the spread of disease was misrecognised as the contamination of the citizenry by Muslims acting upon malicious intent. The disinformation against Muslims fuelled by social media was an example of what Meera Nanda has called the "Big Lies" of India; as Nanda writes, "no amount of debunking can dislodge a lie once it becomes part of a larger narrative that *seems* believable because it addresses some deeper existential anxieties and political interests".[88] The Covid pandemic was called the apocalypse of our times, during which we lived with the uncertain possibility of contagion and death every day. Nothing was safe from the virus, "including the pursuit of safety itself", as Zygmunt Bauman writes.[89] But there was no circumstance in which a commonly felt fear of contamination and disease could bind anyone to their neighbour. There was no acknowledgement of mutual corporeal vulnerability; on the contrary, a discipline of distancing was imposed on collective existence. Within this sphere of isolation, the scapegoats were chosen as targets of collective blame. By blaming the scapegoats again and again and rendering them the perpetual targets of blame and inhumanly worthy of blame, the chances of recognising and calling out injustice against them were nullified. There are only negative emotions felt for the scapegoats: disgust, anger and hostility. The possibility for any solidarity with them has been absent till now. There is no apparent end to this; even after the fear of contagion comes to an end, the process of blaming and conspiring does not stop. Fear anger and disgust towards the scapegoated minority makes way for the emergence of another kind of 'negative solidarity', namely the one inculcated by the nation in its patriots against deviant citizens. This solidarity is the result of thickening of national identities, of negative emotions deflected away from systemic injustice and directed towards citizens from minority communities and of unwavering loyalty to the state and its institutions, despite the injustice perpetrated by them.

[87] Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State U.P., 2008), 44.
[88] Meera Nanda, "Big Lies and Deep Lies in Post-Truth India", *The Wire* (2022), *www.thewire.in*, italics in the original.
[89] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (New York: New York U.P., 1997), 6.

Daniela Vitolo

Mera Jism, *Meri Marzi*. Claiming the Body Where 'Body' Is an Obscene Word

Abstract: The 'Aurat March' (Women's March) has been held in the major cities of Pakistan since 2018. This public event, and the related activities promoted during the year, has emerged as a catalyst for liberal feminists in the country by creating a public space for expression. The Aurat March appearing as a threat to the status quo has made it subject to the disapproval and anger of many. The anger against the marchers, frequently expressed through social media networks, has as a common denominator the accusation of vulgarity. Of the many slogans that appear at the March, one has become the focus of this hatred, thus turning it into the unofficial slogan of the March: '*mera jism*, *meri marzi'* ('my body, my choice'). To the haters the scandal that this statement produces lies in the ability of the word *jism*, a neutral word for 'body' in Urdu, to evoke women's sexuality and thus to drive men to sinful thoughts. This essay suggests that the March has developed a public space for contestation of the 'moral regulation' that nationalist and Islamist policies have used to determine women's place in Pakistani society. Furthermore, it investigates how 'artivism' participates in the formation of this new space for contestation. For this reason, it proposes an analysis of works produced by selected visual artists and investigates how contemporary feminist art challenges the conservative view of women's place in society and reimagines it through representations of women, especially female bodies, in the context of a society where they are both objectified and under constant threat.

Keywords: *Pakistani women's movement*, *Pakistani feminism*, *Aurat March*, *moral regulation*, *negative solidarities*, *body politics*

1. Introduction

Appearing for the first time in 2018 and now established as an annual appointment, the 'Aurat March' (Women's March) has emerged as a catalyst for liberal feminists in Pakistan by creating a public space for expressing women's ideas, visions and demands. At the same time, it has promoted the resurgence of anti-feminist discourse among the conservative sections of society. The event, which attracts many young women, and that enjoys considerable attention, especially through the sharing of contents on social media by both the supporters and the detractors of the March, seems to have initiated a new phase in the history of women's movements in Pakistan.[1] Most of the discourse around the Aurat March, as developed by both feminists and anti-feminists, promotes a conversation on issues of sexuality and body politics, with its supporters stating women to be the sole owners and managers of their bodies, and with the detractors accusing women of promoting improper and vulgar behaviours which pose a threat to society and the national culture. Highlighting that women's rights movements are not new in the country and suggesting that the Aurat March constitutes a turning point in the history of women's movements in Pakistan, this essay proposes to read it as having developed a public space for contestation of the 'moral regulation' that nationalist and Islamist policies have used to determine women's place within Pakistani society. The 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. Furthermore, as a way of investigating the relationship between the emergence of this new feminist contestation and its cultural

[1] Shama Dossa, "The Aurat March. Women's Movements and New Feminisms in Pakistan", in Leela Fernandes, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*, Second Edition, (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

expressions, the paper looks at the way visual arts deal with the discourse developed around the Aurat March. It points out that a generation of artists is emerging that deals with issues of body politics and sexuality in ways that openly challenge conservative views on the matter. The article considers works produced by visual artists Shehzil Malik, Hiba Schahbaz and Misha Japanwala and examines how contemporary feminist art represents female bodies in the context of a society where they are both objectified and under constant threat.

2. The Aurat March: A Controversial Annual Appointment

On 8 March 2018, a group of women's rights activists organised marches which took place at the same time in some of the main cities of Pakistan with the purpose of drawing attention to the ways women are generally seen and treated within Pakistani society. The Aurat March takes place every year on International Women's Day and since its inception it has grown, involving more people and more cities. Every year the event focuses on one main topic, yet the principal reason why people march is to raise awareness of issues of gender inequality, highlighting how civil society tends to deny women basic rights like the right to take decisions regarding one's own life and body, which makes both public and private spaces unsafe for women. Honour killings, rapes, forced conversions, forced marriages, health rights, the various forms of harassment women are victims of, the limits that many families impose on women's freedom of choice, and the violence against and marginalisation of transgender people are some of the issues pointed out by the marchers.

The event is a controversial one in Pakistan where many claim the marchers work on a Western agenda, and even believe they get funding from the West, with the purpose of promoting Western values, and thus vulgarity, in the country.[2] As a consequence, this protest is also accused of promoting ideas and behaviours that are against the Islamic values of the nation, thus suggesting that the marchers are westernised women participating in a conspiracy against Islam and Islamic values. Another way in which detractors deal with this protest is through stating that the issues raised and the demands posed by the Aurat March are not grounded in the national reality where women are granted rights and safety. Furthermore, while it is true that most of the organisers and the participants belong to the upper and upper-middle classes and mostly come from liberal environments, the social origin of most of the marchers is frequently used to dismiss their messages. Critics state that such women are detached from the ground reality as they are both not aware of the real needs and struggles of the average Pakistani woman and are not truly affected by the limits imposed on most women by the local patriarchal society as the environment they live in allows them freedoms that are unknown to the majority of women.[3]

The March, its organisers and participants are publicly criticised and condemned on the streets, both by people involved in counter-marches[4] and by some journalists who are openly aggressive towards the participants while covering the event. The aggression also appears on newspapers, televisions and social media networks. It is on social media platforms, however, that most of the material and opinions in favour of or against the March are shared, and, for this reason, they retain a central role in the development of narratives and counter-narratives about the March and feminists in the country. The strongest voices against the March are those of the conservatives that deem the slogans and the behaviours of the marchers as inappropriate and vulgar. Because of this view, conservative parties have also asked to ban the rally. For instance, in February 2022, the Minister for Religious and Minority Affairs wrote a letter to the Prime Minister stating the Aurat March offends

[2] "Lal Masjid Moves Court Seeking Ban on Aurat March", *Dawn* (2021), *www.dawn.com*.
[3] Azeemah Saleem, "'Aurat March': A Groundbreaking Rally against Patriarchy in Pakistan", *South Asia Monitor* (2020), *www.southasiamonitor.org*.
[4] "Women Rally in Pakistan Despite Attempts to Shut down the Protest", *AFP* (2022), *factcheck.afp.com*.

Islamic values, so asked the government to ban it.[5] Furthermore, it is not rare for the condemnation of this public feminist event to move beyond the limits of fair expressions of dissent. The organisers, for example, have received personal threats while more general threats to the participants have come from the Taliban.[6] It has frequently happened that photographs from the March have been modified in order to change the messages on the placards held by the participants to make them sound shocking or offensive to the common morality.[7]

Indeed, placards have emerged as one of the most interesting aspects of the Aurat March as it is through them that the participants share their messages using phrases that try to catch people's attention during the rally and much of the discussions around the event focus on what is stated and represented on the placards. The participants' aim of getting their signs noticed is also sought by using irony, with placards reading, 'I just got back from work can you pass me a glass of water?' or 'Saying *mashAllah* does not make your harassment *halal*'. In addition, they may use words, expressions and images that are commonly regarded as sensitive and thus not openly used in public conversations, such as statements like, 'If only they were as disgusted by oppression as they are by periods' accompanied by a red-stained tampon, or 'Grow a pair' under the image of a pair of ovaries. While some placards refer to specific issues like the rights of women from minority groups or name some of the female victims of male violence whose cases have received attention from the media, others contain responses to the accusations against the marchers. For example, the allegation of promoting un-Islamic values – 'Protection of women against violence is not un-Islamic' – and the claim that the messages shared on the placards offend the majority of Pakistanis – 'My outrage can't even fit on this sign'.

Of the many slogans used at the March, one has become the main focus of its opponents' attention and so has, as a consequence, turned it into the unofficial slogan of the march: '*mera jism*, *meri marzi*' ('my body, my choice'). This statement is powerful because it encompasses the fundamental claim of women's right to exercise agency over their bodies. Its relevance is annually proved by the number of known cases of violence against women. To those who condemn the use of this slogan, however, the statement is scandalous and the outrage it produces lies in the ability of the word *jism*, a neutral word for 'body' in Urdu, to evoke women's sexuality and thus to drive men to sinful thoughts. At the same time, women's claim to exercise agency over their bodies is understood as their attempt to push for a sexual liberation that would undermine the rules and values Pakistani society is based on. Thus, the slogan is accused of encapsulating all the threats feminists pose both to pious men and to the family system. According to this view, in fact, a woman stating her right to exercise agency over her body is promoting a sexual freedom that is against the religious and cultural values the nation is built on and that will eventually disrupt the family system Pakistani society is based on by undermining the woman's role in it, that of mother and of devout and sexually restrained wife.

Photographs and videos of the marchers with their placards are shared in newspapers and on televisions, but the main vehicle for the circulation of these images is social media platforms, where not just journalists and pundits express their views on the placards, but anyone willing to join in the debate can share their ideas in favour of or against the feminist messages. Thus, it is on social media that hate campaigns are built and find their supporters. For example, a campaign called 'Mard March' (Men's March) was launched on social networks as a sort of counter-march promoting anti-feminist slogans that were mostly developed by modifying the feminist ones, like 'My eyes, my choice' and 'First you cook the food, then I will warm it up', as a reply to the placards saying 'Heat up your food'.[8] Using devoted hashtags and pages not just the condemnation of the feminist rally but hatred against feminists in general is promoted on social media. Such campaigns do not only depict the

[5] Sadaf Khan, "Marching to a Tune of Hatred", *The News on Sunday* (2022), *www.thenews.com.pk*.
[6] Umar Farooq, "Pakistani Taliban Threatens Organizers of Women's Day March", *Reuters* (2021), *www.reuters.com*.
[7] Wasi Anjum Mirza, "Doctored Images Circulate after International Women's Day Marches in Pakistan", *AFP* (2022), *factcheck.afp.com*.
[8] Daanika R. Kamal, "Networked Struggles: Placards at Pakistan's Aurat March", *Feminist Legal Studies*, 30 (2021), 219-33.

marchers as non-representative of the typical Pakistani, Muslim woman, but they go so far as to encourage violence against them. Manipulated images from the rallies accompanied by sexual innuendos and slurs about the women in the photographs circulate as widely as invitations to sexual violence do.

One chilling example of the power the negative campaigns on social media can have occurred in 2021. A video whose audio had been edited so that the marchers seemed to be chanting slogans offensive to religious sensibility was shared on social media platforms with hashtags defining the content of the video as blasphemous and accusing the organisers of blasphemy. The video went viral and sparked outrage, causing many to invoke mob violence against the organisers of the March who, meantime, had shared the original video to prove that it had been morphed. While many were calling for violence against the women involved, hard-line religious parties held demonstrations against the Aurat March. Meanwhile, in a country where the accusation of blasphemy can lead to a death sentence, the Peshawar High Court initiated legal proceedings against the organisers. Later the case was dropped as the investigation could not prove that the viral video was not fake. However, the authors of the edited video achieved their goal of negatively affecting many people's opinions about the marchers by circulating it widely.

If it is true that hatred and misinformation campaigns are nurtured through social media, it is equally true that before and after the live event that takes place on the International Women's Day, the organisers of the protest and their supporters use the same digital means to spread their messages, to raise awareness about the issues the marches focus on and organise the rallies. Many of the leaders belong to groups like Women Democratic Front, Women's Action Forum (WAF) and *Hum Auratein* (We the Women). The use of social media allows them to amplify the message by reaching an audience greater than that of the people who can actually participate in the March and its connected activities. As online communication relies strongly on images, it is not just the photographs and videos from the events that are shared but also pieces of visual art that in some cases are specifically created to promote the March. The most prominent artist whose works are directly related to the March is Shehzil Malik,[9] the first to create posters for the event. Her works can be found on the streets in the days leading up to the March, but they mostly circulate online, attracting supporters as well as haters who personally attack the artist.

Thus, the Aurat March struggle takes place mainly in two spaces: the streets, where the physical event takes place as an annual appointment, and the social media platforms where contents are shared throughout the year. This makes the struggle ongoing and diffused as it takes place through a network of online and offline modes. In both cases, the spreading of messages relies on visuals – the placards, the images from the event, their doctored versions, the posters, the images of women holding messages against the March – which both the activists and their haters appear to recognise as a fundamental means of communication. As Daanika R. Kamal highlights in her study,[10] the attention that anti-feminists, and as a consequence feminists, pay to the slogans that appear at the event and the circulation of the originals and doctored versions on mainstream and social media has turned the placards themselves into a site where the feminist struggle takes place. Feminists use them to express social criticism while opponents see them as a breach of social property. The consequence is that the placards have become not only a site for women to speak up on key issues, such as body politics, but also constitute a public space where ideas are expressed and contested, promoting debate on issues that have been silenced until recently.

[9] Haiya Bokhari, "Artist in Focus: Shehzil Malik", *The News on Sunday* (2020), *www.thenews.com.pk*.
[10] Daanika R. Kamal, "Networked Struggles".

3. Negative Solidarity: The Aurat March as a Threat to the Nation

The attention the Aurat March receives from those who condemn it, whose opinions and unfair ways of expressing dissent through social media promote hatred and violence, can be understood as a form of what Hannah Arendt calls 'negative solidarity'.[11] Arendt conceives of negative solidarity as a form of solidarity that unites individuals who recognise that they share an experience of suffering or injustice. However, in contrast to positive solidarity that draws people towards working together for a common good, negative solidarity does not unite individuals with the shared aim of taking action against the cause of their suffering or oppression. Rather, negative solidarity is merely a sense of commonality that bids people who recognise that they are victims of the same situation that causes suffering but this does not imply that they take action in the pursuit of the common good. In recent times, Pankaj Mishra has pointed out that a trait the contemporary globalised society shares is anger. All over the world, notwithstanding specific local economic, social and cultural characteristics it is possible to individuate what he calls, citing Nietzsche, 'men of resentment', individuals bound together by a negative solidarity produced by the failure of economic and democratic ideals. The resentment, hatred and desire for revenge against whatever appears to be the cause of the individual and collective failure to realise ideals of economic and social contentment, take various forms and are frequently expressed online where angry individuals can unleash their repressed anger while staying anonymous. Mishra also highlights that most of such dissatisfied and angry individuals live "within poorly imagined social and political communities and/or states with weakening sovereignty" frequently affected by "the decline or loss of postcolonial-nation-building ideologies".[12] Scholars[13] agree that Pakistan is an example of a postcolonial nation where the process of constructing a national identity has failed and, since the country was built as a Muslim majority state, political and religious actors have encouraged a representation of Pakistani identity that understands the national and religious identities to coincide. Thus, mainstream representations of Pakistani identity promote the idea that the individual and collective identity lies in the observance of an orthodox interpretation of Islam.

Feminist studies[14] have pointed out that the attribution of different social roles to the different genders is a fundamental issue used to develop the nationalist narratives. Thus, it seems possible to read the angry reactions against the Aurat March and against liberal feminism in Pakistan as a form of negative solidarity that unites individuals against the menace represented by women who question the role the patriarchal system and nationalism have given them. Indeed, in order to build an imagined community, nationalist narratives adopt the patriarchal differentiation of roles between men and women as well as discourse about the regulation of sexuality, the family as society's fundamental institution, and the passing on of traditions as a way of protecting the integrity of the national identity. At the same time, nationalist narratives give women's bodies a symbolic meaning as they are conceived of as representing the nation itself and this justifies men's role as protectors and controllers of women's bodies. In Pakistan, where a nation had to be imagined when a new state was created in 1947, national identity is built around ideas that draw from both tradition and a certain interpretation of religion to determine the characteristics and behaviours that men and women must display to be regarded as proper Pakistanis, and thus to be accepted as members of the society. In this context, anti-feminism is a sentiment that unites people from all social classes, with more or less conservative

[11] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1962), 315.
[12] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger. A History of the Present* (London: Penguin, 2017).
[13] Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Christophe Jafferlot, ed., *Pakistan. Nationalism without a Nation?* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2002); Ayesha Jalal, "Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (1995), 73-89.
[14] Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India", *American Ethnologist*, 16.4 (1989), 622-33.

views, against what is perceived as a common threat to the patriarchal society and to the Islamic nation.

4. Women's Rights in Pakistan's History

In order to understand the reactions to what appears to be a new phase in the women's rights movement in Pakistan, as well as the emphasis that its opponents put on condemning the references to women's bodies, it is useful to look at Pakistan's history and at the history of its women's rights movement. Although mainstream narratives tend to obliterate it, women's organisations in Pakistan are as old as the country and women have played a role within the anti-colonial and nationalist movements that led to the creation of the two separate states of Pakistan and India, thus proving that women's participation in public and political life is many decades old. However, it was in the 1980s that Pakistani society witnessed the appearance of a movement specifically advocating women's rights which emerged in response to the Islamisation policies pursued by Zia-ul-Haq's regime. The policies of the military regime, supported and acclaimed by the most traditionalist groups in society, drew from both local traditions and an extremist interpretation of Islamic teachings to limit women's freedom, to reduce their power and value in society to less than that of men, and to promote their objectification. These laws came after a period of relatively positive changes for women supported by Zulfikhar Bhutto's progressive policies which promoted the active participation of women in social life, thus supporting the idea that women's lives should not be limited to traditional roles and that they should leave the home to get an education and have a job.

Moving in the opposite direction, Zia's policies promoted a strictly patriarchal idea of women's place in society summarised by the slogan '*chadar aur chaar dewari*' ('the veil and the four walls of the house'). The most significant act in this process was the passing of the Hudood Ordinances in 1979, a set of laws which established the non-equality of men and women before the laws of the state. The most controversial of these laws was that regarding *zina*, or extra-marital sex, which established that the adulterer could be punished by stoning to death. These laws also punished those who were found guilty of rape, which was recognised as different from fornication and adultery. However, for a rape case to be proved it had to be confirmed by four pious, male eyewitnesses while the testimony of female witnesses did not count. As consequence, a woman reporting she had been raped would be easily accused of fornication if she could not provide four male eyewitnesses. Because this made it impossible for a woman to accuse her rapist, it openly promoted violence against women by making it extremely difficult for men to be punished for their actions.

It was during this period and as a reaction to such laws that the Women's Action Forum (WAF) was born in 1981. This first movement of feminists in Pakistan demanded to keep religion separate from the state[15] and condemned the use of religion and tradition as ways to justify violence against women. In 1983, when the law of evidence was passed, which stated that the testimony of two women was equivalent to that of one man, the WAF called for a protest against the law and marched in the streets, along with the All Pakistan Women Lawyers Association. The protesters violently clashed with the police because they defied the ban on public assemblies. The accusations brought against the 1983 protesters resemble those heard against the participants of the Aurat March. Furthermore, WAF march was described in the media as un-Islamic, vulgar, and inspired by the West, just like the Aurat March is.

In 2006, under Benazir Bhutto's government, the Hudood Ordinances were overturned, but this move was not sufficient to bring change in a society that had already been deeply affected by Zia's successful Islamisation policies and by the twenty-seven years of laws subordinating women to men

[15] Saigol Rubina, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies* (Islamabad: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016), 16.

and de facto allowing violence against women. Such laws, enforcing a conception of women's place in society that had already existed in the local culture, promoted the objectification of women who were supposed to subordinate their will and actions to that of the men in their families and whose bodies were to be protected with a veil and the walls of the house from presumed violence in public spaces. Since the 1980s, Pakistani society has indeed witnessed a growth in cases of harassment, rape and killing of women at the hands of men from outside their families. In turn, this increased perception of public spaces as unsafe for women has validated the idea that women should not, and should not be allowed to, move freely in public.

The accusation against women's rights activists to be westernised and un-Islamic is, as we have seen, as old as the emergence of the movement for women's rights in Pakistan. Accusing Pakistani feminists of following a Western agenda serves the purpose of representing them as alien, insignificant and constituting a threat for the society and the country, thus persuading large sections of society to distance themselves from and to criticise or to condemn feminists. The fact that this representation of women's rights activists is largely accepted is also explained by the fact that it appeals to the widely shared anti-western views that associate the West to both the colonial occupation of the Subcontinent and the tense post-9/11 relationship between the West and Muslims. Furthermore, such a representation also uses a widely accepted image of the West as morally corrupt in contrast to the moral superiority of Islamic countries. The corruption of the West is frequently seen as proven by Western women's independence and sexual freedom, while the pious Muslim woman who entirely devotes her life to being a good wife and mother is seen as standing for the moral superiority of Pakistan. As Moon Charnaia writes, "the construction of the Pakistani feminist subject as 'Western' constitutes the modus operandi – a central component of nationalist ideology, symbolizing Western penetration into the region, elitism, and a dangerous force of disintegration to the body politic of the people, primarily through sexuality".[16]

Starting from the Zia era, opposition between feminist and non-feminist women has also been promoted, with the latter embracing the role that patriarchal society prescribes for them and condemning feminists as non-representative of the typical Pakistani woman. Thus, secular women's rights activists have been represented in opposition not to Islamic feminists, whose views are based on the idea that Islam guarantees equal rights to men and women, but to these women. They are often active in the women's wings of religious parties and share an interpretation of women's role in Islamic societies that is commonly regarded by women's rights activists as misogynistic and oppressive of women's freedom.[17] The representation of feminists as alien and potentially dangerous to the society should also be understood in light of the politics of the nationalist and Islamist parties that are currently widely supported in the country and that promote, as part of their ideology, the image of the woman-as-nation derived from anti-colonial nationalist narratives. The Pakistani woman that emerges from such narratives is modest in her appearance, sexually restrained and entirely devoted to her role of obedient daughter, wife and mother.[18] If the female body symbolises the nation, then the honour of not just one family but also of the whole nation lies in it, which compels men to make sure that the honour of their daughters, wives and sisters is protected by keeping control over their bodies.

Drawing from Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, Saadia Toor proposes to read the relationship between women, Islam and the Pakistani nation-state through the lens provided by the conceptual framework of what the two scholars define as 'moral regulation', that is "a project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word 'obvious', what are in fact ontological and

[16] Moon Charnaia, "Feminism, Sexuality and the Rhetoric of Westernization in Pakistan", in Leela Fernandes, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 318.
[17] Amina Jamal, "Gendered Islam and Modernity in the Nation-space. Women's Modernism in the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan", *Feminist Review*, 91.1 (2009), 17.
[18] Moon Charnaia, "Feminism", 323.

epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order".[19] Corrigan and Sayer also point out that state formation is dependent on a relationship between nationalism and sexuality as the nation-state gives itself the power of moral regulation which defines morality and respectability. This particularly affects women as they are seen as the repository of the nation's culture and traditions and, consequently, also of its moral code, respectability and honour. This explains why establishing a strict control on women's bodies and sexuality has become part of the process of defining the nation, resulting in laws and social norms which dictate the behaviours and characteristics a woman should have to conform to the ideal set for her by the nation-state. According to Saadia Toor, "what is ultimately at stake in state projects of 'moral regulation' as mediated by discourses of nationalism, gender, sexuality, and respectability/propriety is the maintenance of social order and of regimes of property".[20] This is accomplished by establishing regimes of power and hegemony that affect certain social groups, like women and minorities. To understand how nationalists in Pakistan have used discourse around gender and sexuality to establish a moral code aimed at determining a regime of power, Toor proposes considering the relationship between property and propriety as it has developed in Pakistan since Zia's dictatorship. During this period, laws passed in the name of a program meant to Islamise the nation legally limited women's freedoms and defined what is and is not proper for women to do. At the same time, such laws objectified them, thus encouraging the idea that they are property in the hands of their families which are expected to govern every aspect of their lives. The Aurat March and the outrage and hatred it generates can be read in the light of the 'moral regulation' pursued in Pakistan through nationalist discourse. However, the backlash this new wave of feminists has received seems to have played a role in giving the movement new vigour.[21]

5. Visual Art as Feminist Resistance

In the 1980s, Zia's regime could not put an end to the resistance by the women's movement as the activists left the streets and opted for other forms of resistance which were put into practice through activities involving local communities and which found a powerful voice in the verses composed by poets like Fahmida Riaz and Kishwar Nahid. Lala Rukh was the visual artist whose works expressed the ethos of the movement and who helped spread WAF's messages through her artworks and posters. Artistic expression used as a means of resisting patriarchal dictates is also part of the new wave of Pakistani feminism as several artists interpret and represent an approach to gender issues that defies the traditional moral regime. They give a voice to liberal feminist perspectives through their representations of the body, thus contributing to the public debate by providing another site, that of the visual arts, for its development. The content of the art often reflects the contents that appear on the placards. Visual art is also shared and circulated on social media and, the fact that the artists are frequently insulted and threatened by online haters, reveals that they are perceived as part of the movement and their art as a vehicle for feminist messages. Therefore, this artistic production emerges as a form of 'artivism' because art appears to be a means to participate actively in a movement that aims at generating social change.

If art as a means of active participation in social and political life is not new in Pakistan, it is insightful to place the engagement of Pakistani feminist artists within the larger framework of the

[19] Philip Corrigan and Sayer Derek, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 4.
[20] Saadia Toor, "The Political Economy of Moral Regulation in Pakistan. Religion, Gender and Class in a Postcolonial Context", in Leela Fernandes, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 140.
[21] Syeda Mujeeba Batool and Aisha Anees Malik, "Bringing the Focus Back. Aurat March and the Regeneration of Feminism in Pakistan", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22.9 (2021), 316-30.

contemporary Muslim world. As recent scholarship has discussed,[22] the Arab revolutions have been characterised by the simultaneous emergence of feminist movements accompanied by related artistic production defined by its aim of contesting, reimagining and promoting a debate around the place of women in Middle Eastern societies. As in the case of Pakistani feminist art, this artistic production is strictly related to, and part of, a movement that takes place and is shaped in the streets as well as in virtual spaces. Also feminist art from the Middle East is characterised by a focus on female bodies and on how women experience, conceive and imagine public and private spaces.

The body is seen as "not merely a surface or casement of the individual" but rather "a material space of multiple dimensions that irrupts and interrupts normative orders and activates competing ones through imagination, symbolism and enactment".[23] Thus, in the contemporary Muslim world the female body has become a fundamental element for feminist artivism which aims at undermining patriarchal decrees and promotes the development of a more egalitarian society.

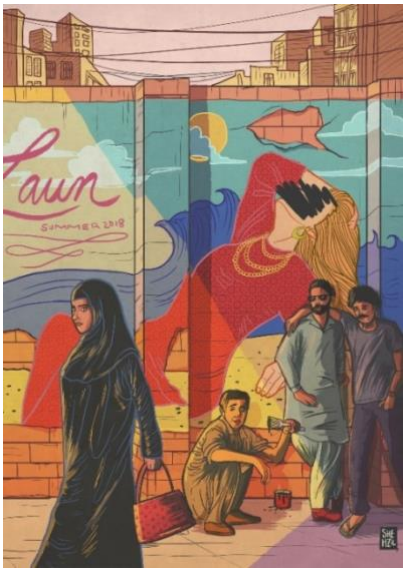

Fig. 1: Shehzil Malik, The Gaze, 2018, digital illustration. Courtesy of Shehzil Malik

To understand the messages and power of feminist art in Pakistan we will look at a few examples. Shehzil Malik's illustrations tell stories of the everyday experiences of women in the country with a particular attention to the common incidents occurring to women when they are in public spaces, from cases of harassment to the raping and killing of women and children.[24] One recurring topic is that of the unprovoked attention and various forms of harassment women are subject to when in the streets, which are not related to the ways women are dressed. In one illustration, for example, a woman wearing a black chador attracts the stares of some men standing by the side of the road. She is passing by a wall where the photograph of a woman posing in what seems an attention-seeking manner has been defaced, supposedly by someone who has deemed it as inducing men to sinful thoughts. Thus, the illustrator shifts the accusation of sexualising the female body from the woman to the men, while

[22] Sara Borrillo and Mounira Soliman, eds., *Artivism, Culture and Knowledge Production for Egalitarian Citizenship in the Middle East and North Africa post 2011*, *Special Dossier of Studi Magrebini/North African Studies*, 18. 2 (2020); Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime, eds., *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions.* (USA: Duke University, 2016).
[23] Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime, *Freedom*, 4.
[24] See Shehzil Malik's official website, *www.shehzil.com*.

also exposing the hypocrisy of those men who condemn women who behave in 'improper' ways and yet, at the same time, harass women regardless of whether they are dressed in modest ways or not. Among the provocative images Malik has created to draw attention to the state of women in Pakistan is one used to denounce domestic violence representing a woman whose neck is strangled by the hands of a man and whose head is trapped by a house-shaped cage. In another illustration, a *matryoshka* is used to represent the characteristics of the girl suitable for marriage according to the societal stereotypes. The doll is defined as the 'ultimate woman' being sponsored in what appears to be an advertisement which reads 'She cooks. She cleans. MBBS certified. 100% family friendly' and, to highlight how women are treated like objects in the hands of men when they are choosing a wife or proposing a daughter as a potential wife, 'Trolley included. Order now!' In Malik's representations, bodies are frequently presented as vulnerable, as objectified and suffering at the hands of men. However, the artist is also asking women to react to this state of affairs by proposing images of women protesting and shouting slogans or riding a bike, an act frequently condemned as improper, as an invitation to create space for women's potentialities.

Fig. 2: Hiba Schahbaz, *Rose Garden*, 2021, watercolour, gouache and tea on paper. Courtesy of Hiba Schahbaz

Hiba Schahbaz paints self-portraits where her naked body is immersed in dream-like and idyllic scenes.[25] As she says in her artist statement, Schahbaz uses her training in miniature art as the starting point of her painting technique. She thus appropriates a traditional form of art which has been practised by men for centuries along with its related imagery to develop her pictorial world whose dominant element is a female body. The body is immersed in what appears to be a peaceful realm inspired by the atmosphere of miniature painting. Her subjects occupy most of the space of the painting[26] and are frequently surrounded by flowers and plants, but at times are depicted against neutral backgrounds or in environments that reflect realistic contexts but simultaneously appear to be out of a dream. The female protagonist of the painting usually appears to be both confident and relaxed as she exposes her body in ways that seem to emphasise the spontaneity and naturalness of the situation. While the paintings appear as a celebration of the female body, the serenity that is conveyed by the female figure might be explained by the fact that she is caught in private situations. In such

[25] See Hiba Schahbaz's official website, *ww.hibaschahbaz.com*.
[26] Bedatri D. Choudhury, "The Boldly Feminine Gaze of Hiba Schahbaz", *Hyperallergic* (2020), *hyperallergic.com*.

situations the absence of men may explain why she can enjoy a moment of freedom to relax and present herself in a nakedness that reminds one of a natural or primordial state, before the definition of gendered roles and codes of conduct. However, this appears to be not just a reminder that gender normativity is a product of patriarchal society but also as an unsettling experience since the artist seems to highlight how far reality is from the dreamy world of the paintings where women cannot enjoy the same freedoms as the female subjects.

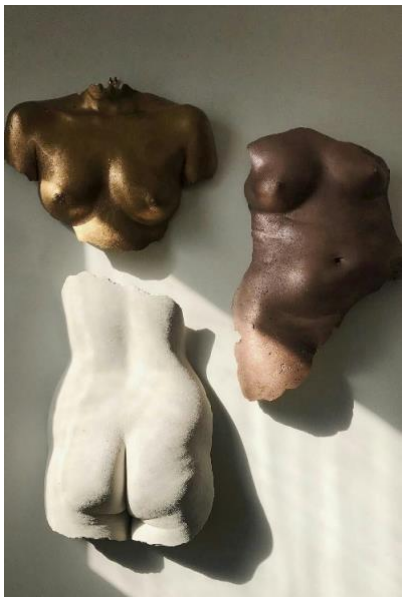

Fig. 3: Misha Japanwala. This is a portion of a picture that the artist has shared freely on her Instagram account (instagram.com/mishajapanwala/).
Unfortunately, our attempts to contact the artist were unsuccessful at the time of publication.

Wearable nude body castings represent the most significant part of Misha Japanwala's artistic production.[27] Plates moulded over the breasts or other parts of the female body appear as both a symbol of its frailty and as an armour, inviting the viewer to consider how fragile a woman's body is when it moves within social spaces. While her works seem to invite the viewer to ponder issues like harassment in public places, domestic violence and honour killings,[28] they also appear to suggest that Pakistani women should try to make their bodies into armour to survive the environment they live in. By showing parts of real bodies through their castings, Japanwala dares to smash the concept of propriety that wants women's bodies to be covered without actually exposing a naked body. Doing so could more easily lead to accusations of vulgarity. The artist herself and her models appear dressed in an armour modelled on their own bodies, this however, is enough to cause scandal and raise anger among Pakistanis. Japanwala's ideal public is Pakistanis, who mostly see her work through her social media pages, but she also speaks to a Western audience, aware of the stereotypes commonly associated with South Asian female bodies, in order to deconstruct the image of the fully covered South Asian woman. As the artist states, this collection of castings, titled 'Azaadi' ('Freedom'), is meant to represent "the reclamation of our bodies in art and how we want to depict them and what we

[27] See Misha Japanwala's official website, *ww.mishajapanwala.com*.
[28] "Misha Japanwala", *Forbes* (2021), *www.forbes.com*.

want to say about them".[29] Thus, the artist seems to want to create a discourse primarily addressed to women, South Asian women in particular, inviting them to focus on the representations of female bodies since art offers a space where women can reclaim their bodies, free from male dictates.

The 'improper' female body that marchers and artists in various ways expose to the public gaze, and which they show in its vulnerability and strength, ceases to be a man's property and becomes a site of the construction of a feminist narrative. The fact that this appears to some as a threat to national identity seems to reveal the limits of the nationalist and the Islamist narrative.

[29] Aamina Khan, "Designer Misha Japanwala Is Never Fully Dressed without a Breastplate", *Vogue* (2021), *www.vogue.com*.

Giuseppe De Riso

The Algebra of Anger. Social Oppression and Queer Intersectionality in *Funny Boy* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Abstract: This article compares Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) with Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) in order to describe the processes of discrimination against queer people within a strained social fabric marked by familial, ethnic, and class oppressions. Through Pankaj Mishra's theory of anger in capitalist societies, Hannah Arendt's concept of negative solidarity, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of queer intersectionality, this paper examines how the two novels situate their queer characters' quest for sexual identity and self-affirmation against the backdrop of the neoliberal expansion of the Indian subcontinent at the turn of the 20th century into the present. Such process increased social inequalities, exacerbated class tensions, and pre-existing ethno-religious conflicts, producing interlocking systems of repression in which queer subjectivities face various forms of physical and psychological discrimination, as existential anger and the threat of violence either force them to painful separations or to rebuild new social relationships.

Keywords: *class discrimination*, *ethnic conflict*, *negative solidarity*, *paranoia*, *queer intersectionality*

1. Incidence of Social Discontent on the Formation of Negative Solidarities

The purpose of this essay is to trace a critical comparison between Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). The first novel describes the teenage years of Arjie Chelvaratnam, an upper-class Tamil boy in Sri Lanka, and the discovery of his own homosexuality during the escalating conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamils in the 1970s and 1980s. In the second, we meet Anjum, a Muslim hijra who, at 46 and in extreme poverty, is faced with the challenge of raising a child in India at the beginning of the new millennium, still consumed by religious hatreds. The novels feature two very different characters, each with their own age, nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation and social standing. Drawing on a theoretical framework that combines Hannah Arendt's concept of 'negative solidarity',[1] with Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality,[2] I will discuss how discrimination against queer people in the two novels confronts and informs other modes of oppression driven by fear and social resentment at intercommunal and (trans)national levels, sometimes in seemingly contradictory ways. In the final part, I also analyse how sometimes these alliances express the desire to attain enfranchisement or escape social inequalities in order to ensure one's safety, pursue one's ambitions or well-being.

In *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Pankaj Mishra suggests that industrial societies have ushered in a globalised, competitive market-oriented economy that promises fulfilment for all while leaving large segments of the population without jobs or employed in unsatisfying occupations.[3] In a world where everyone wages war against each other, most people are doomed to suffer failure, loss, and defeat, or, as Christopher Bayly (drawing on Marx) wrote in *The Birth of the Modern World*, they

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951], new edition with added prefaces (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1973).
[2] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Lam Review*, 43.6 (1991), 1241-1299.
[3] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Penguin, 2017).

are reduced to "long-term losers in the scramble for resources and dignity".[4] Exacerbating poverty and misery creates a context in which human relations are dominated by what Herzl[5] called Darwinian mimicry and René Girard[6] mimetic desire: a persistent state of dissatisfaction fuelled by the insatiable appetite to possess what others have, because if other people want it, it might be something worth pursuing. Such appropriative mimicry is the hallmark of those whom Nietzsche called men of *ressentiment*: "the worms of revenge and rancour [who spin] the web of the most wicked conspiracy ... against those who are successful and victorious".[7] This is a humanity sick with envy and chronic discontent, obsessed by the opinions of others and conformity to societal expectations, cloaked in deference, while hiding deep-seated grudges against higher social strata or the wealthy. In short, resentment in the modern age reflects the desire for convergence and similarity rather than differences in theology, culture, or ideology.

Mishra perceives this phenomenon of generalised anger as an unrecognised civil Third World War. Resentments within civil society contribute to the decay of its fabric through the erosion of democratic values, creating fertile ground for chauvinism and authoritarianism. Mishra notes that Dostoevsky was one of the first intellectuals to denounce that, in a system of industrial competition, the fallacious notions of sovereignty and personal freedom can be a source of murderous paranoia. Economic hardship, the suspicion that one's suffering is the result of a ruling class that thrives on pain, and the fear of rejection and annihilation, all combine into a toxic mixture that allows barkers and false prophets to unite people, especially young men, against scapegoats.[8] According to René Girard, scapegoats are often created by people who, caught in a kind of "blindness",[9] try by all means to find a way out of a difficult situation. The point is to find a liberating target on which to hurl violence. It does not matter whether the victim is actually at fault. Mishra further adds that the oppression of a scapegoat is to be enforced, among other purposes, in order to conquer new space or territories upon which to build a more fulfilling existence, a practice that frequently relies on appeals to enhance masculinity. He describes how, for example, many of the young men recruited for the Italian expansion in Libya and Ethiopia in the first half of the twentieth century were attracted by the calls to affirm manhood and the opportunities for conquest it offered as a chance to end a life of frustration and begin a new existence of 'justice' and 'honesty'. Indeed, a common motivation for violent mass movements is the utopian impulse to rebuild society and state power.

Mishra borrows the phrase 'negative solidarity' from Hannah Arendt to describe the anomalous closeness (exacerbated by the global information network) that binds groups of people with unequal power, wealth, and rights together, increasing the likelihood that they will feel jealousy or resentment, and consequently desire to commit violence against the groups they blame for their suffering. Arendt first used this phrase in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to describe the sentiment against the status quo shared by the "competitive and acquisitive society of the bourgeoisie"[10] of pre-Nazi Germany. Angry at existing institutions and feeling that civil responsibility was only "a needless drain on [their] limited time and energy", these people invoked the strong man, a leader who "tak[ing] upon himself the troublesome responsibility for the conduct of public affairs",[11] would enable them to pursue "a way ...

[4] Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 119.
[5] Theodor Herzl, *The Jews' State: A Critical English Translation* [1896] (e.v., Jason Aronson, 1997). Here and further on, 'e.v.' stands for 'electronic version'. As with most electronic versions of books, the reference has no place of publication.
[6] René Girard, "The Plague in Literature and Myth", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 15.5 (1974), 833-850. See also, James G. Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2000).
[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. by Carol Diethe (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2006).
[8] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1989).
[9] Ibid., 3.
[10] Arendt, *The Age of Totalitarianism*, 313.
[11] Ibid.

of life ... insistently and exclusively centered on the individual's success or failure in ruthless competition".[12] According to Arendt, this "self-centered bitterness"[13] paradoxically led to a more cynical, selfless attitude toward death, the sense that one does not count as an individual but merely as an embodiment of a collective phenomenon. Mishra believes that societies built on financial competition and personal profit create in the modern world the conditions for falling into the compulsive aggregations and nihilistic violence that Arendt identified in Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Negative solidarity, thus understood, sees people united in collective fear and social discontent.

In "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?"[14] Arendt uses this phrase a second time to express the dread that unites the peoples of all walks of life against the threat of nuclear weapons that could wipe out humanity. As this kind of solidarity brings together people in the face of collective self-destruction, it also fosters a desire for isolation and separation due to the excruciating political responsibility it entails:

> This negative solidarity, based on the fear of global destruction, has its correspondence in a less articulate, but no less potent, apprehension that the solidarity of mankind can be meaningful in a positive sense only if it is coupled with political responsibility. Our political concepts, according to which we have to assume responsibility for all public affairs within our reach regardless of personal 'guilt,' because we are held responsible as citizens for everything that our government does in the name of the country, may lead us into an intolerable situation of global responsibility. The solidarity of mankind may well turn out to be an unbearable burden, and it is not surprising that the common reactions to it are political apathy, isolationist nationalism, or desperate rebellion against all powers that be rather than enthusiasm or a desire for a revival of humanism.[15]

Arendt's concept of negative solidarity provides a remarkably sharp analytical tool for examining how much both novels have in common, as they allow to identify the "structure of feeling"[16] underlying the relationships that form or break down around the two main characters, often in fear and resentment. Both Arjie and Anjum must explore their 'anomalous' sexuality in two nearly contiguous historical periods linked by the neoliberal momentum that, sweeping across the entire sub-continent on the impetus of free market competition, was simultaneously reproposing or accentuating patriarchal oppression in kinship relations, ethno-religious conflicts, paranoid anxiety about being victimised by hidden forces, class and caste inequalities, and, more generally, the contradictory antagonisms that British colonial domination had left on the land.

2. Queerness, Kinship and the False Promises of Globalisation

While José Santiago Fernández Vázquez[17] notes that the premise of Arjie's story may not be particularly original, since depicting bloody wars for territorial and cultural dominance through the eyes of children has become quite a popular trope in postcolonial literature, in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath asserts that *Funny Boy* "lays out

[12] Ibid. This was also true of the unemployed who attributed the failure of their own lives to social inequity.
[13] Ibid., 315.
[14] Hannah Arendt, "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?" [1959], in Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 81-94.
[15] Ibid., 83.
[16] The expression comes from Raymond Williams, "From Preface to Film", in Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, eds., *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama Limited, 1954). The concept would be later developed, among others, by Fredrich Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1991); *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (e.v., Cornell U.P., 2015).
[17] José Santiago Fernández Vázquez, "The Quest for Personal and National Identity in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*", *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, 24.1 (Autumn 2001), 103-117.

the complex system of prohibition, punishment, and compulsion that governs and structures gender differentiation"[18] in the conflicted environments of South Asian countries, during the years of market deregulation initiatives several decades after independence from European rule. In *Funny Boy*, we see how the general liberalisation process of the Indian subcontinent impacted the social and economic fabric of Sri Lanka. Arjie feels that there is "something new in [their] lives".[19] After the collapse of socialism, the government had embraced the free market, leading to greater financial prosperity for his family. The inauguration of Sri Lanka's first American-style supermarket coincides with the proliferation of restaurants springing up across the country and offering 'exotic food' like hamburgers. In *Ministry*, we also see India preparing to become "the world's favourite new superpower"[20] as it opened its economy to foreign investment. In Delhi, several billboards bearing the words 'our time is now' announced the arrival of Kmart and Starbucks. However, the promise of a more fulfilling life was made as "sleeping bodies of homeless people lined their high, narrow pavements, head to toe ... looping into the distance".[21] The stark contrast between the prospect of a prosperous life and the arid terrain of utter destitution leads Roy to conclude that "it was the summer Grandma became a whore".[22] In other words, the nation was behaving like an ageing, suffering woman who pretended to forego her problems in order to compete in the marketplace. Despite the triumphant glitz and glamour advertising of the new India of globalisation, the poor, the so-called surplus population, were being evicted from their precarious housing. The police were dispatched to the slums, but they met resistance from the residents, who stood armed at their doorsteps. Sometimes the policemen were forced to withdraw merely because "there were too many of them to be killed outright",[23] and not due to concern for their lives. In India, the process of urban cleansing was not a novel phenomenon. It was also one of the fundamental tenets of Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency of the mid-seventies, when people were crushed to death in their homes by bulldozers in the middle of the night so that cities could become more 'beautiful'.[24] The world of both novels, especially Roy's, is made up of outcasts, people considered by the upper class to be the refuse of society, at a time of political turmoil and economic liberalisation when India was developing into one of the world's fastest growing economies. These are people who are rejected or disregarded, who suffer from poverty, and are on the verge of extinction.[25]

Love is generally defeated in these works. This is true whether the love is homo- or heterosexual. In *The Ministry of the Utmost Happiness*, mysterious Tilo is in love with Musa, with whom she has a relationship but is eventually killed after he joins the Kashmir struggle for independence. Musa, for his part, sees his wife and daughter slaughtered by a gunshot.[26] In *Funny Boy*, Radha is in love with Anil, a Sinhalese man who harbours feelings for her but is rejected by her family's rancour toward his ethnic group, since Radha's grandfather had been killed in a Sinhalese attack on Tamils twenty years before. Also, if she turns against her family, Radha is at risk of rejection just like Doris, the Burgher woman in

[18] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke U.P., 2005), 170.
[19] Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy* [1994] (London: Vintage, 1995), 107.
[20] Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (e.v., Penguin, Random House, 2017), 104. This reference has no place of publication as it refers to the digital version available on the Google Play Store.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 106.
[24] During Indira Gandhi's tenure as prime minister, she declared a state of emergency to prevent the country from being ruined by a corrupt political class. In reality, Indira suppressed civil liberties, restricted free expression, and used violence against those she considered her political enemies (and thus inimical to the national interest she believed she represented). The political programme of the state of emergency was laid out in a 20-point plan, to which Indira's son Sanjay added five more points. Sanjay's main concern was to beautify the environment by razing as many slums as possible and sterilising the poorer sections of society to prevent overpopulation.
[25] Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes, "Romancing the Other: Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 57.1 (March 2022), 102-117.
[26] They were killed by the same bullet which penetrated the mother's heart after piercing her daughter's temple.

charge of a play in which both Arjie and Radha appear, had been. Doris had turned against her English-born family by marrying a Tamil man, and they later abandoned her. In her own words, Radha acknowledges that she became aware of her feelings for Anil in response to the family's opposition to a possible 'mixed' marriage.[27] Before marrying Arjie's father, when the laws still forbade interethnic marriages, Amma was in love with Daryl, a white man who was forced to leave her and emigrate to Australia when the government imposed Sinhala as the only official language, which he did not speak. Arjie's father himself had considered marrying an English girl, who reciprocated his feelings, before he "came to his senses [and] realized, [she] would never fit in with his family. Also, she was from a working-class family, and 'low class was low class whether it was English or Sri Lankan'".[28] Roy dedicates her novel to the unconsoled in a world ravaged by social inequalities and discrimination. Its epigraph reads "it's all a matter of your heart",[29] indicating the importance of emotions at all levels. When asked who these unconsoled may be, Roy replied, "All of us, in secret, even if we don't show it.... I think the world is unconsoled right now".[30] According to Filippo Menozzi,[31] Roy's writing is infused with an aesthetic of the inconsolable as it takes into consideration emotional leftovers that are largely overlooked in historiographies and political accounts.

As the examples above show, class distinctions and ethno-religious barriers underlie the 'residual' nature of the often unhappy unions that make up the nuclear family, a heteronormative structure that is the pillar of capitalist society. It is against this backdrop of sentimental contradictions that we follow Anjum's path to emancipation. Anjum was born with two sexes, a fully developed male member and a still developing vagina. Her mother, Jahanara, was so distressed upon this discovery that she considered killing both herself and her daughter. In Urdu, everything is assigned a specific gender. Her child had two of them in one body, which in the maths of a patriarchal culture was equivalent to having none. To the world her child would be a hijra, a "clown without a circus"[32] or a "queen without a palace".[33] She belonged to a liminal, mostly indeterminate realm that excluded her from all the different kinds of blood relationships that make up a patriarchal family. Overcome by despair, she takes the child to the shrine of Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed. In doing so, she comes into contact with "strange people ... the kind of people who in her earlier life she would not have deigned to even glance at unless they'd crossed her path. Suddenly they seemed to be the most important people in the world".[34] Her daughter's condition brings her closer to the disenfranchised humanity she would have otherwise ignored if the child had been born with a defined gender, and for whom she now feels an enormous sense of empathy. Upon learning of Anjum's double sex, her father Mulaqat Ali, a beverage merchant whose business had declined due to the spread of Coca-Cola in his country, unsuccessfully tries to bolster her masculine side by telling her of the ancestral exploits that are part of the family tree, which he boasts can be traced back to the Mongol emperor Changez Khan. There is no doubt that Anjum's dubious sexuality challenged this dynastic inheritance and made her run the risk of finding no place in it. Therefore Mulaqat, who believed that the power of medicine in the "modern era"[35] could

[27] "The funny thing", she remarks to the boy whom circumstances had also made funny, "I never saw him in that light until Amma ... talked to his parents that I began to see him differently" (Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 6).
[28] Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 170.
[29] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 84.
[30] This quote comes from an interview Roy gave to Emy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh in 2017. It is available online at www.democracynow.org/2017/6/20full_extended_interview_arundhati_roy_on.
[31] Filippo Menozzi, "'Too Much Blood for Good Literature': Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and the Question of Realism", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55.1 (2018), 20-33.
[32] Ibid., 20.
[33] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 8.
[34] Ibid., 14.
[35] Ibid., 21.

cure his 'son', brings Anjum to Dr. Ghulam Nabi, who recommended a surgeon to seal her "girl-part",[36] but warned that the feminine tendencies, which he called 'fitrat', would likely remain.

Arjie in *Funny Boy* is also subjected to virilization measures. A memory from his childhood illustrates the threat of familial dissolution which fear of homosexuality usually brings with it. The episode comes from the time when his parents[37] and uncles took all the children to their grandparents' house on Sundays for one of their typical family spend-the-day, during which the children were almost completely free to pursue their favourite activities. Arjie enjoyed participating in the bride-bride game, where he could play the role of the bride, instead of playing cricket with the boys. For this, however, Arjie is first insulted by his cousin Tanuja, who calls him a "pansy", a "faggot", and a "sissy"[38] and when he is caught by his parents the family unity is in danger of breaking down. Appa, his father, accuses his mother, Amma, of evoking strange fantasies in her son because she allows him to watch her put on makeup. In the future, Arjie will not be allowed to do that and will also be required to play with his male cousins. In another scene, Appa, concerned about his son's "certain tendencies",[39] asks the muscular and virile Jegan, the son of a childhood friend, for assistance in overcoming them. Arjie is also enrolled at the Queen Victoria Academy because it "will force [him] to become a man".[40] The nature of the masculinization attempts Arjie and Anjum face provide insight into the deep fear of extinction that Edward A. Ross[41] termed 'race suicide', and situate the question of queer sexuality within the complex framework of kinship ties within patriarchal societies.

Michel Foucault[42] distinguished the ability to freely enjoy one's own body (what he referred to as 'regime of sexuality') from the laws that govern marriage and lineage in order to pass on wealth, property, and, more generally, inheritance ('regime of alliance').[43] Elizabeth Freeman[44] argues in "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory", that kinship ties are regulated by policies that sanction a variety of lived relationship forms centred on heterosexual couples and extending to children. These policies provide economic and other material benefits, but they also impose obligations on all who are classified as family members. In dyadic systems of dynastic succession, the presence of gay and lesbian individuals introduces a logistical challenge for family policy and ethnographic mapping. In the words of Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr: "queer is always already in response to a dominant heterosexual matrix: a solely reactive force of re-signification, mockery, disrespect to the dominance of heterosexuality, to the power of the norms".[45] In *Undoing Gender* Judith Butler[46] questions whether kinship is necessarily bound to heterosexual language and whether homosexuality or queer sexuality must necessarily elude or resist it. It is observed that the problem with queer subjects, and more generally, with members of a sexual orientation not intended for reproduction, is that they do have names, but those names belong to a dominant lexicon that tries to

[36] Ibid., 22.
[37] Arjie's family is from the Tamil minority, descendants of contract workers imported from India by the British who were used as slave-like labourers for the cultivation of tea.
[38] Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 17.
[39] Ibid., 172.
[40] Ibid., 216.
[41] Edward A. Ross, "The Cause of Race Superiority", *Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Sciences*, 18 (1901), 67-89.
[42] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: An Introduction* [1976], trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[43] Because of this, Foucault also relates family and sexuality to society's distribution of wealth and capital.
[44] Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory", in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, eds., *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* (Maldon, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 295-314.
[45] Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, "... So As to Know 'Us' Better Deleuze and Queer Theory: Two Theories, One Concept – One Book, Many Authors ...", in Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 2009), 1-10, 4.
[46] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

assimilate them into heteronormatively understood families. Consequently, they are either 'naturally' adapted to family relationships with a mother, a father, and a child, or they are excluded from them.

Elizabeth Freeman argues that this linguistic inadequacy is a consequence of the fact that the queer family is seen as lacking 'extensibility'.[47] In cultural systems that view the family as a unit capable of producing and reproducing offspring, the problem with queer sexuality is that it does not provide those 'elementary structures', as Claude Lévi-Strauss[48] describes them, of kinship and consanguinity capable of multiplying across space, through a network of family chains, or extending over time through descent. As a result, queer minorities "collapse into amorphous and generic 'community,' while queer 'descent groups' seem for the most part linguistically inconceivable".[49] They are forced to vacillate between individualistic self-identifications and abstractly romanticised notions of community subordinated to national values. In considering the meaning of queerness from this perspective, it is crucial therefore that we take into account how small-scale kinship ties are connected to the larger social formations based on nationality and ethnicity from which they derive their legitimacy, acquire meaning, and become thinkable, to use a term cherished by Foucault.

3. Intersectionality and the Maths of Fear

In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw describes structural intersectionality in terms of interlocking systems that enable discrimination. Repression against sexual orientations outside the 'norm' cannot be viewed in isolation, but must be seen in conjunction with other forms of discrimination related to kinship, class, race, religion and nationalism. We can only understand the long-term effects of discrimination against queer people within the context of a continuum of patterns that connect and separate different social and cultural domains. Because queer intersectionality addresses oppression as a structure of mutually reinforcing discriminations, it can provide refined critical inquiry tools and methodologies that account for the complexity of the connections between them. This argument was made by Eithne Lubhéid in her introduction to *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, US Citizenship, and Border Crossing*, in which she writes that "the importance of understanding the intersectionality of race and gender has opened up space in turn to ask how sexuality might also intersect with multiple categories of identification and difference".[50]

Given her sexuality, Anjum will naturally want to separate from her biological family and find one in which she can truly be herself. Khwabgah (literally, the house of dreams) is a place where only hijras live and where she can express her individuality in ways she could never have imagined before. Her mother initially asks her not to go, but when she refuses, they agree to meet occasionally at the shrine of Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed, while her father cuts all ties with her out of shame. The hijras are expected to abandon their biological ties when they join the larger hijra community, which is distinguished by a unique degree of solidarity, different from that of other social outcasts. Unlike 'normal people' who worry about poverty, gender inequality, religious conflicts, and national wars, the hijra community is united by an intractable unhappiness: "think about it," her friend Nimmo bemoans, "what are the things ... normal people get unhappy about? ... Price-rise, children's school-admissions, husbands' beatings, wives' cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war — outside things that settle down eventually. But for us [this is] all inside us.... The war is inside us. It will never settle down".[51]

[47] Freeman, "Queer Belongings", 297.
[48] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* [1967], revised edition, trans. by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
[49] Freeman, "Queer Belongings", 297.
[50] Eithne Lubhéid, "Introduction: Queering Migration and Citizenship", in Eithne Lubhéid and Lionel Cantú, eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, US Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota, 2005), xxiv.
[51] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 29.

In the years that follow, Anjum grows up to become the most famous hijra in Delhi. She undergoes a series of physical changes, including surgery to remove her penis[52] and taking drugs that give her voice "a peculiar, rasping quality, which sometimes sounded like two voices quarrelling with each other instead of one".[53]

In time, however, Anjum develops a crescent sense of unease mixed with frustration at Khwabgah, which she poignantly conveys through her completely irrational fear that Saeeda may have cursed Zainab, Anjum's unofficially adopted child who is infected with malaria. Saeeda is another member of Khwabgah, younger and more educated than her, who alternates between wearing traditional Indian clothing and western style garments. Indeed, Saeeda is not only part of Khwabgah, but has also become more westernised: she prefers to "speak in the new language"[54] of the globalised world and refers to herself as a "transperson"[55] rather than a hijra. Saeeda competes with Anjum for the leadership of Khwabgah and is "second in line for Zainab's affections".[56] As Zainab grows increasingly ill, Anjum builds up an all-embracing, "mounting paranoia"[57] for which Saeeda is made the scapegoat. Anjum believes that Saeeda has cast some kind of spell responsible both for Zainab's sickness and the attack on the Twin Towers, which she watches with horror on live television. In her view, "the hex that had been put on Zainab had made the whole world sick".[58] Anjum's paranoia, her irrational fear of a culturally 'mixed' Muslim threatening her primary position in Zainab's and other hijras' hearts, thus illustrates the otherwise unsuspectable connection between queerness and cultural tensions as they exist between East and West, between Muslims and Hindus, similar, the author observes, to how the then Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, used 9/11 to attack Muslims by exploiting baseless fears of Islamic communities in his country, even though they had nothing to do with the New York attacks: "'The Mussalman, he doesn't like the Other,' he said poetically in Hindi, and paused for a long time, even by his own standards. 'His Faith he wants to spread through Terror'".[59] The rivalry between Anjun, the traditional hijra, and Saeeda, the transgender woman who is open to internationalisation and eager to learn the language of the foreigners, produces an envy that is directly contrasted with the feelings of anger against Muslims across the country at a time of perceived vulnerability. The September 11 attack on the Twin Towers led to increased persecution of Muslim communities around the world, which in the case of India strengthened the political position of those who wanted to turn the country into a Hindu republic.

4. Ethno-Religious Warfare

In their introduction to "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?", David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Mufioz complain that queer studies has "rarely addressed ... broad social concerns", and has hardly embedded its analyses in the broader context of global crises that have shaped configurations "among political economies, the geopolitics of war and terror, and national manifestations of sexual, racial and gendered hierarchies".[60] By placing her story at the intersection of issues of ethnic-religious conflicts, kinship, and gender imbalances, Roy demonstrates the timeliness of the call and invites critical reflection in that direction. This is a text that simultaneously reveals the

[52] It is common for hijras to have their genitals removed and to be sexually passive. Therefore, not only can they not commit sexual assault, but they also have no reproductive abilities.
[53] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 34.
[54] Ibid., 29.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 42.
[57] Ibid., 44.
[58] Ibid., 47.
[59] Ibid., 47.
[60] David L. Eng et al., eds., "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?", in *Social Text*, 23.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2005), 1-24.

systems of power from which particular alliance formations or rivalries emerge, but also how they spread to other communities with which they do not seem directly connected. As Nathaline Reynolds reports,[61] the Indian government grew increasingly callous to issues of social injustice and began accusing its opponents of disloyalty. In the nation that was home to the world's third-largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan, Hindu elites claimed that Islam posed one of the greatest threats to democracy. Islamists were considered violent and inclined to subjugate their neighbours. Nisha Kapoor[62] has explained how this climate reinforced Muslims' perception of being victims of injustice, hindered their social integration, and triggered a widespread identity crisis, which in turn led many young men to join radical Islamic groups. Discrimination against Muslims contributed immensely to inflaming tempers, setting in motion a spiral of outrage and accusations in which each party blamed its own actions for the other side's crimes. All parties were victims and never perpetrators.

This is clear from Roy's account of Anjum's involvement in the Gujarat reprisals. One day, sixty Hindu visitors were burned alive in a bus set ablaze on the site where the Babri Masjid mosque had been demolished ten years earlier.[63] In revenge, Hindus began slaughtering Muslims everywhere, in the streets, in their homes, and even in hospitals. According to unofficial government sources, each action would be met with an equal and opposite reaction. In reality, "the 'reaction' ... was neither equal nor opposite".[64] The acts of revenge were always worse than the insult suffered. Although Roy points out that the Babri Masjid, a mosque built 450 years earlier by Mughal emperor Babur in the northern Indian city of Ayodhya, was demolished by Hindu fundamentalists to make room for the construction of a Hindu temple, it is nonetheless noteworthy that the mosque itself was built on the site of an earlier Hindu temple destroyed to make way for the mosque. Indeed, Robert Layton and Julian Thomas[65] recall that the mosque stood on the foundations of an earlier Hindu temple that marked the birthplace of the legendary hero king Rama. This mosque had been disputed since the 19th century, to the point where it was 'desecrated' in 1949 with Hindu imagery inside. It was closed and remained unused until it was eventually demolished 42 years later. The devastation of sacred places of worship is perceived as a way to erase a community's past, which is why it can become a cause for retribution. The climate of tension between Hindus and Muslims is reflected in the escalation of reprisals, which were always intended as a reaction to violence previously experienced.

Therein lies the irrational maths of fear that crosses borders and community boundaries. In her article "The Algebra of Infinite Justice",[66] Roy describes the anger of Americans after 9/11, which she calls reflexive because it was a reaction to the instinctive feeling of revenge that triggered it. "Stygian"[67] anger and feelings of revenge reinforced each other, creating a "lockpick"[68] capable of "slipping"[69] unnoticed through all walls and boundaries, whether material or social. In Roy's analysis, it was precisely this kind of anger that led to the unlikely negative solidarity between the United States and Russia in the fight against an already devastated Afghanistan. Using unlikely equations, this kind of solidarity can extract "collateral value"[70] from violence for retaliation or preemptive purposes. In

[61] Nathaline Reynolds, "Hindu Nationalism and the Muslim Minority in India", *Corridors of Knowledge for Peace and Development* (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 2020), 279-303.
[62] Nisha Kapoor, *Deport, Deprive, Extradite: 21st Century State Extremism* (e.v., Verso, 2018).
[63] The exact date is 6 December 1992.
[64] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 52.
[65] Robert Layton and Julian Thomas, "Introduction: The Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property", in Robert Layton et al., eds., *Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001).
[66] Arundhati Roy, "The Algebra of Infinite Justice", *The Guardian* (2001), *www.theguardian.com*.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

the case of 9/11, revenge for the tragic deaths of 7,000 people could justify the slaughter of hundreds of thousands or even millions of others.

5. Unseen Enemies

Extraction of collateral value is possible also because, in addition to centralised fear generated by a specific enemy, in our times there is also a pervasive panic, the sense reinforced by the mass media of living in a world out of control, where any disaster can strike anyone at any time. In "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization",[71] Arjun Appadurai discusses the distress of living in neglected cities where it is not uncommon to die unexpectedly from being hit by a piece of plaster falling from the cornice of a building. Or consider Geetanjali Shree, whose novel *The Empty Space*[72] expresses the apprehension of suddenly becoming the victim of a terrorist attack. To Shree, such subcutaneous unease is not limited to the Indian subcontinent, but is now universal and affects the whole world: "The specificity of the event ... unhinged the lives of the bereaved family and their friends overnight. Such a calamity can strike anywhere, anytime, we felt. It brought home to me the horror of our contemporary world where stupid and sinister violence is a quotidian reality".[73] Confronted with unintelligible catastrophes, emotions such as distrust seem to be the most effective means of conflict management.

This is especially true of *Funny Boy*. The family's hostility to Radha and Anil's union is reinforced by the climate of fear created by the spread of horrific news on the radio. As Mishra correctly noted, in the age of anger "grisly images and sounds continuously assault us".[74] The final section of the novel consists of accounts from Arjie's diary. A clash between the Tamil Tigers and government soldiers serves as justification for a series of punitive measures against the Tamils, whose homes are later set on fire. The most disturbing aspect of this situation is not the violence itself, but the impression that it is being secretly manipulated by the government with the support of the military. The police are not on duty in the streets, and telephone communications have been cut off. Rumour has it that the government itself is passing out voting lists so that angry mobs know exactly which houses to loot and burn down. Arjie's family feels hunted by an invisible predator whose existence they cannot prove. They only know that it is there and that sooner or later it will strike through the unbridled hatred of the crowd. They can only rely on terrifying rumours and the macabre images evoked by the reports on the radio. Selvadurai reminds readers that evil is most fearsome when it is unpredictable.

When Radha returns from Jaffna, the city to which her family had sent her so that she could not meet Anil secretly, she is assaulted in a train attack by Sri Lankans. Many of the 'ethnic' trains that transported Tamils from the north of the island to the south, where the majority Sinhalese lived, were attacked during the years preceding the civil war, sometimes resulting in certain rail lines being shut down. Radha returns home, however, and her behaviour makes it clear that the violence she witnessed has left the deepest wound, not the bruise on her face, and Arjie realises that the unrest, which he previously thought was far away, is actually threatening him more closely than he had anticipated:

> The recent riots, which had seemed so removed from my life took on an immediate and frightening dimension.... Slowly, the news about what was happening in other parts of the country had begun to come into Colombo. The things we heard were so terrible that everyone had been sure there would be a forty-eight-hour curfew, and people had rushed to the shops to stock up on provisions.... What seemed disturbing, now that I thought about those 1981 riots, was that there had been no warning, no hint that

[71] Arjun Appadurai, "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization", *Development and Change*, 29 (1998), 915-925.
[72] Geetanjali Shree, *The Empty Space* (Noida-New York: Harper Perennial, 2011).
[73] Ibid., 3335 (Kindle).
[74] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 16.

> they were going to happen.... What was to prevent a riot from happening right now? I thought, even as I lay in this hammock, was it not possible that a mob was getting ready to come to our hotel? I shuddered.[75]

Émile Durkheim[76] argued that the seriousness of a crime is usually measured by the extent to which it offends or hurts the collective or individual feelings of a group of people, since it represents an attack on the authority or the stability that holds that group together. A violation of the law does not by itself justify the imposition of a specific penalty. The way it is perceived by the community determines its gravity: "harm caused to important interests is not in itself sufficient to determine the ... response; the harm must be perceived in a particular way".[77] Following Durkheim, in these novels we can observe how many relationships within and between communities are based more on the different emotional states of the various social categories than on law or justice.

In an India rife with religious conflict, Anjum is spared her life during Hindus' slaughtering thousands of Muslims in Gujarat only because they irrationally fear that killing a hijra may bring them bad luck:

> Bad luck!
> Nothing scared those murderers more than the prospect of bad luck. After all, it was to ward off bad luck that the fingers that gripped the slashing swords and flashing daggers were studded with lucky stones embedded in thick gold rings. It was to ward off bad luck that the wrists wielding iron rods that bludgeoned people to death were festooned with red puja threads lovingly tied by adoring mothers.[78]

They humiliate Anjum by making her chant their nationalist victory slogans and leave her "un-killed. Un-hurt.... the longer she lived, the more good luck she brought them".[79] As a Muslim, Anjum should have been killed like everyone else, but she is spared because the Hindus fear that killing a hijra will bring misfortune to their cause. She is also not harmed because they believe that the longer she lives, the greater the chances they have of succeeding in their project of social renewal. It is ironic that the very representatives of one of the religions that most discriminates against homosexuals are able to build a negative solidarity with a part of the very people they discriminate against, because they believe that the success of their struggles may well depend upon their survival. And yet, Anjum is forced to disguise herself as a man in order to gain entry into a refugee camp in Gujarat,[80] her sexuality and Islamic beliefs repeatedly make her the object of different kinds of discrimination which appear all interrelated, sometimes in irrational and contradictory ways.

6. Corruption and Class Conflict

In the India inflamed by "the euphoria of high economic growth figures", Nathelene Reynolds maintains that "the privileged ... look upon those left behind with suspicion".[81] Arjie's father believes that it is sufficient to follow a low profile, to be discreet, and to "tread carefully"[82] in order for things to work out for them. Therefore, he supports the government in the hope that it will crush the Tamil

[75] Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 180.
[76] Émile Durkheim, "The Division of Labour in Society" [1893], trans. By. Margaret Thompson, in Kenneth Thompson, *Reading from Emile Durkheim*, revised edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2004).
[77] Ibid., 25.
[78] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 70.
[79] Ibid., 70.
[80] While Mansoor, the son of an old friend of Anjum's father, shaves his beard, which is highly valued in the Islamic religion, and wears the puja threads traditionally associated with Hinduism in order to survive while looking for her.
[81] Reynolds, "Hindu Nationalism and the Muslim Minority in India", 279.
[82] Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 196.

Tigers. "Once the government destroys these damn Tigers, everything will go back to normal".[83] Here we see a Tamil siding with his oppressor and even hating other Tamils whom he sees as dangerous because they might incur the wrath of the Sinhalese and the government. His thinking is based on fear of retribution from the powerful, of losing his social position. He fears the destruction of his hotels and property, police harassment, and hostility from his own Sinhalese associates. He rejects his wife's idea of emigrating to Canada or Australia because Sri Lankans are not offered good job opportunities there and he is appalled at the idea of ending up as a gas station attendant or cab driver.

Similarly, Anjum is changed by the trauma of the violence she endured in Gujarat. As a result of her resentment against Saeeda, who threatens Anjum's authority in the hijra community to which they belong and in the nuclear family that Zainab represents to her, Anjum develops a sense of dissatisfaction that gradually leads her to leave the hijra community and live (or, as she puts it, 'die') in a graveyard. In this place she builds a guesthouse she calls Jannat, or paradise. It will not be populated by ghosts or supernatural beings, but only by heroin addicts, "stray dogs that are better off than humans"[84] and a few corrupt policemen who are willing to let her live there if she pays them a bribe. As an integral part of the apparatus of oppression that breeds abuse and social injustice, the police have no qualms about preying on the least of the least, who are already struggling to survive. In time, Jannat becomes home to her new family of fallen angels, hijras in exile who, like her, defy the rigid norms of hijra communities.[85]

Characters in both novels are immersed in a hostile environment distinguished by a sense of insecurity that feeds on the fears it stokes. In the Indian subcontinent, anger at being hounded by business or government is widespread, crossing racial and religious lines to reach different social groups. Grievance is prevalent among the lower classes because they fear they cannot cope with a corrupt and servile social system. Indeed, in this regime, the police often serve the powerful to dispossess peasants of their land and property, or falsely accuse innocent people to cover up their own misdeeds, or simply remain silent when mass violence is essential to the interests of the political elite. As a result of the corruption of institutions and their favouritism, violence is the catalyst for fantasies of revenge by the weak, who are often the victims of those who are supposed to protect them.

When Daryl returns to Sri Lanka after more than a decade in Australia, he does so to investigate abuses committed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. This law was passed by the government in 1978 and empowers the police to arrest and detain anyone who is merely suspected of being a terrorist. As a result, the entire Tamil community lives in fear and becomes easy prey not only for violent nationalists but also for the authorities themselves, who can commit any kind of atrocities and harassment against them simply by raising the spectre of terrorism. Thus, it is not surprising that when Arjie's mother goes to the police to report Daryl's disappearance and the fact that his house has been ransacked by strangers, the officers initially ignore her as a Tamil, but then take notice when she mentions her 'white man' friend. The police blame Daryl's servant Somaratne and falsely accuse him of the theft. In reality, the police have probably already been keeping a close eye on Daryl and have broken into his house. After Somaratne also vanishes, Arjie and his mother go to his village to ask about him, but they are pelted with stones and bottles, reflecting the divide between the wealthy urban bourgeoisie and the poverty-stricken rural population. As Tamils, Arjie's family feels oppressed because of their ethnicity. However, once they become acquainted with the rural world, they find that they themselves are considered "rich folk from Colombo",[86] privileged perpetrators of an economic system that ignores peasants as "not even human beings",[87] and uses them as cannon fodder at will.

[83] Ibid.
[84] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 68.
[85] During her time here, Anjum tries to heal the double wound resulting from the ethnic and religious violence of which she was a victim in Gujarat, as well as from the rift with Zainab, who is in the care of Saeeda and who occasionally visits her.
[86] Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 153.
[87] Ibid.

Interestingly, this accusation may not be entirely unfounded: it transpires that at least in one of their hotels, just three hours from Colombo, poor boys prostitute themselves to rich foreigners with the consent of Arjie's father, taking advantage of the fact that the police turns a blind eye because they profit from tourism.

When Daryl's body is found lifeless on the beach of a fishing village, Amma is convinced that he was killed at the behest of the government and that the police are covering it up with the help of false witnesses: "Of course they have witnesses.... They have witnesses for everything these days".[88] Both she and Arjie feel powerless and "a terrible sadness"[89] at the thought that Daryl's death remains unexplained and justice is not served. There is no support from the media either. Journalists and storm troopers are busy making "empty questions ... they asked the poor what it was like to be poor",[90] thereby testifying to their contribution to the corruption of the state. They report only news items that can be spectacularly edited and cannibalised to feed the false pity of those who are a little better off, while ignoring or worse attacking those who try to expose the criminal practices of the corporations, especially in agriculture, that fund their editors' salaries.

7. Conclusions

Even in these extreme circumstances, new and unexpected bonds can be formed: "Once you have fallen off the edge like all of us have", Anjum reminds a Dalit friend[91] in Jannat, "you will hold on to other falling people".[92] Like Anjum, Arjie feels "caught between [two] worlds, not belonging or wanted in either".[93] Precisely because he is marginalised, he is able to establish an unexpected relationship with Radha, the soon-to-be bride who allows him to play with her makeup. As Radha's heterosexual love moves along the ethnic fault line, Arjie thinks about the pain he would feel if he lost her, for she is his only true friend. He also tries to imagine how he would feel if he lost his family because of his sexual orientation. Anjum suffers the same fate twice: first when she comes to terms with her sexuality and later when she realised that she wanted to become a mother to Zainab. Love, as Rossella Ciocca notes, operates "not only against heteronormativity but versus the 'blood and soil' cum religion nationalist rhetoric".[94] Within these boundaries, both Arjie and Anjum confront the resentments that start building up in their families and spread like wildfire to the outside world. To fully understand queer intersectionality in an age of anger, one must observe the cruel and relentless operations of aggregation and separation fuelled by the fear of total annihilation.

[88] Ibid., 143.
[89] Ibid., 158.
[90] Ibid., 107.
[91] Saddam Hussein, a Dalit who helps Anjum expand the guesthouse business to include funerals. He worked in a mortuary before moving to Jannat, but was fired after an argument with a doctor. His fault was being a Chamar, a derogatory term for Dalits in north and northwest India, denoting a category of untouchables.
[92] Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 92.
[93] Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 45.
[94] Rossella Ciocca, "Mothering Community: Surviving the Post-nation in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*", *Textus. English Studies in Italy*, 33.3 (September-December 2020), 183-200, 195.

Brian E. Crim

"John le Carré is Mr. Angry now that Smiley's day has gone". Spy Fiction and the Age of Anger

Abstract: This article examines the radical shift evident in John le Carré's post-9/11 novels and argues that the author emerged as both a fierce critic of the war on terror and an insightful guide into the expansive post-9/11 security state. John le Carré understood the power of ressentiment and its changing dynamics before and after the Berlin Wall came down, but his writing entered a new phase in the wake of 9/11. Le Carré's normally detached cynicism turned to anger and increased nihilism after the U.S. and Britain invaded Iraq, embraced torture and 'extraordinary rendition', and upended the precarious balance between liberty and security at home and abroad. After relating a brief history of spy fiction and its relationship to the post-9/11 national security state, I turn to le Carré's response to the 9/11 attacks by focusing on the novels *Absolute Friends* (2003) and *A Most Wanted Man* (2008). John le Carré's post-9/11 novels, like his previous work, stage tragic collisions between ordinary people seeking meaningful human connection in a dangerous world and the impersonal organizations responsible for making it that way. The institutions have changed since the Cold War, as have the perceived external threats justifying their existence, but le Carré demonstrated a unique ability to interpret and critique the post-9/11 security environment.

Keywords: *Pankaj Mishra*, *John le Carré*, *9/11*, *War on Terror*, *Absolute Friends*, *A Most Wanted Man*

> It is now clear that the post-9/11 policies of pre-emptive war, massive retaliation, regime change, nation-building, and reforming Islam have failed – catastrophically failed – while the dirty war against the West's own Enlightenment – inadvertently pursued through extrajudicial murder, torture, rendition, indefinite detention and massive surveillance – has been a wild success.
>
> Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*

As the European powers brought nearly three fourths of the globe under its control during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a feat made possible by their robust industrial capitalist economies, Pankaj Mishra notes they brought with them the same "unprecedented political, economic, and social disorder" responsible for two world wars, genocide, and totalitarian ideologies.[1] Our current 'Age of Anger' is rooted in the West's celebrated intellectual tradition, one harboring far darker impulses than most acknowledge. Mishra argues that Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of 'ressentiment' best describes a contemporary society "herded by capitalism and technology into a common present, where grossly unequal distributions of wealth and power have created humiliating new hierarchies" on a global scale. It is not the lofty rhetoric of eighteenth century Enlightenment thinkers that inspires our present, but the more nihilistic voices from that same movement and their nineteenth century descendants. Ressentiment in the twenty-first century is characterized by "an existential resentment of other people's being, caused by an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness." John Locke's Social Contract reverts to Thomas Hobbes' "everybody against everybody else" as ressentiment born from exploitative capitalism and neo-imperialism "poisons civil society" and enables the "global return to authoritarianism and toxic forms of chauvinism".[2] The Cold War blunted

[1] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (Penguin Books, 2018), 10
[2] Ibid., 13-14.

the effects of ressentiment in the 'Third World' by propping up client states, but most of these regimes failed in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Pankaj Mishra traces how ressentiment influenced a burgeoning class of angry young men in the Islamic world and inspired the likes of Mohamed Atta and Osama bin Laden to provoke the very "clash of civilizations" Western thinkers and politicians anticipated after the Cold War. Legions of so-called "experts on Islam" peddled their wares "more feverishly after every terrorist attack" and recast Cold War absolutist thinking like "free world versus unfree world" and the "evil empire" for a new era.[3] In the immediate aftermath of the attacks the West, specifically the United States and Britain, rallied behind an aggressive foreign policy and the erection of a new national security state masking "boundless, direful ambition", in the words of journalist Spencer Ackerman.[4] Popular culture reflected this consensus by rolling out films and series featuring male protagonists charging into the post-9/11 landscape as vengeful warriors, embodying the West's righteous fury and eliminating the radical Islamist enemy by any means necessary. Characters like Jack Bauer from the long-running series *24* (2001-10) emerged as the archetype for the twenty-first century spy, a technologically sophisticated blunt instrument who shoots first and asks questions later. When answers are not forthcoming, Bauer expertly breaks his enemies (men, women, civilians, and even elected officials) through torture. Bauer, like George W. Bush, the American president who counted among his fans, embraced the credo that you do "whatever it takes".[5] An angry and fearful American public initially welcomed the massive and unaccountable surveillance state promising greater security at the expense of some civil liberties. Voices of dissent were rare and virtually no one was interested in hearing terms like 'blowback' when it came to understanding the connection between Al Qaeda's attacks and legacies of Western imperialism and Cold War military adventurism. The war on terror only exacerbated ressentiment at home and abroad, transforming the theoretical clash of civilization advanced by aloof political scientists into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The cultural turn in the first few years after 9/11 was largely uncritical of the hyper-aggressive US response, as evidenced by the ever-popular political thriller and spy fiction genres. Authors and studios pressed into service by the White House to create content aiding the war on terror seemed to accept and channel Dick Cheney's prescription for the future wars to come: "We also have to work, though, sort of the dark side, if you will. We've got to spend time in the shadows in the intelligence world. A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion, using sources and methods that are available to our intelligence agencies, if we're going to be successful".[6] The incomplete victory in Afghanistan and years of stalemate in Iraq, a conflict based on manufactured intelligence, along with a parade of horrifying revelations about torture and prisoner abuse soured the American public on the forever wars fought in their name. Cultural representation followed suit. The same production team responsible for *24*'s Jack Bauer in the early 2000s created the more cynical and morally ambiguous *Homeland* a decade later. Carrie Matheson and Nicholas Brody, characters irreparably damaged in body and spirit by the post-9/11 conflicts, wandered the vast national security landscape as cautionary tales. By the 2010s, film, television, and literary responses to the interminable war on terror frequently expressed the West's apprehension about preemptive war,

[3] Ibid., 18-19.

[4] Spencer Ackerman, *Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump* (New York: Viking, 2021), 24.

[5] Jane Mayer, *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 31.

[6] "The Vice President Appears on Meet the Press with Tim Russert", *The White House* (2001), *georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov*. On November 11, 2001, forty Hollywood executives met with senior advisor Karl Rove at the White House ostensibly to assist the Bush administration's post-9/11 messaging. While nothing concrete was agreed to, pro-war content tended to dominate the media landscape for several years after 9/11. See Matthew Alford, *Reel Power: Hollywood Cinema and American Supremacy* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

drone strikes, torture, unchecked surveillance, and creeping authoritarianism. Post-9/11 culture discerned ressentiment's grip on the Western worldview before political establishments did.

One cultural icon associated with the world of spy fiction immediately declared the war on terror a dangerous overreaction. John le Carré (David Cornwell) spent four decades before 9/11 illuminating the human dimension of espionage during the Cold War and its aftermath, transforming the spy novel into one of the most significant literary genres in the post-World War II era.[7] Le Carré created complex characters with rich inner lives and narrated their experiences navigating the darkest corners of the amoral universe inhabited by Soviet and Western intelligence services. Reflecting on his lengthy career to a new class of recruits about to enter a post-Cold War world, George Smiley, le Carré's iconic character and personal avatar, delivered an unvarnished assessment of Cold War history. "We concealed the very things that made us right", said Smiley as he ran through a litany of Machiavellian maneuvers; "We protected the strong against the weak, and we perfected the art of the public lie.... And we scarcely paused to ask ourselves how much longer we could defend our society by these means and remain a society worth defending".[8] John le Carré contended with this dilemma in every novel since *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963). Always more than a spy novelist, le Carré was not destined to reside forever in the Cold War imaginary. If the first half of his career chronicled how the West dealt with "rogue forms of communism", le Carré wrote in 1990, the second half would likely revolve around the question "How was it going to deal with rogue forms of capitalism?"[9] Le Carré devoted his post-Cold War novels to grappling with the vagaries of transnationalism, specifically the deterioration of national sovereignty and increased connectivity among populations and cultures.[10] Making the case for a "moral order beyond ideology", le Carré continued to emphasize the erosion of human rights at the expense of indifferent bureaucracies and multinational corporations.[11] Le Carré tapped into ressentiment by daring to consider the victims of unchecked intelligence agencies. What happens when the bipolar world transitions into the multipolar? What if Britain and America can no longer convince the world they matter as much as they used to?

John le Carré understood the power of ressentiment and its changing dynamics before and after the Berlin Wall came down, but his writing entered a new phase in the wake of 9/11. Le Carré's normally detached cynicism turned to anger and increased nihilism after the U.S., with Britain's unfailing support, invaded Iraq, embraced torture and 'extraordinary rendition', and upended the precarious balance between liberty and security at home and abroad. The remainder of this article examines the radical shift evident in John le Carré's post-9/11 novels and argues that the author emerged as both a fierce critic of the war on terror and an insightful guide into the expansive post-9/11 security state waging it "in the shadows". After relating a brief history of spy fiction and its relationship to the post-9/11 national security state, I turn to le Carré's response to the 9/11 attacks by focusing on the novels *Absolute Friends* (2003) and *A Most Wanted Man* (2008). John le Carré's post-9/11 novels, like his previous work, stage tragic collisions between ordinary people seeking meaningful human connection in a dangerous world and the impersonal organizations responsible for making it that way. The institutions have changed since the Cold War, as have the perceived external threats justifying their existence, but le Carré demonstrated a unique ability to interpret and critique the post-9/11 security environment.

Bill Haydon, the traitor at the heart of John le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) is the ultimate 'espiocrat', a character blessed with the best Britain had to offer privileged young men "born for empire". Modeled after the infamous double agent Kim Philby, le Carré also gave Haydon a bit of

[7] John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Spy Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 157.
[8] John le Carré, *The Secret Pilgrim* [1990] (New York: Ballantine Books, 2017), 129.
[9] Ibid., 381.
[10] Robert Lance Snyder, *John le Carré's Post-Cold War Fiction* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017), 9.
[11] Ibid., 18.

his mentor Graham Greene's perspective on the secret world: "Haydon ... took it for granted that secret services were the only real measure of a nation's political health, the only real expression of its sub consciousness".[12] What does spy fiction reveal about a nation's culture and politics? Specifically, how does the genre's popularity influence the manner by which the national security state operates in the post-9/11 security environment? A British invention, the emergence of the political thriller in the Victorian and Edwardian periods reflected Britain's mounting fears about national security and imperial rivalry in distant locations like Africa and Asia.[13] Successive generations of British, and eventually American authors, used the genre to comment on international politics and to reassert national values in the form of heroic protagonists like Ian Fleming's James Bond, whose brazen tactics and unapologetic 'Britishness' stood in stark contrast to Britain's diminished role in the world after World War II.[14] Spy fiction imagines and defines the enemy, who is usually depicted as the ultimate 'other' with obvious racial and cultural differences inherently threatening to imperial ambitions. Consequently, combatting the enemy justifies the most extreme violence in defense of the realm.[15]

Historically, the figure of the spy is a "locus for cultural fantasies", writes Allan Hepburn. The spy upholds the myth that human agency still matters in the cold and impersonal twentieth century.[16] Michael Denning claims spy thrillers have been "cover stories for our culture, collective fantasies in the imagination of the English-speaking world, paralleling reality, expressing that which they wish to conceal, and telling the 'History of Contemporary Society'".[17] Even John le Carré's tormented protagonists establish identities and evince agency in sprawling intelligence bureaucracies, acting as vehicles "for social critique because he [the spy] preserves individual agency. Never just acting on his own behalf . . . the spy switches between public and private selves without warning".[18] The intelligence bureaucracy in modern spy fiction, 'the Circus' in le Carré's universe, is a microcosm for the nation it serves.[19] The spy can either bend the service to its will, like James Bond, or become its creature, subsuming his identity (and soul) to the Great Game. Le Carré novels are littered with the wreckage of those who tried and failed to challenge the intelligence bureaucracy, and therefore the state. Only the rumpled George Smiley occasionally had success, but at great personal cost.

The post-9/11 spy thriller is even more transparent about channeling society's collective fears and fantasies than it was in the twentieth century. However, as Andrew Pepper notes, many literary scholars dismissed "the contributions that crime and espionage novels have made to ongoing attempts to map the significance of September 11 and its aftermath." The truth is, he counters, is that the genre "has excelled at the task of responding, often in critical and imaginative ways, to the security environment in the wake of the 9/11 attacks".[20] Pepper lauds John le Carré in particular for discerning the similarities and differences between police work and espionage when it comes to combatting terrorism. Moreover, in his post-9/11 novels le Carré demonstrates how the deterioration of state sovereignty on the "transnational stage" enables multinational corporations and private security firms to hijack the war on terror for their own ends.[21] As is often the case in le Carré's novels, ordinary people pay the price for both intelligence victories and failures.

[12] John le Carré, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* [1974] (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 367.
[13] Wesley K. Wark, "Introduction: Fictions of History", *Intelligence and National Security*, 5.4 (1990), 1.
[14] Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narratives and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (London: Routledge, 1987), 13-14.
[15] Oliver S. Buckton, *Espionage in British Fiction and Film since 1900* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), xii.
[16] Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2005), xv.
[17] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 2.
[18] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 167.
[19] Toby Manning, *John le Carré and the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 189.
[20] Andrew Pepper, "Policing the Globe: State Sovereignty and the International in the Post-9/11 Crime Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 57.3 (Fall 2011), 403-404.
[21] Ibid., 422.

But not every writer or director is interested in critiquing the post-9/11 security environment, even decades removed from the event. Since the beginning of intelligence as a bureaucratic responsibility in the late nineteenth century, the relationship between spy fiction and real intelligence activities has always been incestuous and unnerving. Lurid spy fiction about German spies running amok across Britain prompted the Imperial Defence Committee to create the Secret Service in 1909.[22] In the US, the FBI and later the CIA invested in flattering portrayals of their officials and their missions in popular culture. In some cases, the CIA even ghostwrote scripts that served its interests.[23] The 'covert sphere', which comprises films, television series, video games, and novels, legitimizes and even empowers governments to wage secret wars with tacit support from the public. Timothy Melley defines the covert sphere as "a cultural imaginary shaped by both institutional secrecy and public fascination with the secret work of the state". Where else can the public learn about the work of the national security state other than popular culture? And if the intelligence bureaucracy can help construct sympathetic narratives via Hollywood liaison offices or by lending studios equipment and personnel, so much the better. The covert sphere is more than a cultural reflection of actual covert actions, Melley argues, "It is an ideological arena with profound effects on democracy, citizenship, and state policy".[24] Spy novelist Phillip Knightley wrote that his genre's "search for conspiracies and our fascination with betrayal shield us from reality and dangerously simplify the world around us. And the fictional glorification of spies enables the real ones to go on playing their sordid games".[25] 9/11 enabled governments to spend endlessly on national security, but selling the public on multiple wars while simultaneously retreating further into secrecy required forging a consensus capable of withstanding scrutiny. The covert sphere, resurrected from the dustbin of Cold War history and reconfigured for the war on terror, aided this purpose. "To put it crudely", Melley writes about the post-Patriot Act world, "it is illegal to disclose state secrets but not illegal to write espionage fiction".[26]

Few cultural figures as prominent as John le Carré dared to question or challenge the U.S. response to 9/11 in those first few weeks after the attacks. Sympathy and declarations of support poured in from all over the globe, and le Carré certainly counted among those who felt, in his words, "an enormous, inexpressible sympathy for the victims, for America", but he had already concluded the George W. Bush administration was both incompetent and dangerous to act responsibly.[27] In a foreword written for a new edition of *The Tailor of Panama* released in April 2001, le Carré renounced "[t]he new American realism, which is nothing other than gross corporate power cloaked in demagogy" and believed "quite simply and emphatically" that the U.S. is not "fit to run the post-Cold War world". Furthermore, he added, "George W. Bush is not fit to run America, or for that matter a single-decker bus, but that's America's business. Unfortunately, he has been given charge of the world's only superpower".[28] It is perhaps no surprise then that when the first bombs fell on Afghanistan six weeks after September 11, le Carré pulled no punches in a biting editorial entitled, "We have already lost the war on terrorism". His piece evokes many of the themes found in *Age of Anger*, specifically the West's perpetuation of 'economic colonialism' and the "plundering of the Third World by uncontrollable multinational companies". Le Carré mourns the West's lost opportunities after the Cold War to combat

[22] Graeme Shimmin, "Le Queux: How One Crazy Spy Novelist Created MI5 and MI6", *Graeme Shimmin*, *graemeshimmin.com*.
[23] See Tricia Jenkins, *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).
[24] Timothy Melley, *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 2012), 5.
[25] See Wark, "Introduction: Fictions of History", 9.
[26] Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 10.
[27] Adam Sisman, *John le Carré: The Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 550.
[28] Adam Sisman, "From Cold War Spy to Angry Old Man: The Politics of John le Carré", *The Guardian* (2015), *www.theguardian.com*.

the "unglamorous enemies of mankind: poverty, famine, slavery, tyranny, drugs, bush-war fires, racial and religious intolerance, and greed".[29] Writing primarily to a British audience, le Carré condemned Prime Minister Tony Blair's willingness to serve as America's "eloquent white knight" in endless military adventures while misgoverning a nation "blighted by institutionalized racism, white male dominance, chaotically administered police forces ... and unnecessary public poverty".[30] Le Carré was not naïve; Al Qaeda had to be dealt with and military action in Afghanistan was "a horrible, necessary, humiliating police action," but he cautioned "when it's over, it won't be over".[31]

John le Carré had just begun a novel that would become *Absolute Friends* (2003) when Al Qaeda struck, initially scuttling a project planned around a terrorist plot. Le Carré declared the novel 'dead in the water', but Bush and Blair's invocation of a 'Global War on Terrorism' and the growing drumbeat for a preemptive war against Saddam Hussein changed his perspective.[32] Enraged by Bush and Blair's blatant fabrications concerning an Al Qaeda-Iraq connection and the tragi-comic search for weapons of mass destruction, le Carré determined that "[t]he lies have been distributed are so many and so persistent that arguably fiction is the only way to tell the truth".[33] In January 2003, shortly before completing *Absolute Friends*, le Carré penned another editorial similar to his first entitled "The United States has gone mad." *The Times* published the piece just two months before the 'coalition of the willing' blitzed Iraq, marking a decade of sunken treasure, blood, and lost national prestige. "The reaction to 9/11 is beyond anything Osama bin Laden could have hoped for in his nastiest dreams", he wrote about the "surreal war-to-be". Dismayed by the Patriot Act and Britain's expansion of the Official Secrets Act, le Carré lamented, "As in McCarthy times, the freedoms that have made America the envy of the world are being systematically eroded".[34] He blamed the "compliant ... media" and "vested corporate interests" for perpetuating "one of the great public relations conjuring tricks of history". It brought him no pleasure, but le Carré once again predicted the disaster to come.[35] Friends, family, editors, readers, reviewers, and even le Carré himself recognized he was in danger of succumbing to what le Carré, a lifelong Germanophile, termed *alterszorn* ('the rage of age'). "I am now so angry", le Carré wrote a confidante, "that I have to exercise a good deal of restraint in order to produce a readable book".[36]

Absolute Friends has many of the elements one associates with le Carré's novels, such as individuals vs. institutions and the complicated internal lives of double agents, but there is no doubting 'the rage of age' left its mark on his first post-9/11 novel.[37] The story revolves around the lifelong relationship between Ted Mundy, the Pakistan-born son of a British military officer with an itinerant upbringing who settles for an uninspiring civil service career, and Sasha, a charismatic West German intellectual and anarchist who defects to East Germany only to become disillusioned with the oppressive regime. As a Stasi (East German secret service) officer, Sasha enlists Ted to pass intelligence to British intelligence. When the Wall comes down, thanks in part to Ted and Sasha's efforts, Ted abandons the secret world (and Britain) for his beloved Germany. Ted lands a job as a tour

[29] John le Carré, "We Have Already Lost the War on Terrorism: What Victory Can We Possible Achieve that Matches the Defeats We Have Already Suffered, Let Alone the Defeats that Lie Ahead", *The Globe and Mail* (2001), *www.theglobeandmail.com*.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Sisman, *John le Carré*, 550.
[33] Ibid., 551.
[34] John le Carré, "The United States Has Gone Mad", *The Times* (2003), *www.thetimes.co.uk*.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Sisman, "From Cold War Spy to Angry Old Man".
[37] Phyllis Lassner argues that le Carré's post-9/11 novels are similar to his previous ones, but with a significant change in narrative style and voice. See Phyllis Lassner, "Paradoxical Polemics: John le Carre's Responses to 9/11", in Kristine A. Miller, ed., *Transatlantic Literature and Culture After 9/11: The Wrong Side of Paradise* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17.

guide in Munich and forms a makeshift family with a Turkish refugee and her son, essentially creating a life as far removed from the one he led as possible. After years of silence, Sasha contacts Ted after 9/11 in hopes the two can rekindle their relationship and make the world right again. Ted is a thinly veiled avatar for le Carré, manifesting the same outrage the author communicated in his editorials: "It's the discovery, in his sixth decade, that half a century after the death of empire, the dismally ill-managed country he'd done a little of this or that for is being marched off to quell the natives on the strength of a bunch of lies, in order to please a renegade hyperpower that thinks it can treat the rest of the world as its fiefdom".[38] Sasha is seduced by the vision of a mysterious Russian oligarch named Dimitri to create a socialist think-tank, what amounts to a library filled with left-wing literature and philosophy to counter American propaganda, and convinces Ted to join him on one last crusade against injustice. "Teddy. My friend. We are partners in a historic enterprise", Sasha pleads, "We shall do nothing to harm, nothing to destroy. Everything we dreamed of in Berlin has been delivered to us by providence. We shall stem the advance of ignorance and perform a service of enlightenment for all humanity".[39] But experienced le Carré readers know something is rotten in Munich.

Sasha is an easy mark, an idealist despite a lifetime of disappointment, but Ted is naturally more cynical. Dimitri is speaking their language, however, pushing all the right buttons for two world-weary radicals incensed by the state of the world:

> The war on Iraq was illegitimate, Mr. Mundy. It was a criminal and immoral conspiracy. No provocation, no link with Al Qaeda, no weapons of Armageddon. Tales of complicity between Saddam and Osama were self-serving bullshit. It was an old colonial war dressed up as a crusade for Western life and liberty, and it was launched by a clique of war-hungry Judeo-Christian geopolitical fantasists who hijacked the media and exploited America's post-9/11 psychopathy.[40]

Ted becomes suspicious upon learning Sasha's former CIA contact is behind the library scheme. Another red flag involves some money originating from the Middle East. Ted realizes that supposed book deliveries are actually bomb-making materials. When Ted reaches out to Nick Amory, an MI-6 contact from his previous life for help, the CIA, aided by a compliant German police, springs the trap and gun down the two friends in what the press later sensationalizes as 'The Siege of Heidelberg'. The world will come to know Ted and Sasha as Al Qaeda sympathizers, one with a Muslim girlfriend and a grudge against the West and the other a radical leftist and former Stasi agent. Nick is left to pick up the pieces, writing an anonymous account of the massacre identifying the extralegal CIA action as a new Reichstag Fire perpetrated by "agents of a self-elected junta of Washington neoconservative theologians close to the presidential throne".[41] Predictably, no one of consequence notices or cares about Nick's truth. The West falls into line behind the next phase of America's neoconservative crusade.

Even for le Carré the ending of *Absolute Friends* was despairing. Reviewers eagerly anticipating the novel were taken aback by the blistering political commentary and strident anti-Americanism. Those who shared his perspective on the Iraq war expected some moral victory in his protagonists' tragic end. Alec Leamas made the choice to die on his own terms in the shadow of the Berlin Wall in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, but there is no redemption for Ted and Sasha. Steven Poole of *The Guardian* regretted the novel's "monotonous expression of anger" because le Carré retained "enormous and undimmed skills as a storyteller". Regretfully, Poole concludes, "Where once there

[38] John le Carré, *Absolute Friends* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2003), 301-302.
[39] Ibid., 341.
[40] Ibid., 321.
[41] Ibid., 448.

was a subtle knife, here is only a blunt stick".[42] The novel's reception from more centrist publications indicates le Carré was an unwelcome voice of opposition within a Western culture essentially supportive of the war on terror. *The New York Times*' Michiko Kakutani called *Absolute Friends* "a clumsy, hectoring, conspiracy-minded message-novel meant to drive home the argument that American imperialism poses a grave danger to the new world order". Le Carré always believed this last point, but Kakutani accuses him of the same "black and white moralism that Mr. le Carré's nemesis, the Bush administration, is so fond of".[43] Years later Kakutani praised *Our Kind of Traitor* (2010) because, in her view, "Mr. le Carré has set aside the dogmatic, anti-imperialist, anti-Western ideology" infecting his first few post-9/11 novels. Less discerning reviewers like Daniel Johnson of the *Daily Telegraph* dismissed *Absolute Friends* out of hand, positing that le Carré is not up to the challenge of writing for the post-9/11 world: "John le Carré is Mr. Angry now that Smiley's Day has gone".[44] Not for the first time, critics declared prematurely that le Carré was an anachronism, a relic from a bygone geopolitical era.

Absolute Friends was not a simple screed targeting American foreign policy and the war on terror. Ted and Sasha are reminiscent of Magnus Pym and his Czech handler Axel, le Carré's characters from the critically acclaimed novel *A Perfect Spy* (1986). Le Carré excavates Ted and Sasha's past lives and charts their evolving idealism from the radical 1960s through the tumultuous start of the twenty-first century. The novel asks, how prepared or capable is the left of opposing the unrelenting march towards war and authoritarianism? Christian Caryl wrote an incisive 2004 review of *Absolute Friends* and *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983), le Carré's first novel about terrorism, arguing that the aging spy novelist is not an ideologue dashing off simplistic calls to action. "The sense of ideological exhaustion is just too overpowering", Caryl notes, "the feeling of loneliness and drift that infuse the hero [Ted] just too stark".[45] Moreover, le Carré is as unsparing in his treatment of the forlorn old leftists as he is the American shock troops bearing down on them. "Nowhere do Sasha and Mundy even come close to formulating a coherent counterprogram" to the war on terror, Caryl argues. The book "reflects the diffuseness and confusion of the contemporary radical left just as much as it skewers the Bush administration".[46] *Absolute Friends* reflects Pankaj Mishra's interpretation of ressentiment because le Carré demonstrates how blowback derives from past misdeeds. He also empathizes with the victims of Western imperialism and Cold War competitiveness.

The Nation lauded *Absolute Friends* for its fiery attack on Bush's war on terror, seemingly gratified that someone with the stature of John le Carré shared its worldview, but reviewer Patrick Smith also detected his fatalism when it came to the Left, "Le Carré seems to suggest that there is little hope, in our media-manipulated world of appearances, that rational thinking can triumph over the connivances of corporate-funded politicians who find fearful populaces their surest way of retaining power". It is a bleak assessment, Smith acknowledges, "but scarcely unbelievable".[47] *Absolute Friends* is angry, and sometimes the characters act as mouthpieces for leftist editorial writers like le Carré, but the novel also maps the fraught moral and political landscape after 9/11 for his future characters. Le Carré found it "deeply depressing" that the West moved so quickly from the Cold War to a new era of "unlimited wars in the future", he said in a 2004 interview. "And I suppose that's what I was fighting

[42] Steven Poole, "Spies and Lies", *The Guardian* (2003), *www.theguardian.com*.
[43] Michiko Kakutani, "Adding Reality's Worries to a Thriller", *The New York Times* (2004), *www.nytimes.com*.
[44] See Sisman, *John le Carré*, 556.
[45] Christian Caryl, "Le Carré's War on Terror", *The New York Review* (2004), *www.nybooks.com*.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Patrick Smith, "A Near Perfect Spy Novelist", *The Nation* (2004), *www.thenation.com*.

against in *Absolute Friends* and that, for as long as I can, is what I will continue to fight against. I would long for more comprehension and a greater respect for the victims of our dreams".[48]

The story of one such victim inspired le Carré's 2008 novel *A Most Wanted Man* (*AMWM*). Murat Kurnaz is a Turkish citizen and legal resident of Germany who was arrested and detained on baseless terrorism charges, first at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan and then Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. U.S. and German intelligence services mishandled the case from the start and sought to cover up their mistake while Kurnaz languished. Le Carré befriended Kurnaz and wrote a blurb for a memoir detailing his ordeal.[49] Le Carré decided to return to the war on terror as a topic after writing *Mission Song* (2006), a novel about corporate greed and corrupt national bureaucracies pillaging the Congo. *AMWM* places the character Issa Karpov in a similar situation to Murat Kurnaz. *AMWM* focuses on both the mysterious Issa and his Kafkaesque nightmare and the business of spying in a changed international security and policing landscape. Issa is a living legacy of Russia's brutal war in Chechnya, a sensitive and damaged soul whose Russian colonel father raped his Chechen mother. A devout Muslim with dreams of serving his beset community as a doctor, Issa is detained and tortured by multiple countries before landing in Hamburg as a stateless refugee, carrying nothing but the number to his dead father's bank account. A sympathetic Turkish family takes Issa in and contacts Annabel Richter, a lawyer specializing in human rights who is determined to protect Issa from state abuse. Annabel and Issa meet with Tommy Brue, a British banker who did "a little of this and that" for MI-6 in the past, and determine Colonel Karpov's dormant account is the product of collusion between British intelligence and the Russian mafia. Annabelle enlists Tommy's help to shield Issa from the prying eyes of Germany's myriad security services, arguing that protecting him is their moral duty as citizens of the West. "In my law school we talked a great deal about law over life", she tells Brue. "It's a verity of our German history: law not to protect life, but to abuse it. We did it to the Jews. In its current American form it licenses torture and state kidnapping. And it's infectious. Your own country is not immune, neither is mine".[50]

Issa is immediately tracked by Günther Bachmann, a domestic intelligence officer with a checkered past and a talent for cultivating Muslim sources. Bachmann would rather use Issa than arrest him. However, Bachmann is stuck heading a small investigative unit in Hamburg because he offended federal espiocrats anxious to follow their American benefactors' agenda. Hamburg is "a guilty city", Bachmann explains, not only because of its Nazi past but also for acting as a "second ground zero", nurturing Mohamed Atta and other extremists before 9/11.[51] Bachmann regards Issa as a small fish useful for baiting a shark, a wealthy philanthropist named Abdullah who is suspected of funneling arms to unsavory characters across the Middle East. Bachmann wants to turn Abdullah and learn more about the worst actors in the region, but his superiors sense an opportunity to deliver both Issa and Abdullah to the CIA on a silver platter. Bachmann feared "[t]he running feud between those determined to defend civil rights at all costs, and those determined to curtail them in the name of greater national security, was approaching critical mass", but he had no idea that his side already lost.[52] Bachmann convinces a skeptical Annabel that Issa's cooperation will give him legal status, but she feels badly about manipulating him.

The improbable team of Bachmann, Tommy, and Annabel enact a scheme to transfer Issa's inheritance to Abdullah's charity and follow the money. However, the CIA intercedes with the help of

[48] Melissa Block and Robert Siegel, "David Cornwell Discusses His Novel *Absolute Friends*, Which Was Written under His Pen Name, John le Carré", in Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, eds., *Conversations with John le Carré* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 173-174.
[49] Sisman, *John le Carré*, 562. Murat Kurnaz's memoir is entitled *Five Years of My Life: An Innocent Man in Guantanamo*.
[50] John le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 89.
[51] Ibid., 54.
[52] Ibid., 99.

MI-6 and German federal authorities and arrest both Issa and Abdullah immediately after the transaction. They also deport the helpful Turkish family for good measure. Annabel and Brue stand in stunned silence, but Bachmann knows he's been duped. "Where have you taken him?" Bachmann asks Newton, an old CIA acquaintance responsible for the kidnapping. "Abdullah? Who gives a shit. Some hole in the desert, for all I know. *Justice has been rendered man. We can all go home*". Bachmann is dazed, "What's rendered? What justice are you talking about?" Newton then delivers the novel's last bit of dialogue, mocking Bachmann's (and the readers) naiveté when it comes to the proper way to wage the war on terror:

> *American* justice, asshole. Whose do you think? Justice from the fucking hip, man. No-crap justice, *that* kind of justice! Justice with no fucking lawyers around to pervert the course. Have you never heard of *extraordinary rendition* No? Time you Krauts had a word for it! … Abdullah was killing Americans. We call that original sin. You want to play softball spy games? Go find yourself some Euro-pygmies.[53]

Like *Absolute Friends*, *AMWM* ends with unaccountable American agents and their collaborators committing brazen human rights violations. While *AMWM*'s principal characters are "humanly authentic persons", Robert Lance Snyder notes, secondary characters are "ciphers of a supervening ideology or institutional cause".[54] In Newton's case, he embodies the worst excesses of the war on terror while Bachmann's feckless superiors prove that American ideology is entrenched throughout all Western intelligence bureaucracies.[55]

The different receptions for *Absolute Friends* and *AMWM* is revealing. With few exceptions, critics disliked le Carré's caustic first post-9/11 novel, but after five disastrous years in Iraq readers seemed ready to move on from culturally conservative renderings of the war on terror. Spy novelist Alan Furst admired le Carré's "moral anger ... written from a seductive point of view" and called *AMWM* the "strongest, most powerful novel ... for representing the sheer desperation of those whose job it is to prevent another 9/11".[56] British writer Robert McCrum compared le Carré's "unbridled rage" to Hamlet's condemnation of the rotten state calling the novel's ending "a devastating and phantasmagoric finale expressive of our times".[57] Le Carré was condemned in 2003 for (mis)directing his anger towards the victimized U.S., but by 2008 some of the same publications applauded his blistering attacks on Bush and Blair's follies. Andrew O'Hagan of *The New York Times* named le Carré "the world's most reliable witness to the vicissitudes of international paranoia". However, Michiko Kakutani was unmoved by *AMWM*, writing that "Mr. le Carré's contempt for the U.S.' post-9/11 approach to the war on terror not only makes for a story told in blacks and whites – with none of the grays that distinguished his famous Smiley novels – but also results in an ending that the reader can see looming a mile off".[58] It is not le Carré's 'contempt' for U.S. foreign policy that bothers Kakutani, but the supposed toll 'the rage of age' exacted on his otherwise brilliant oeuvre.

But what if Smiley's day really is gone? Not just the bipolar Cold World dynamic, but also the very notion that intelligence can be effective, purposeful, and sometimes even justified in the right hands. *Absolute Friends* and *AMWM* in particular depict an intelligence bureaucracy dependent on technology and at the mercy of paramilitary "hillbillies from the Farm" to render American justice.[59] There simply is no room for Smileys in the ranks, that is to say seasoned professionals capable of

[53] Ibid., 321-322.
[54] Snyder, *John le Carré's Post-Cold War Fiction*, 105.
[55] Matthew A. Bellamy, "Spy Culture and the Making of the Modern Intelligence Agency: From Richard Hannay to James Bond to Drone Warfare", Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 2018), 316.
[56] See Lassner, "Paradoxical Polemics", 21.
[57] Ibid.
[58] See Sisman, *John le Carré*, 580.
[59] Pepper, "Policing the Globe", 414.

shrewd Machiavellian maneuvers when necessary but acts of decency and humanity as well. Günther Bachmann comes close, but even with his talent he could not see the extent to which his own bureaucracy had made his kind irrelevant until it was too late. John le Carré's post-9/11 novels dramatize Pankaj Mishra's blistering assessment of the West's post-9/11 posture quoted at the beginning of this article. Dressing neo-imperialism in the guise of philanthropy and messianic democracy has only kicked up the dust of ressentiment to the point the dust storm envelopes us all.

John le Carré's novels are angrier and more nihilistic after 9/11 because he never lost his touch when it came to describing the human condition in relation to international events. "For me, the intelligence experience that I had, that formative time in my life, has simply become a vehicle, a stage, a theater, that I use to express other things", he said in a 2019 interview.[60] After 9/11, le Carré evoked the plight of the individual in a world riven by ressentiment. His writing explored the consequences of failed states, a compliant media, and cynical political leaders eager to stoke the fires of fanaticism and undo democracy. Le Carré's interviews from the 2010s until shortly before his death in 2020 emphasize his worries about the "absence of critical argument" and a new fascist threat on the horizon.[61] "We seem to be joined by nothing very much except fear and bewilderment about what the future holds. We have no coherent ideology in the West, and we used to believe in the great American example. I think that's recently been profoundly undermined for us. We're alone".[62] If the forever wars ever end, John le Carré will count among its greatest historians and, more importantly, a deeply moral and empathetic voice of resistance.

[60] Scott Simon, "John le Carré Fears for the Future in 'Agent Running in The Field'", *BPR*, 2019, *www.bpr.org*.
[61] Amy Goodman, "John le Carré (1931-2020) on the Iraq War, Corporate Power, the Exploitation of Africa & More", *Democracy Now!* (2020), *www.democracynow.org*.
[62] David Bianculli and Terry Gross, "John le Carré Reflects on His Own 'Legacy' of Spying", *NPR* (2017), *www.npr.org*.

Mara Matta

The *Danse Macabre* of Bangladesh. Humayun Azad's Creative Interruptions in an Age of Anger

Abstract: Bangladesh has come a long way, since its constitution in 1972 and it is now considered on the 'right path' towards a future as shiny as the one of its immediate neighbor, 'Shining India'. In this scenario of rivalries and mimetic desires gone astray, Humayun Azad (1947-2004), a writer and a scholar, regularly spoke out against misogyny, Islamist threats, and the blatant racism poisoning a country born out of the ashes of communal conflicts and ethnic hatred. He was in the forefront in denouncing the matrix of violence that Bangladesh has been performing, with attacks on free thinkers and 'minorities' both by government agencies and religious extremists. This article is a homage to Azad's creative interruptions and literary interventions against fear, anger, and those resentful feelings even among his university students and colleagues, invoking the 'Talibanization' of Bangladesh (*Āmarā sabā'i hōbō Tālibān, Bānlā habē Āphagānistān*). Given the quixotic, dangerous politics of those who Mishra calls the "bland fanatics", now that the Taliban have seized power in Afghanistan and extremist forms of Islam dictate the country's destiny, it is even more relevant to remember Humayun Azad's writings that instill a culture of freedom in Bangladesh, based on the constitutional pillars, made increasingly fragile by political and environmental 'crises'.

Keywords: *Bangladesh*, *Bengali literature*, *existential anger*, *mimetic desire*, *negative solidarities*, *organic intellectuals*

1. The *Age of Anger* in Bangladesh. The Unfulfilled Quest for a Secular Democracy

The same summer that the grenades blasted in Dhaka, targeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during one of her rallies on the 21st of August 2004, a seasonal monsoon created havoc, with heavy floods destroying much of the main annual rice crop just before it was harvested. An estimated 36 million people (25% of the total population at the time) were affected. That same year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published a report which identified Bangladesh as the most vulnerable country in the world to tropical cyclones, in a world spinning towards a climate crisis.[1] It also happened to be the same year when the poet, novelist, and social critic, Humayun Azad survived an assassination attempt in February 2004 at the annual Dhaka Book Fair, only to be killed in Munich that August. According to a 2022 op-ed in *The Dhaka Tribune*, the 2004 assassination attempts targeting the Prime Minister and other secular critics reflect the crushing of the dream of a democratic and secular Bangladesh under the boots of army generals and Islamist militants. The threat of the establishment of "a pro-Pakistani, anti-India, and anti-secular government" had fueled resentment against many secularists in Bangladesh but it had also triggered what some call a 'crisis of secularism'.[2] In the rather gloomy scenario at the dawn of the millennium,

[1] UNDP – Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, *A Global Report. Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development* (New York, 2004) See *www.undp.org*.

[2] The memory of the terrible attack on the Awami League party's leader Sheikh Hasina during one of her rallies is annually revived by the media. On the 21st of August 2022, on the anniversary of the tragic event, the *Dhaka Tribune* published an online editorial where an anonymous 'special correspondent' wrote: "assault of August 21 ... was a sequel to the BNP-Jamaat's master plan of consolidating power for an indefinite period by using the state machinery and harboring like-minded armed militant groups". The current PM Sheikh Hasina is one of the two daughters of the father of the nation who survived the massacre of her entire family on the 15th of August 1975. In 2018, Hasina's government and the War Tribunal sentenced

Islamists in Bangladesh began a witch-hunt to catch and kill some prominent writers whose works had irked the radicalized youth who were advocating or actively joining the various Islamist groups mushrooming in the country. Alongside these resentful pariahs, others were choosing the Arendtian life of the "conscious pariah"[3] to reclaim their intellectual independence.

Rejecting the vicious rivalries of politicians and voicing his condemnation of the violence unleashed by the fundamentalists, a Bangladeshi man – a writer, a scholar – stood out alone against the extremism and the misogyny of the hatemongers, wishing to align with no one and reclaiming his free voice through his writings. Daring to criticize the "negative solidarities" that Islamists in Bangladesh were fueling among the disenfranchised youth, Humayun Kabir (1947-2004) spoke against the political blabbering of local politicians who ruled with deception and viciousness in pursuit not of the public good, but of their own self-interest. With likewise intensity, he also set against the Islamists who were using the public sphere to invoke the 'Talibanization' of Bangladesh and the scrapping of the last remains of the secular sentiment of the country.[4] This conscious pariah, loved by his colleagues and students at the University of Dhaka and admired by many readers for his brave and sarcastic stance against the Islamic fundamentalists (who finally managed to condemn him to a premature death in 2004), had, at one point of his life, changed his name into Humayun Azad – Humayun 'the free one'.[5] Armed only with words and under the banner of a chosen name and fate,

to death a group of people accused of being involved in the 2004 attacks. Some belonged to the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami of Bangladesh (Huji-B), the same group that targeted Humayun Azad and other independent thinkers, bloggers, and politicians. Senior officials of the BNP's Party and members of the security forces and the intelligence have also been accused to have helped the Huji-B leader Maulana Tajuddin to flee to Pakistan. See "August 21 Grenade Attack: The Day Democracy Almost Died", *Dhaka Tribune* (2022), *www.dhakatribune.com*.

[3] In one of her most debated articles titled "The Jew as Pariah" (1944), Hannah Arendt first discusses the work of Heinrich Heine and the idea of the 'liberated Jew'. She talks of Heine as the perfect *schlemil*, the foolish and naïve figure to be found in Yiddish literature, who can escape the hypocritical stance of a parvenu and reclaim 'real freedom' through great poetry and the mastering of the art of irony and mockery: "When one comes down to earth, one has to admit that laughter does not kill and that neither slaves nor tyrants are extinguished by mere amusement. From this standpoint, however, the pariah is always remote and unreal; whether as *schlemihl* or as "lord of dreams" he stands outside the real world and attacks it from without. Indeed, the Jewish tendency towards utopianism – a propensity most clearly in evidence in the very countries of emancipation – stems, in the last analysis, from just this lack of social roots. The only thing which saved Heine from succumbing to it, and which made him transform the political non-existence and unreality of the pariah into the effective basis of a world of art, was his creativity. (105) Moving from Heine's poetry to the definition of the concept of the 'conscious pariah', she delves into the political thoughts of Bernard Lazare and unpacks what it means to be conscious of such a pariah status in society. She claims that Lazare moves a step further from Heine's realizations of the necessity of being an 'emancipated' Jew. As someone who happens to live in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, she claims, "Lazare could appreciate at first hand the pariah quality of Jewish existence" (108). She also points out that Lazare is aware that it is not enough to accept his position as a pariah, as many Jew *parvenus* were doing, but it is necessary to embrace such status with a rebellious consciousness. As she puts it, Lazare knows that the Jew must "become a rebel ... the champion of an oppressed people" (108). From these considerations on the work of Heine and Lazare (and we can better imagine the reasons behind the interest that Humayun Azad developed towards Heine's poetry and his journey to Munich allegedly to study his work), Arendt elucidates the work of Chaplin and Kafka. In her days, social isolation was no longer possible: "You cannot stand aloof from society, whether as a *schlemihl* or as a lord of dreams. The old escape mechanisms have broken down, and a man can no longer come to terms with a world in which the Jew cannot be a human being either as a *parvenu* using his elbows or as a *pariah* voluntarily spurning its gifts. Both the realism of the one and the idealism of the other are today utopian". In the end, she concludes, the man of goodwill will die in isolation if he is not allowed to live and operate as a "man among men", because "only when a people lives and functions in consort with other peoples can it contribute to the establishment upon earth of a commonly conditioned and commonly controlled humanity". See Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition", *Jewish Social Studies*, 6.2 (1944), 99-122.

For some thoughts on the heritage of the concept of the 'conscious pariah' and the relationship between Jews and modernity, see Larry Ray and Maria Diemling, "Arendt's 'Conscious Pariah' and the Ambiguous Figure of the Subaltern", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19.4 (2016), 503-520.

[4] Abdul Wohab, "'Secularism' or 'No-Secularism'? A Complex Case of Bangladesh", *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7.1 (2022).

[5] The term *āzād* comes from Farsi and means 'free'. In Bangla it is spelled as *ājād.*

he bravely confronted his enemies, who savagely attacked him during the Dhaka Book Fair in 2004.[6] Azad was repeatedly stabbed by a group of fundamentalists during the presentation of one of his more controversial novels at an annual Book Fair traditionally held on the premises of the Dhaka University Campus, during the month of February. On the 12 of August, barely a week after he had moved to Munich to conduct some research on the poet Heinrich Heine, some German officials in Dhaka called the family and told them that Humayun Azad had died in his sleep in his apartment in Munich. Family and friends, however, refused to believe that he suffered a heart attack and immediately called for a full investigation. His son, Ananya Azad, moved to Germany a few years ago, having been forced to leave Bangladesh after receiving death threats for following in his father's intellectual steps. Ananya shared some of his memories of Humayun Azad with this author, including that terrible day when he (barely a teenager) had to witness the ferocious attack against his father and began living in terror. Ananya applied for asylum in Germany after having spent many years locked in his house in Dhaka, afraid of going out and when he did donning a motorcycle helmet to feel protected from the blades of the fundamentalists. (Personal communication, Ferrara, October 2015). Humayun Azad continues to represent the image of the free thinker who dared to think. He proved with his own life what Hannah Arendt had written in one of her essays collected in *Men in Dark Times*: "thinking calls not only for intelligence and profundity but above all for courage".[7]

In 2005, thirty years since the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman[8] (one of the founders of the Awami League Party who successfully led the Bangladesh Liberation War[9] in 1971),[10] political scientist Ali Riaz[11] presciently claimed that the spiral of violence unleashed in the country and the "blame game" played by the two main political parties (Bangladesh National Party and Awami League) had steered Bangladesh towards a dramatic state of chaos and violence. Riaz's concerns on the worrisome developments in Bangladesh brought him to conclude that "[i]f the present trend continues, it will not be long before the nation's democracy becomes a casualty in the 'crossfire' of partisanship", at the same time soliciting the people of Bangladesh to remember how hard they had fought for democracy and that "they must now be vigilant to protect it".[12]

At an international level, the tragic events of 2004 had also raised a considerable amount of alarm, especially in the US, since the future of democracy in Bangladesh was considered crucial to assure a steady ally in the area, with Bangladesh often described as 'the moderate Muslim country'

[6] On the death of Humayun Azad, see "Top Bangladeshi Author Found Dead", *BBC News* (2004), *news.bbc.co.uk*.
[7] Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing", *Men in Dark Times* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 8.
[8] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, known as Bongobhondu (*Baṅgabandhu*, 'friend of Bengal'), was the political leader who launched and led the Bangladesh Liberation War *Muktijuddho* [*mukti yud'dha*], also known as *Swadhinata Juddho* [*sbādhīnatā yud'dha*], that resulted in the secession from West Pakistan and the birth of the newly independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. Amartya Sen, "Bangabandhu and Visions of Bangladesh", *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, 13.1-2 (2021), 22-26. On the figure and the political views of Bongobondhu see also: Arild Engelsen Ruud, "Bangabandhu as the Eternal Sovereign: On the Construction of a Civil Religion", *Religion*, 52.4 (2022), 532-549; Roksana Badruddoja, "Time, History and Memory: The Mythical Bongobondhu and the Birthing of Bangladeshi National Memories and Counter Memories", *South Asian Review*, 40.4 (2019), 290-304.
[9] See, among others, Wardatul Akmam, "Atrocities Against Humanity During the Liberation War in Bangladesh: A Case of Genocide", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4.4 (2002), 543-59. On the War Museum and the controversy around the aestheticization of the conflict, see Nayanika Mookherjee, "'Never Again': Aesthetics of 'Genocidal' Cosmopolitanism and the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17.1 (2011), S71-S91. The Museum's website can be accessed at *www.liberationwarmuseumbd.org*.
[10] See Banglapedia, "Bangladesh Awami League", *en.banglapedia.org*.
[11] Ali Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004: The Politics of Vengeance and the Erosion of Democracy", *Asian Survey*, 45.1 (2005), 112-18.
[12] Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004", 118.

in the South Asian geopolitical region.[13] In 2010, Bruce Vaughn, writing his Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report addressing members of the U.S. Congress on the political and strategic developments between Bangladesh and the U.S., maintained:

> In the years since independence, Bangladesh has established a reputation as *a largely moderate and democratic majority Muslim country*. This status has been under threat from a combination of political violence, weak governance, poverty, corruption, and Islamist militancy. There has been concern in the past that should Bangladesh become a failed state,[14] or a state with increased influence by Islamist extremists, it could serve as a base of operations for terrorist activity. In more recent years, such concerns have abated somewhat as Islamist militants have been vigorously pursued by the government and Bangladesh has returned to democratic government.[15]

Vaughn's somehow optimistic views on the reputation of Bangladesh and its stability as a democracy capable of successfully tackling the rise of ideological extremisms of many sorts, not just the one represented by the Islamist parties and their growing number of accolades, does not take into account the opinions of Bangladeshi nationals, both scholars and writers, who have been monitoring the escalation of violence in independent Bangladesh since its inception and writing about the threats posed to the seeds of a democratic and secular country.

In *Age of Anger*, Pankaj Mishra, discusses the "Islam-centric accounts of terrorism" that have translated into a ceaseless global war on terror, with consequent "forceful – or quixotic – policies aimed at encouraging 'moderate' Muslims to 'prevent' 'extremist ideology', and 'reform' Islam".[16] Mishra denounces the incapacity of the Western political elites to fully understand different cultural climates and accuses them of overreacting to the "political challenge of terrorism". He criticizes the way they have tried to counterbalance their inadequacy – and the 'terror' of it – with an attitude of aggressive overreaction which frequently materializes in the launching of military campaigns meant to suppress the Islamic extremists but, more often than not, translating into other massacres and further frightening of innocent people, caught in between the fear of the Islamists and the frantic, equally 'unreasonable', violent actions of authoritarian rulers, at home and abroad. At the same time, Mishra aptly posits, "selfie-seeking young murderers everywhere confound the leaden stalkers of 'extremist ideology', retaliating to bombs from the air with choreographed slaughter on the ground". And he aptly asks: "How did we get trapped in this *danse macabre*?"[17]

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[13] Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, "Decoding the Rising Islamist Threat in Bangladesh", *Observer Research Foundation* (2021), *www.orfonline.org*.

[14] According to Robert I. Rotberg, Director of the Program on Intrastate Conflict at Harvard University's John F Kennedy School of Government and President of the World Peace Foundation: "The road to state failure is marked by several revealing signposts. On the economic side, living standards deteriorate rapidly.... Foreign-exchange shortages provoke food and fuel scarcities and curtail government spending on essential services and political goods.... Corruption flourishes.... On the political side, leaders and their associates subvert prevailing democratic norms, coerce legislatures and bureaucracies into subservience, strangle judicial independence, block civil society, and gain control over security and defense forces.... Security, the most important political good, vanishes". The description provided, with the helix of economic and political deterioration strangling Bangladesh, brought some analysts to see the country as a potentially 'failed state' and an ideal territory for the emerging of terrorism and Islamist fundamentalism. See Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror", *Foreign Affairs* (2002), 127-140.

[15] Bruce Vaughn, *Bangladesh: Political and Strategic Developments and U.S. Interests*, (CRS Report for Congress, Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress, 2010); emphasis added.

[16] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Kindle Edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 16.

[17] The French expression 'danse macabre', familiar vocabulary in Europe, refers to the famous cycle painted in 1424-25 on the walls of a charnel house in the parish cemetery of Les Saints Innocents in Paris. According to some scholars, it is this (by now) illustrious French mural that lies at the origin of all later medieval and early modern representations, whose appeal has survived until the modern and contemporary times. The *Danse Macabre* is also known "as the Dance of Death, *danza de la muerte*, *dodendans*, *Totentanz*, *Dødedansen* or *Surmatants*" and it relies on the vernacular to be made accessible to everyone; see Sophie Oosterwijk and Stefanie Knöll, eds., *Mixed Metaphors: The* Danse Macabre *in Medieval and Early Modern*

This appears to be the same question that Bangladeshi scholars, writers, bloggers and artists have been trying to confront, if not to answer, since the beginning of the 2000s or, if we consider the historical trajectories of this young country, since its establishment in 1971.

In the beginning of the 2000s, the streets of Dhaka were sinisterly resonating with the chanting of slogans such as "We will all join Taliban, Bangladesh will turn into Afghanistan" (*Amra shobai hobo Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghanistan* [*Āmarā sabā'i hōbō Tālibān, Bānlā habē Āphagānistān*]). The slogan was coined by a group of Islamic extremists who had traveled from Bangladesh to Afghanistan in the mid-1980s and early 1990s to fight against the then-Soviet Union alongside their 'brothers', the Taliban. These men, upon returning home to Bangladesh, had created or joined various militant groups, among which the *Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami* (*Hārakāṭ-ul jihād āl-isalāmī*), known as Huji-B,[18] and the *Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (*Jāmā'atul mujāhidīn Bānlādēś*), simply called JMB,[19] with the aim to establish a regime where extreme forms of Islam were set to be in place, in a way similar to what the Talibans had been fighting to achieve in Afghanistan. Although we lack reliable and official statistics of the numbers, and there are no precise records of the identities of those who traveled to Afghanistan, Ali Riaz (2008) claims that at least 3000 Bangladeshi nationals might have fought in the Afghan-Soviet war.[20] He also warned about the future trajectories of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh, while identifying potential Islamist militant leaders and the JMB's repeated calls for the imposition of a stricter Islamic rule in the country.[21] He posed a very challenging question: "whether Bangladesh should already be considered a failed state".[22] In 2003, Riaz[23] had expressed similar concerns on the "nationalization of Islamism"[24] and the way such phenomenon was sustaining the ascent of the Islamist forces as increasingly legitimized actors on the Bangladeshi political stage.

Riaz also highlighted the necessity of re-signifying the words used in the debate around 'secularism' in Bangladesh, by revisiting Tazeen Murshid's analysis of the word 'secular' in the

Europe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). The expression is timeless, although it originally referred to a specific iconography that was meant to act as a *memento mori* in a time when diseases like plague, poverty, and war, made it necessary to remind everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, of the physical and spiritual death whose fear can be conquered only by faith in Christ and the hope derived from God. Its meaning, moving from one place to another, changed accordingly, but preserved its original message. However, Pankaj Mishra uses it in a more literal sense and without specific reference to the origins of the medieval imagery and its spiritual message. I am using the term in the same way Mishra adopts it in his book when he asks, "How did we get trapped in this *danse macabre*?" (see Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 16). For a better understanding of the origins of the medieval imagery and the way it traveled during time and across Europe, see Oosterwijk and Knöll, *Mixed Metaphors*.

[18] The Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford offers the following descriptions of this militant Islamist group: "Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI) is a Deobandi militant group with branches in Pakistan and Bangladesh. HuJI demands Islamic rule in India and Bangladesh and supports Rohingya insurgents in the Rakhine province of Myanmar". The CISAC has created an archive for mapping and monitoring the activities of many militant groups; see *cisac.fsi.stanford.edu*.

[19] According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP): "The Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Party of the Mujahideen) aims at establishing the rule of Islam in Bangladesh through an armed struggle. The outfit is opposed to the establishment of democracy and calls for the conduct of government under Islamic law". On August 17, 2005, while claiming responsibility for the serial blasts through leaflets, in Bangla and Arabic, left at the site of the explosions across the country, the JMB said: "We're the soldiers of Allah. We've taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law the way Prophet, Sahabis and heroic Mujahideen have done for centuries.... It is time to implement Islamic law in Bangladesh. There is no future with man-made law". For more details, see SATP, "Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, *www.satp.org*.

[20] Ali Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Complex Web* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

[21] Ibid. See also Ali Riaz's personal website, *www.aliriaz.online*.

[22] Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004", 112.

[23] Ali Riaz, "'God Willing': The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23.1/2 (2003), 301-20.

[24] Riaz refers to the work by Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994).

frame of the Indian and Bangladeshi Constitutions,[25] and concluded that "the idea of religious tolerance was enshrined ... in the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh as *dharmanirapekshata*, meaning religious neutrality. It is the specific dynamics of domestic politics that allowed the preeminence of Islamic forces in the polity, and their successes in the electoral process".[26] He contended that the rise of the Islamists in Bangladesh, and the consequent erasure of secularism from the country's Constitution in 1977, was to be viewed as the manifestation of a "conservative Islamization process which Bangladesh has been undergoing over the last quarter of a century".[27] This process saw Islam becoming the state religion in 1988, along with the widespread use of Islamic idioms in political discourse, and then the forging of close connections between secularists and Islamists in the political domain. Ali Riaz did not subscribe to the idea that there was some sort of "dormant Muslim identity of the Bangladeshi population"[28] that was resurfacing. His evaluation of the rise of political Islam in Bangladesh was based on two main factors, which he described as "(a) the crises of hegemony of the ruling bloc; and (b) politics of expediency by the 'secularist' parties".[29] These factors acted as main catalysts and favored the rise of an Islamist language in political discourse, creating a space for the progressive Islamization of the public sphere.[30] In this scenario, the Islamists not just acted as a significant and growing force in the field of politics, but also staged their terroristic activities and tried to capitalize on it.

1.1 *Negative solidarities and the Bangladeshi* pariahs

In the tragic experience of modernity, as Hannah Arendt posited, everyone is living in a common present and "[e]very country has become the almost immediate neighbor of every other country, and every man feels the shock of events which take place at the other side of the globe".[31] This ethos was overwhelmingly felt by many Bangladeshis, especially among the youth. At the beginning of the 2000s, when India was trying to catch up with China's economic miracle and the then-ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched its optimistic slogan of 'Shining India' for the 2004 Indian general elections,[32] some Bangladeshis were steaming with resentment against the Asian giant

[25] Tazeen Murshid writes that in the context of India and Bangladesh, "'[s]ecular' came to be defined as the binary opposite of 'communal' implying a tolerance of other religious communities". See Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5. Cit. in Riaz, "God Willing", 303.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Riaz, "God Willing", 301.
[28] Ibid., 302.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ali Riaz, "The New Islamist Public Sphere in Bangladesh", *Global Change, Peace & Security*, formerly *Pacifica Review: Peace, Security & Global Change*, (2013), 1-14.
[31] Hannah Arendt, "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?", *Men in Dark Times* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 83.
[32] In 2004, while the electoral frenzy was in full swing, the Hindu right-wing nationalist party of BJP (*Bhāratīya Janatā Pārṭī*) launched an estimated US$20 million campaign to advertise its 'India Shining' economic achievements and political program on all Indian TV channels. The campaign aimed at highlighting the successes of the Indian economy, especially those which had benefited the Indian middle class and the Non-Resident-Indians (NRI) alike. Many newspaper ads were published and glossy posters were pasted up all over to support the electoral campaign to keep India 'shining'. See Parwini Zora and Daniel Woreck, "Indian Election. The BJP's 'India Shining' Campaign: Myth and Reality", *World Socialist Web Site* (2004), *www.wsws.org*.
On the debate about India's development strategy and its alleged 'inclusive growth' hailed by the BJP, see, among others, Anurag Narayan Banerjee and Nilanjan Banik, "Is India Shining?", *Review of Development Economics*, 18.1 (2014), 59-72.
For a better understanding of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political strategies and the rise of the BJP in India after the 'success' of the so-called Gujarat Model, see also John Harriss, "Hindu Nationalism in Action: The Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian Politics", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38.4 (2015), 712-718; Duncan McDonnell and Luis Cabrera, "The Right-wing Populism of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (and Why Comparativists Should Care)", *Democratization*, 26.3 (2019), 484-501.

neighbors which were perceived – especially India – as constant bullies rather than regional allies, and with some of the Western countries – in particular the U.S. – which had become 'the enemy' par excellence in the imaginary of millions of Muslims around the world who were feeling increasingly outraged by the absurdity of the so-called 'war on terror' and the humiliation inflicted on their Muslim brothers in places like Guantanamo. While the BJP in India was busy popularizing its political mantra of 'Shining India' on the global stage, promoting Bengaluru (Bangalore, Karnataka) as the 'Silicon Valley of India' for its crucial role in developing the IT sector and exporting IT's related goods, Bangladesh was still far from dreaming of its own 'Digital Bangladesh' and was (perhaps unwillingly) raising a generation of angry men, similar to the Nietzschean 'men of ressentiment' recalled by Mishra in *Age of Anger*. The vision for a 'Digital Bangladesh' took root in 2008, when current PM Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League Party returned to power under the manifesto of 'A Charter for Change', the political program of the Bangladesh Awami League (allegedly inspired by Barack Obama's presidential campaign). One of the main goals, at that time, and today a slight disappointment for many Bangladeshis who truly believed in it, was the establishment of the so-called 'Digital Bangladesh' (DB) by 2021. Projects aimed at ushering in the DB vision and translating it into reality have faced uncountable difficulties in a country where electricity cuts are a daily occurrence and natural disasters a threatening reality. Turning Bangladesh into a digitally developed nation by 2021 has remained one of the main slogans of the present AL government. However, Digital Bangladesh is also turning into a dangerous system of surveillance, especially the government's 2018 the Digital Information Act (DIA 2018), a law which clearly curtails freedom of expression and heavily cracks down on the right to access information under the 'pretense' of preventing the escalation of cybercrimes. The DIA 2018 further restricts the space of independent journalism, affecting not only journalists and bloggers, but also lawyers, activists, scholars and representatives of the civil society. It is a development of a previous law – the Information and Communications Technology Act (ICT ACT 2006) – and increasingly raises high barriers to the way of independent research and investigative journalism.[33] When Mishra writes that "Grisly images and sounds continuously assault us in this age of anger" and that "the threshold of atrocity has been steadily lowered since the first televised beheading (in 2004, just as broadband internet began to arrive in middle-class homes) in Iraq of a Western hostage dressed in Guantanamo's orange jumpsuit", one needs to imagine what this atrocious performance of terror signified in Bangladesh, where what Mishra describes as "a sentiment of pervasive panic generated by the news media and amplified by social media" was indeed more pervasively amplified and constantly exacerbated by "the reality of climate change, which makes the planet itself seem under siege from ourselves".[34]

2. Humayun Azad, a Namesake

> A pine is standing lonely
> In the North on a bare plateau.
> He sleeps; a bright white blanket
> Enshrouds him in ice and snow.

[33] See Md Aliur Rahman and Harun-Or Rashid, "Digital Security Act and Investigative Journalism in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis", *CenRaPS Journal of Social Sciences*, 2.2 (2020), 216-236; Md Abu Bakar Siddik and Saida Talukder Rahi, "Cybercrime in Social Media and Analysis of Existing Legal Framework: Bangladesh in Context", *BiLD Law Journal*, 5.1 (2020), 68-92. On a recent assessment of the Digital Bangladesh 'vision', see Anupam Mazumdar and Husam Helmi Alharahsheh, "Digital Bangladesh-vision 2021: What is the Digital Bangladesh Concept?", *South Asian Research Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 2.1 (2020), 6-9; Kristen Waughen et al., "The Digital Divide: A Digital Bangladesh by 2021", *International Journal of Education and Human Developments*, 1.3 (2015), 1-8.

[34] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 21.

He's dreaming of a palm tree
Far away in the Eastern land
Lonely and silently mourning
On a sunburnt rocky strand.[35]

Born in Bangladesh in 1947, Humayun Azad was a writer, a poet, a prominent scholar of linguistics, and a prolific author of books and articles on Bengali language and literature. He is considered as one of the most renowned contemporary intellectuals of Bangladesh, a country he deeply loved and felt rooted into. However, Azad passed away far from the green and lush of his own country: he was found dead in a hotel room in Munich, the city of his alleged 'exile'.[36] There are many unsolved questions surrounding his death, and much awaited answers that perhaps would never materialize. His family and many among his colleagues and friends believe that his premature death was a direct consequence of the brutal attack he faced in Dhaka during the annual Book Fair held on the campus of Dhaka University every February. After the February 2004 vicious assault that had left him almost dead, the government of Bangladesh decided to send him to Germany in August 2004, apparently for guaranteeing him the safety and protection that they could not grant him in his own land. Azad was not the first one to meet such fate: in 1975, the poet Daud Haider had fallen into disgrace after the publication of some poems that allegedly 'offended the religious sentiments' of a radical few.[37] The government decided to send him in exile: after many years in India awaiting to be repatriated to Bangladesh, Haider made his way to Germany, never to return. Humayun Azad would not be the last either, as many young writers and bloggers are finding shelter in Europe and elsewhere after attacks (or threats of death) against them by some fanatic Islamists.

What do these writers have in common in sharing such an uneventful fate? Why has 'exile' been the only answer to their plight, despite their commitment to Bangladesh, a self-proclaimed secular republic where Bengali language and culture 'should' dictate the ethos of the new state? The answer may lie in one of the poems of the German author Heinrich Heine, born in Düsseldorf in 1797, but deceased in Paris in 1856, where he was expatriated after the German authorities had repeatedly banned some of his poetry. In Heine's work *Ideen: Das Buch Le Grand* (1827), translated in English as *Ideas: The Book of Le Grand* (2006),[38] is a poem whose form and content strike us for its modernity. Heine simply wrote:

[35] Heinrich Heine, "Lyrical Intermezzo" [1822-23], *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine. A Modern English Version*, trans. by Hal Draper (Oxford: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982), 62. The original song, titled "Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam", is the number 33 of the Lyrical Intermezzo: "Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam / Im Norden auf kahler Höh. / Ihn schläfert; mit weißer Decke / Umhüllen ihn Eis und Schnee. / Er träumt von einer Palme, / Die, fern im Morgenland, / Einsam und schweigend trauert / Auf brennender Felsenwand".

[36] Officially, Azad went to Munich to conduct research on the poetry of Heinrich Heine. However, many in Bangladesh told this author that the Bangladeshi government did not know how to protect him and found it more convenient to 'exile' him, allegedly for his own safety. The outcome of this plan, if it was indeed carried out with these purposes, was truly disastrous as Azad died just after one week from his arrival in Munich.

[37] Mubashar Hasan and Arild Engelsen Ruud have written a paper where they recollect five cases where the Blasphemy Law was used to prosecute writers, bloggers and cartoonists in Bangladesh. Daud Haider "was independent Bangladesh's first (in)famous 'blasphemer'". He wrote a poem in 1974 that created outrage among the public. Arrested, he was kept in jail under a false name to protect him from other inmates. When he was finally released on the home minister's order, he was forced to leave the country. "The following day, he was put on a plane to Kolkata, just him and two minders – an extraordinary undertaking in those days. He has never been able to return to his country in spite of having requested to do so". See Mubashar Hasan and Arild Engelsen Ruud, "The State and the Construction of the 'Blasphemer' in Bangladesh", in Anne Stensvold, ed., *Blasphemies Compared*: *Transgressive Speech in a Globalised World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 175-91.

[38] Heinrich Heine, *Ideas: The Le Grand Book (Das Buch Le Grand) and Memoirs*, trans. by Richard Hollick (Kindle Edition, 2015).

The German Censors —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— Idiots —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— ——.[39]

Arguably Azad moved to Munich in 2004 for researching the life and the works of the controversial poet Heinrich Heine because he found a resonance in these verses. Heine's uncompromising stance on the use of poetry and literature as tools of rebellion against the political authorities of those times might have appeared extremely appealing to him, much as Heine's use of irony. His temperament, as shown in his life and his work, resonated with the defiant spirit of this Bangladeshi critical scholar and unbending writer, whose name combined the greatness of the Mughal emperor Humayun with the idealistic aspirations of a given name like *Āzād* ('free'). Such a 'namesake' should have been a harbinger of a great future ahead, but we are left only with his powerful writings, his controversial verses, and his adamant denouncement of fundamentalisms of any sort, religious as much as political. As we have seen, these two positions dangerously coalesced in the aftermath of the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, and far from building a nation free from the poisonous mix of politics and religion, political Islam became a force that could not be ignored and, obviously, not even mocked at. Like the German censors of Heine's poem, they were perhaps fools, but likewise dangerous and capable of using the resentful youth to kill whoever posed a threat to their growing regime of terror in Bangladesh.

3. Humayun Azad, an 'Organic Intellectual' and an 'Absurd Hero'

In 1986, when the serial killings of writers and bloggers in Bangladesh were less predictable, Humayun Azad wrote a poem provocatively titled "Ad. Bangladesh, 1986", published in Bengali on the *Bichitra Eid Issue* (Dhaka 1986):

Yes, you are the talented man we are looking for
If you have muscles only, not brain
If you have hammer alone and no poetry
If you have an axe only, and no music within you
If you have but a gun to fire, and no dance within you
If you have the heel alone, and no dreams within you
You are the talented man we are looking for
If you can walk to the Pub
Leaving a time bomb under your father's bed
You will be appointed our chief executive
In charge of our society
Of our state
Of our civilization.[40]

[39] Ibid.

The poem depicts an individual who is void of any humanity, incapable of feelings and emotions, but perfectly capable of leaving a bomb even under his father's bed. These were the required characteristics of the most suitable candidate to the position of 'chief executive' of the heartless factory that Bangladesh had become in just fifteen years since its independence in 1971. This was the time of the autocratic regime of General Husain Mohammed Ershad (President from 1983 until 1991). Under Ershad's military dictatorship, Bangladesh saw a radical 'Islamization' of Bangladeshi society. Islam was declared as the state religion in 1988 and dissidents began to be systematically persecuted. Humayun Azad was among those who criticized the regime, following a tradition of intellectuals that, as Rashid Askari has stated, "had unswerving faith in the spirit of the Liberation War, and unflagging support for the cause of social progressivism".[41] Scholars Nazrul Islam and S. Aminul Islam have argued that the poem "Ad. Bangladesh 1986," represents the "symbolic reflection" of the situation faced by the intellectuals in Bangladesh.[42] In an article published in a widely read Bangladeshi newspaper, *The Daily Star*, Professor Ashraf Hossain Khondakar (in 2012), a leading poet and influential literary critic, highlighted the fact that "[n]owhere has literature been so much entangled with the political history of a land as it has been in Bangladesh".[43] Khondakar, whilst affirming that the majority of the people of Bangladesh are far from being fundamentalists, also warned against "a hydra-headed monster with multifarious tentacles, the worst of which were religious fanaticism and communal hatred".[44] He concluded his article by stating:

> The writers of Bangladesh have to work under such constraints that there is always a kind of edginess in their literary expressions. Bangladeshi poetry has been overtly political, as the poets had to grapple with such monsters as political autocracy, religious fanaticism and communal hatred. They have been tireless and vociferous in their protest against these ills. Judged from pure aesthetic viewpoints, Bangladeshi literature might appear to be too loudly political, but it could hardly be otherwise. Nowhere has politics been more oppressively real as it has been in Bangladesh. The writers of Bangladesh have never found an ivory tower of aesthetic disengagement to contemplate their navels in total oblivion of the harsh realities around them.[45]

Azad's poetry was, indeed, prone to edginess and overtly political, often bravely sarcastic and full of ambiguity. In one of his much quoted poems, "Time To Stay Quiet",[46] Azad had cautioned his readers that sometimes it is necessary to stay "quiet". This call to stay quiet, however, did not imply a form of passive quiescence verging on political apathy. Azad meant a kind of meditating silence where the "organic intellectual" consciously 'takes time' and ponders the best course of action to be taken in order to free his mind, first, and then awaken the nation. In *The Prison Notebooks* (1971), Antonio Gramsci elaborated a model of an "organic intellectual" capable of liberating himself from

[40] Humayun Azad, "Ad. Bangladesh, 1986", *Bichitra Eid Issue* (Dhaka 1986).
[41] Rashid Askari, *The Wounded Land: Peoples, Politics, Culture, War Crimes Liberation War and Literature in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh, 2013), 59.
[42] Nazrul Islam and Aminul S. Islam, "Crisis of Intellectuals in a Peripheral Society: the Case of Bangladesh – 1947 to 1981", in B. K. Jahangir, ed., *Social Science Perspective* (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 1988), 8.
[43] Ashraf Hossain Khondakar, "Bangladesh's Writers: Battling Terror, Ethnic Conflict and Fundamentalism", *The Daily Star* 2012), *www.archive.thedailystar.net*.
[44] Khondakar speaks also of Azad's case and the reasons behind the assault in February 2004: "Humayun Azad created a lot of dissatisfaction among the fundamentalists by writing *Naari*, a Bengali version of Simone du Beauvoir's *Second Sex*. In response to their protests, the then government of Bangladesh banned the book. But the more immediate cause of the assassination attempt was the publication of a devastating novel named, *Pak Saar Zamin Saad Baad* [*Pāk sār jamin sād bād*], in which he satirized with extreme vehemence the activities of the collaborators of the Pakistani army during the liberation war in 1971". See Khondakar, "Bangladesh's Writers".
[45] Ibid.
[46] Humayun Azad, *Humayun Azad: Selected Poems*, trans. by Hassanal Abdullah (Dhaka: Ramshkar Debnath, 2013).

the mental shackles imposed by society and ideology: "The first step in emancipating oneself from political and social slavery is that of freeing the mind", Gramsci advised.[47] Humayun Azad chose the role of an organic intellectual, deeply involved in the life and politics of his country, whose responsibility towards society was based on a deep appraisal of what constituted the 'rights and wrongs' of the social and political order. Gramsci had elaborated on the figure of such intellectual, stating that "[b]y intellectual, must be meant not only those strata commonly understood by this denomination, but in general the whole social stratum that exercises organizational functions in the broad sense, both in the field of production, and in the cultural one, and in the politico-administrative one".[48] Humayun Azad appeared to be following this Gramscian model of being an active and engaged intellectual who, in order to produce a positive and progressive change in society, must first be aware of the way the oppressive system works. Hence, Azad advocated for the necessity of a time of 'observational dissent', a "time to stay quiet", although with an alertness tinged of irony:

> It's time to stay quiet.
> Silently, we have to observe
> The killer's artwork.
>
> We have to be the mere speechless audience
> In this festival of blood, knives, and madness.
> And we will see friends forever disappearing.
> And we will pass our time hearing
> The footsteps of the organized gangs
> Desperately burying birds' chirpings.
>
> We have learned how to tolerate the shameful
> And bitter act of undressing our daughters
> In the streets of the nation's capital.
> We have learned not to ask
> Question about the murdered bodies of our sons.
>
> We will observe how the killers'
> Graceless, mad, and blind axes
> Torment even the faraway sky.
> Quietly, we will try to imagine
> How cold the edges of those axes are![49]

Nicholas Birns, commenting on the ambiguous message of the poem, suggests that Azad is ironically complaining about the roughness of the vicious attacks of the killers, pointing to their "graceless, mad, and blind axes" as if it could have been more acceptable to be killed in a sort of graceful manner. Birns interprets Azad's poem as denouncing – mockingly, we may add – even the lack of any 'aesthetic quality' in the cruel acts of the murderers. For Birns, Azad is pointing out "that killing is not just a matter of force but of bad art that demands we pretend it is good art".[50] I would contend that Azad is also advocating a powerful act of counter-hegemonic gaze, a critical observation that consists of a conscious observance of the 'bad art' of those traditional intellectuals who, as Gramsci

[47] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 97.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Azad, *Humayun Azad*.
[50] Nicholas Birns, "Vigilant Skepticism: The Poetry of Humayun Azad. A Review of: Humayun Azad, Selected Poems", *Shabdaguchha. A Journal of Bilingual Poetry*, 16.3-4 (June 2014).

denounced, are at the service of regimes of violence and oppression. In order to unveil the mechanism of such panoptic systems,[51] where organic intellectuals feel trapped by the awareness of being completely exposed, and thus vulnerable, to the Foucauldian 'discipline and punish' structures of power, Azad advises to keep quiet and "observe the killer's artwork". It is a Sisyphean act of defiance, where the mindful insight conquered by the conscious pariah silently and quietly breaks the univocal gaze typical of the Bentham's Panopticon and courageously gazes back, thus defeating the system and revealing its artwork as tasteless craftwork, as 'bad art'.

This simple act of refusing to be tamed, however, might be enough to shake the oppressive system at its roots, to scare the oppressor and trigger a reaction that could result in the annihilation of the free-spirit that unleashed such fear. "Quietly" – says Azad – "we will try to imagine/How cold the edges of those axes are!" The irreverence of his words and the caustic humor tainted by disillusionment indicate the sensibility of an artist who laments the descent of its beloved Bangladesh from hope into chaos. And yet, refusing to silence the "birds' chirping" despite the "blood, knives and madness", the poet quietly but defiantly observes and denounces the killings, the enforced disappearances, and the "graceless" and "blind axes", 'as if' it were acceptable to die at the hands of murderers who would be 'at least' capable of inflicting beautiful strikes. An aesthetic of death, we might say, that smears the faces of the rough and obtuse killers with shame and contempt. A scorn and a disdain born out of the deep self-realization of the conscious pariah, an absurd hero.

4. Conclusion

On 13 April 2022, various newspapers in Bangladesh and abroad reported that a Dhaka Court, after 18 years, had finally sentenced to death four members of the Islamist militant group JMB for the 'assault to kill' of Professor Humayun Azad.[52] Bangladesh News 24 also reported:

> The case documents reveal that Azad's sudden demise in Munich was due to stress, anxiety and underlying injuries which resulted from the attack. Issued by a Munich morgue, the autopsy report also said Azad's treatment after the attack may not have been able to cure him properly and the fear and anxiety resulting from the attack, which is clinically known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), may have exacerbated his already worsening condition before he finally died.[53]

Whatever the real causes of his sudden and tragic demise, Humayun Azad and his writings have not been forgotten or forsaken by Bangladesh. Especially among the youth, he has been praised as the undaunted hero who taught them to think, not just with intelligence but, as Arendt had advocated, with courage. In a recently published interview to his son Ananya Azad, Asmaul Husna wrote:

[51] In 1785, the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), founder of the doctrine of utilitarianism, began working on his ideas of a model prison system, which has become extremely famous and debated. The 'Panopticon' project was developed by Bentham for almost twenty years and his theory of fictions, according to which non-existent fictitious entities can have real effects and truly impact the lives of people, remains as one of the most thought-provoking philosophical controversies. The Panopticon is not merely, in Michel Foucault's words, "a cruel, ingenious cage" where convicted subjects are made to collaborate in their own subjection and annihilation. It is a terrible machine of surveillance, inhabited by a human ghost, whose power is completely relinquished by the system and crushed to the point of turning him/her into a living ghost. See Jeremy Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham: The Panopticon Writings* (London: Verso, 1995); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012).

[52] Faisal Mahmud, "Bangladesh Sentences Four to Death for Prominent Writer's Murder", *Al Jazeera* (2022), *www.aljazeera.com*; "Four JMB Men to Die for Killing Humayun Azad", *TBS News* (2022), *www.tbsnews.net*.

[53] Dhaka Court Correspondent, "Four Sentenced to Death in Humayun Azad Murder Case", *Bangladesh News 24* (2022). *bdnews24.com*.

> Because of his strong commitment to a search for truth and for fearlessly expressing his convictions through his words, Humayun Azad (1947-2004), a revolutionary writer from Bangladesh was an inspirational figure to many even if he has been treated as disposable by the Bangladeshi establishment.
>
> For many young people in Bangladesh, Azad's charged words and expressions were a crash course in learning how to argue effectively to defend one's convictions. There has also been criticism that he was too rigid in the way he sought dialogue on everything and anything. Both of these things are not new. What is new is the problem facing Bangladesh today that the act of writing is no longer safe as it once was. If you dare to speak with conviction, you may face insurmountable 'dangers'. Humayun Azad chose to accept these hazards and write candidly in the midst of all of these perils.[54]

Humayun Azad's fearless consciousness, his courage and undefeated will even when acting in the midst of dangerous conditions, especially for someone who had been a freedom fighter during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and could not accept the regime of terror and the frustrated anger of the youth in his 'beloved Bengal',[55] makes us read his poetry with fresh eyes and endless admiration. Was he an existential hero, someone who also, like Camus' Sisyphus, "negates the gods and raises rocks"? A hero who, like a warrior, has chosen action after contemplation, for whom that line "observe the killer's artwork" is not a condescension to the power of the oppressors, but rather a scornful look that exposes their mediocrity? His son Ananya says of his father's poetry:

> If one looked at the repertoire of his poems, they speak about history and tradition, offer religious and political critiques, oppose capitalistic exploitation and explore nuances of love and despair. He was candid and wrote with a deep sense of realism that can be called modernist. His poetry went beyond the aesthetics of beauty and offered a critique of the society and the state that he was part of. He sought a deep transformation and stirred radical (if varied) sensibilities among his readers. The rhythm of his poetry resonated well, especially with the young readers seeking their own truths.[56]

Humayun Azad never abdicated his role as a public intellectual and freedom fighter. The 'truths' that the young readers are looking for in his writings – regarding history, politics, poetry and courage to think – are always generously offered in his poems and novels alike. He was a sincere scholar, an honest pursuer of truths, even when this meant irritating sensibilities and facing the terrible consequences of resentful men in an age of anger and radicalizing desperation. One of his most famous and much quoted poems, "I probably will die for a little thing" expresses all the delicate tenderness of a fighter's soul:

> I probably will die for a little thing,
> For a little leaf of grass,
> And for a little drop of dew.

[54] Asmaul Husna, "Humayun Azad and the Contemporary Relevance of His Writings for the Bangladeshi Youth", *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 8.2 (2022), 274.

[55] The national anthem of Bangladesh, *Āmār sōnār bānglā* (*My Golden Bengal*) was originally written by the Bengali writer and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in 1906 to protest the first partition of the Great Bengal into West and East Bengal by the Governor Lord Curzon. Rabindranath Tagore's poem, aimed at celebrating the beauty of the Bengali land and the unity of its people, beyond ethnicity and religious affiliations, was adopted by the independent Bangladesh as its national anthem in 1972. It remains as a little paradoxical that one of Tagore's most famous poems, originally written to celebrate unity during a colonial period of agitation against the first partition of Bengal (then abolished in 1911) has become a national anthem of only one part of Bengal. It is even sadder that some Islamists today complain about this song as not appropriate for a 'Muslim nation' and campaign to substitute it with a more respectable one. For a detailed study of such controversies, see Caf Dowlah, *The Bangladesh Liberation War, the Sheikh Mujib Regime, and Contemporary Controversies* (London: Lexington Books, 2016).

[56] Husna, "Humayun Azad", 275.

I probably will die for a petal of flower
Suddenly fly away in summer's breeze.
I will die for a bit of rain.[57]

Humayun Azad had deep faith in the people of Bangladesh. His scornful attitude was never directed toward the angry youth. He was concerned about the tragic twist of fate that had seen his country emerge victorious from a war that was always meant to be more than a secession conflict born out of economic and political exploitation. He believed that Bangladesh could get rid of what Hannah Arendt had called "articles of superstition", that is, "Progress and Doom".[58] Like Arendt, he believed that it was necessary to exercise caution in the face of "reckless optimism and reckless despair".[59] He had seen the birth of his country, he had fought for it. But he never agreed to subscribe to the efforts put forward by politicians, on one side, and Islamic extremists, on the other, to force Bangladeshi people into a performance of outrageous and violent conflict for power. He embraced the necessity of "examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight".[60]

Humayun Azad bore this burden as a conscious pariah, refusing to be doomed even when facing the most ferocious attacks to his work and to his own persona. He proved once again that superstition and fate can be surmounted by scorn and the courage to think. Throughout his writings, we can hear him laughing with pleasure, that same pleasure that Arendt defined as "the intensified awareness of reality" which "springs from a passionate openness to the world and love of it".[61] As she had insightfully concluded: "Not even the knowledge that man may be destroyed by the world detracts from the 'tragic pleasure'".[62] This was possibly also the way Humayun Azad lived his life and faced his death: with the 'tragic pleasure' of a Sisyphean hero, who loved his world even when aware he could be destroyed by it. We must keep imagining Azad as 'happy'. This would be the legacy of resistance against those who fuel the 'Age of Anger'.

[57] Humayun Azad, "I Probably Will Die for a Little Thing", trans. by Hassanal Abdullah, *Shabdaguchha*. *A Journal of Bilingual Poetry*, 39 (January-March 2008).
[58] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), vi. The citation comes from the "Preface" to the 1950's edition of the book, first published in 1948 and reproduced in the following editions. Arendt constantly produced new prefaces to her work, adding comments and updating her introductory remarks.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., vii.
[61] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 6.
[62] Ibid.

Monia O'Brien Castro

Anger in the City. Negative Solidarities and the Pursuit of the Common Bad in the Context of the 2011 English Riots

Abstract: Starting from Hannah Arendt's concept of negative solidarities, the thrust of this paper is to determine whether the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, in the aftermath of the 2011 English riots, manufactured a moral panic with the help of the mass media, presumably in order to distract British people from the damaging social effects of neoliberal capitalism and to be in a position to legitimise and impose its Big Society ideology. I shall demonstrate that angered 'gang' members and rioters, beyond appearances, may be understood as irregular participants in a democratic process exercising some measure of positive solidarity against the state. In addition, I shall contend that on the contrary, the coalition deliberately rejected the social dimension of riots and endeavoured to escape political responsibility, instrumentalising 'gangs' and adopting the recurring blame-it-on-the Blacks/poor approach to keep its alibi intact, thereby practising negative solidarity.

Keywords: *culture*, *democracy*, *exclusion*, *gang*, *riot*, *neoliberalism*

1. Introduction

The 'gang' phenomenon was no new feature of British society when the August 2011 English riots erupted. In spite of the existence of an official definition,[1] the term 'gang' refers to a very American construct which is pregnant with racial and social connotations. Owing to the mass media's long-standing distortions and extensive sensationalist coverage of postcode rivalries involving the use of guns or knives,[2] and owing to conservative and labour governmental declarations,[3] British 'gangs' had been essentially portrayed as dangerous Black entities inhabiting impoverished urban settings on a regular basis.

Yet, the unprecedented violence displayed by the protesters during the 2011 riots had 'gangs' gain in credibility, with Prime Minister Cameron declaring "an all-out war on gangs and gang culture".[4] In the eyes of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, 'gangs' encapsulated the moral, social, and populist crises linked with immigration, terrorism, and drugs,[5] hence they became the epitome of what was wrong in British society. The inflated statistics provided by the coalition were expected to prove that 'gangs' had orchestrated the events,[6] hence that they were cabals.[7] The

[1] The definition was introduced in the Policing and Crime Act 2009, section 34 (The National Archives, *Policing and Crime Act, c.26* (2009), *www.legislation.gov.uk*) and revised by the Serious Crime Act 2015, section 51 (The National Archives, *Serious Crime Act, c.9* (2015), *www.legislation.gov.uk*). A gang is defined as a group of at least three people using (a) characteristic(s) enabling its identification as a group, and engaging in gang-related violence or getting involved in the illegal drug market. I shall use quotation marks to remind the reader that the term, when used by the mass media, politicians or the public, not necessarily refers to bona fide gangs.

[2] Postcode rivalry is a conflict between 'gangs' over territory.

[3] For instance, "Straw Blames Absent Dads for Gang Violence", *The Daily Mail* (2007), *www.dailymail.co.uk*.

[4] James Tapsfield et al., "PM Vows War on Gangs After Riots", *The Independent* (2011), *www.independent.co.uk*.

[5] Simon Hallsworth and David Brotherton, eds., *Urban Disorder and Gangs: A Critique and A Warning* (London: Runnymede, 2011), 16.

[6] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of disorder* (London: Guardian Books, 2011), 21.

disturbances were undisputedly interpreted as a crime and not as a protest movement from below against a "capitalist revolution from above".[8] Concomitantly, 'gangs' conjured up a form of negative solidarity based on anger producing the common bad, which a government angered by mindless violence and animated by positive solidarity should annihilate, for the common good. But should it indeed?

Starting from Hannah Arendt's concept of solidarities and drawing on the theses developed by researchers such as Hallsworth and Wacquant,[9] as well as on a thorough review of scientific publications, official reports, press articles, grey literature,[10] and on two field studies carried out by the author,[11] the thrust of the paper shall be to determine whether in the context of political scandals and protests against austerity measures the coalition was served with both the most appropriate circumstances and folk devils, so that it was in a position to implement its Big Society ideology to the greatest possible extent.[12] Invented criminality has been a feature of British society since the 18th century, when concern over crime grew and broad-circulation press developed.[13] Instrumentalising 'gangs', the alibi, manufacturing a moral panic with the help of the mass media may have enabled Cameron to distract people from the damaging social effects of neoliberal capitalism – deep-seated structural problems. Firstly, I will contend that in spite of appearances and since young people tend to inform of what democracy requires, 'gangs' and rioting may be understood as unwonted democratic processes arising from the hardest needs – i.e., deprivation, racism, alienation, unequal opportunities, police harassment, discrimination and hopelessness, that is the common bad. Thus, my point is that 'gang' members and rioters somewhat unconsciously aimed at pursuing some measure of common good – positive solidarity. Secondly, I shall posit that on the contrary, a negative mode of solidarity may in fact have been practised by the government itself as it purposely overlooked the social dimension of the riots and implemented a "culture of fear",[14] therefore endeavouring to escape political responsibility. As a consequence, the coalition seemingly privileged the pursuit of the common bad as it ended up repressing, through 'gangs', the victims of poverty, on cultural and moral grounds,[15] rather than tackling poverty itself. Actually, poverty was to ensure the survival of harsh neoliberalism and thereby that of the coalition itself.

2. Reading Democratic Participation into Gang Membership and Rioting

Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old Black man who had been under surveillance within the framework of the fight against gun violence in London, was killed by the police on August 4, 2011 in Haringey,[16] North London, officially because he had threatened them. Revolts followed a couple of days later, spreading

[7] Stanley Cohen, *Hooligans, Vandals and the Community: A Study of Social Reaction to Juvenile Delinquency*, PhD thesis (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1969), 63.
[8] Loïc Wacquant, *Bourdieu, Foucault and the Penal State in the Neoliberal Era* (Duke: Duke U.P., 2009), 127.
[9] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban*; Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Duke: Duke U.P., 2009).
[10] Meaning information produced outside of traditional publishing and distribution channels – governmental reports, white papers, studies run by non-governmental organisations for instance.
[11] The study, which was carried out in the summers of 2012 and 2013 in Tottenham, Hackney, Packham, and Brixton as part of a research project devoted to contemporary British 'gangs', enabled the author to conduct about fifty interviews with inhabitants, former and current gang members, social workers, and community workers.
[12] The Big Society neoliberal project implied devolving political power and social responsibility to local communities.
[13] David Philips, "Three 'Moral Entrepreneurs' and the Creation of a 'Criminal Class' in England, c. 1790s-1840s", *Crime, History & Societies*, 7.1 (2003).
[14] Jonathan Simon, *Governing through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2009).
[15] A euphemism for race used among politicians for decades.
[16] Betsy Barkas, "Framing the Death of Mark Duggan", *Institute of Race Relations* (2014), *www.irr.org.uk*.

to 66 English local authorities until August 11. Most of these areas featured amongst the poorest and most crime-ridden,[17] and 30% of the underage rioters inhabited them.[18] 5,112 offences were committed, between 13,000 and 15,000 individuals participated in the disturbances, and 4,000 people were arrested (90% were acquainted with the police).[19] The arrestees were mainly men (89%), aged 18-24 (46%), and 10-17 (26%). 40% were White, 39% Black, 11% mixed, 8% Asian, and 2% belonged to other ethnic categories.[20] This most recent wave of urban riots was characterized by what was sometimes referred to as consumerist hooliganism since looting made up 50% of crime.[21] Altogether, the riots cost over £500 million and caused 5 deaths.[22] Prime minister David Cameron, home secretary Theresa May,[23] and the mayor of London, Boris Johnson,[24] blatantly condemned these criminal acts led by 'gangs'.[25] Consequently, they offered a neo-security analysis of the riots,[26] which reduced the social explanation to a minimum as they clearly subscribed to the gangland thesis.[27] In fact, commentators on all sides of the political spectrum agreed that the 1980s riots may have originated in deprivation, racism, and inequalities, but that this time the situation was different.[28] The common denominator to all urban riots seemed to be the participants' profile.

Once again, the usual culprits emerged as urban lower-class youths, especially Black youths. The Black community had been stigmatised, pathologised, essentialised, and criminalised on cultural grounds for decades so that its members had become perennial criminals.[29] Incidentally, ideas of criminality and policing in the UK originated in colonialism.[30] Father hunger,[31] dysfunctional family structure, hostility to authority,[32] violence, nihilism,[33] hedonism, materialism, indiscipline, lack of respect, immorality,[34] and gangsta culture – these traits have long been commonly associated with Black families, whose culture is said to be defective, un-British, and even criminogenic.[35] Interestingly enough, the August 2011 looters were highly criticized by the authorities, the media, and the public for their expensive tastes, when one may argue that first, 18% of the businesses targeted were food retailers and restaurants;[36] second, that they proved they were attracted to designer clothes

[17] Home Office, *An Overview of Recorded Crimes and Arrests Resulting from Disorder Events in August 2011* (London, 2011), 3.
[18] The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the Riots: The Final Report* (2012), 7.
[19] Ibid., 16-17.
[20] Home Office, *Overview*, 28-29.
[21] Ibid., 4.
[22] John Drury et al., eds., *Re-Reading the 2011 English Riots: ESRC 'Beyond Contagion' Interim Report* (Sussex: University of Sussex, 2019), 6; The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the Riots*, 17.
[23] "Riots: Theresa May's Speech on 11 August 2011", *Home Office* (2011), *www.gov.uk*.
[24] Ben Glaze and Ellen Branagh, "Residents Vent Anger at Boris Johnson", *The Independent* (2011), *www.independent.co.uk*.
[25] "PM's Speech on the Fightback After the Riots", *Cabinet Office* (2011), *www.gov.uk*.
[26] Meaning they considered the riots were criminal and should be solved by a tightening of security.
[27] This means that most urban violence is gang-related and that gangs mushroom apace. Simon Hallsworth, *Understanding Violent Street Worlds,* PhD Thesis (2019), 10.
[28] See for instance "Riots are not a genuine outlet of political angst", *The Evening Standard* (2011), *www.standard.co.uk*; "Politicians Condemn Tottenham Riots", *The Guardian* (2011), *www.theguardian.com*.
[29] Stephen Cushion et al., eds., *Media Representations of Black Young Men and Boys Report of the REACH Media Monitoring Project* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011), 12.
[30] Jasbinder S. Nijjar, "Echoes of Empire: Excavating the Colonial Roots of Britain's 'War on Gangs'", *Social Justice*, 45.2-3 (2018).
[31] Home Affairs Committee, *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System: Second Report of Session 2006-07*, vol. 2: Oral and Written Evidence (2007), 87.
[32] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 8.
[33] Ibid., 4.
[34] Charlie Cooper, "Understanding the English Riots of 2011: 'Mindless Criminality' or Youth 'Mekin Histri' in Austerity Britain?", *Youth & Policy,* 109 (September 2012), 7.
[35] See Monia O'Brien Castro "L'atavisme des Noirs comme pierre angulaire d'un discours raciste et propagandiste à l'encontre des 'gangs' britanniques contemporains", in Michel Prum and Florence Binard, eds., *Minorités et société* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020).
[36] Home Office, *Overview*, 14.

and high-tech products and thus shared a mainstream culture celebrated by the media, that of wealth as life goal. As a matter of fact, beyond the criminal other,[37] an entire section of the community was labelled as criminal, as articulated by historian and broadcaster David Starkey. On *Newsnight* (BBC2), the latter controversially asserted that young working-class Whites, 'Chavs',[38] had been contaminated by criminogenic Black culture and therefore "become Black",[39] that is criminals. Hence, those at the bottom of the social ladder, irrespective of their race, purportedly formed a homogenous dangerous and immoral section of the community that should be remoralised.[40] This vision of the poor echoes through the ages.[41]

Yet, as suggested earlier, the inquiries into the 1980s riots such as the Scarman report,[42] highlighted multiple forms of urban grievance, especially among Blacks. As averred by Solomos, the national anomie then had not resulted from race and alien cultural values, but race had been central to the eruption of riots given that young Blacks were confronted with a greater number of obstacles such as racism and discrimination.[43] Many a study has, likewise, laid stress on the socio-economic impulse behind riots, namely a genuine structural process which has produced aggressive social personalities among the poor urban youth.[44] In *Men in Dark Times,* Hannah Arendt distinguishes between negative and positive solidarity. The former form draws individuals from selfishness into a group sharing an experience of suffering, injustice, or oppression. The philosopher deems it deficient since such fearful identification with a common bad doesn't lead to the pursuit of a common good. The latter form refers to empowered individuals gathering to resist oppression or injustice thereby pursuing the common good, as they are in a position to exercise their rights and duties and make sure their freedom and equality are inextricably linked with other people's – positive solidarity and political responsibility go hand in hand.[45] In the light of Hannah Arendt's analysis, one may posit that 'gang' membership and rioting may actually be interpreted as forms of democratic participation based on the anger generated by socio-economic deprivation as a driving force, for the benefit of an entire class.

Four decades of neoliberal restructuring and erosion of the welfare state have undoubtedly had political, economic, and social impacts. These decades have reshaped the perspectives and experience of young people who belong to the urban precariat. In fine the process manufactured serially angered young men. Indeed, violence collectives are generated by the redistribution of a progressively privatised space which excludes them from resources according to Hagedorn.[46] Research has shown that 'gangs', beyond appearances, have a social function – transitioning members into adulthood. 'Gangs' help these youths overcome structural powerlessness;[47] provide them with a sort of refuge founded on territorial attachment within disorganised communities deprived of social links;[48] solve the

[37] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 8.
[38] 'Chavs'/'Charvers' refers to those anti-social young people inhabiting deprived areas who have adopted Black culture. The mass media in particular have extensively used this pejorative term from the early 2000s.
[39] "UK Riots: It's Not About Criminality and Cuts, It's About Culture… And This is Only the Beginning", *The Telegraph* (2011), *www.telegraph.co.uk*.
[40] "PM's Speech".
[41] One may refer to the philosophy behind the 1834 Poor Law.
[42] The Thatcher years were marked by waves of urban riots. Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981: Report of an Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).
[43] John Solomos, "Riots, Urban Protest and Social Policy: The Interplay of Reform and Social Control in Ethnic Relations", *Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations,* 7 (December 1986), 10.
[44] Cyprien Avenel, *Sociologie des* "*Quartiers Sensibles*" (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 85-86 ; Gareth Morrell et al., eds, *The August Riots in England: Understanding the Involvement of Young People* (London: NatCen, 2011).
[45] Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 82-83.
[46] John Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis U.P., 2008).
[47] Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie", *American Sociological Review,* 3.5 (October 1938).
[48] Keith Kintrea et al., eds., *Young People and Territoriality in British Cities* (Glasgow: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008), 4-5.

male identity crisis attributable to a matriarchal family model;[49] restore a self-esteem undermined by the way non-discredited populations perceive them[50] or by failure at school,[51] especially as many carry the heritage of colonialism within them.[52] Finally, gang-related activities such as drug trafficking enable them to win power as well as respect.[53] But belonging to a 'gang' also gives the opportunity to challenge authority in order to compensate for the incapacity to participate in society in a traditional way.[54] 'Gangs' are not organised structures or sustained political organisations,[55] since they have no clearly-stated demands. Yet, they may be considered to be subcultural, alternative, radical protest movements intervening in the political debate. They manage to bring the issues of people cast away to the very margins of society to the forefront and make them visible. Therefore, 'gangs', as they are not paralysed by fear, represent those margins, both unofficially and symbolically.[56] Voter alienation acted as a catalyst to "a silent revolution" in the politically marginalized working classes.[57] The fact that 'gangs' agreed to stop their postcode war for four days during the 2011 riots proves that what matters to them is to unite against their oppressors,[58] namely the police, and by extension the government. As a consequence, having recourse to unorthodox methods to express political views might be regarded as inseparable from the pursuit of social change.

Likewise, one may say participants in riots, whether 'gang' members or not, and with the exception of elements like hardened criminals or middle/upper class looters,[59] speak for their community. In the neoliberal age, the educational system fails to provide young people with an education, thereby preventing them from developing their critical sense.[60] Rioting amounts to refusing the political language,[61] to a political vacuum.[62] Freire explains that alienated and oppressed individuals in colonised territories, which include distressed areas which have tended to undergo a regeneration or rather gentrification process in highly developed countries,[63] internalise negative images of themselves. As a consequence, their "culture of silence" allows neither dialogue nor self-government.[64] They confront an "enemy without a face" who ignore them on a daily basis, condemn them to social worthlessness, and lead them to a deadlock,[65] even if fighting on one's territory gives the illusion there is a chance to win.[66] The message rioters conveyed in a community spirit was

[49] Roger Hopkins Burke, *An Introduction to Criminological Theory* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2005), 105.
[50] Detlef Baum, "Can Integration Succeed? Research into Urban Childhood and Youth in a Deprived Area in Koblenz", *Social Work in Europe* 2.3 (1996).
[51] John Pitts, *Reluctant Gangsters: Youth Gangs in Waltham Forest* (Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2007), Chapter 9.
[52] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 20.
[53] Jack Katz, *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil* (US: Basic Books, 1988).
[54] Anne Power and Rebecca Tunstall, *Dangerous Disorder: Riots and Violent Disturbances in 13 Areas of Britain 1991-1992* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997), 2.
[55] Steve Hall et al., eds., *Criminal Identities and Consumer Culture: Crime, Exclusion and the New Culture of Narcissism* (Oxon: Willan, 2008).
[56] Drury et al., *Re-Reading*, 6.
[57] Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2003), 3.
[58] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading,* 22.
[59] Youngsters from comfortable backgrounds participated in the 2011 riots too. "The Middle Class 'Rioters' Revealed: The Millionaire's Daughter, the Aspiring Musician and the Organic Chef All in the Dock", *The Daily Mail* (2011), *www.dailymail.co.uk.*
[60] Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Youth: Racialized Memories and the Culture of Cruelty* (New York: Routledge, 2012), xiv.
[61] John Gaffney, "L'Interprétation de la violence, une analyse du discours sur les troubles sociaux au Royaume-Uni: le cas de Handsworth, Birmingham, 1985", *Langage et société,* 40 (1987), 54.
[62] Avenel, *Sociologie,* 86-87.
[63] The areas hit by the 2011 riots were amongst them.
[64] Tom Heaney, *Issues in Freirean Pedagogy* (Thresholds in Education, 1995), *lust-for-life.org*.
[65] Christian Bachman and Nicole Leguennec, *Violences urbaines. Ascension et chute des classes moyennes à travers cinquante ans de politique de la ville* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 355-356.
[66] Gaffney, "L'Interprétation", 54.

ultimately political,[67] but they were not fully aware of it and did not present it as such either. This is "zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing". Riots obviously conveyed a subjective statement on an objective condition.[68] Oppressed populations, who do have a political conscience, know they are constantly refused self-determination and the status of active citizen.[69] Yet, they lack organisation and union to reverse the situation.[70] One may regard rioting as an illustration of instantaneous attempt at pursuing positive solidarity.

In August 2011, "the rioters were seen as militant, but not disciplined; impulsive rather than organized; expressive but not articulate; targeted but not strategic. Their actions involved group collaboration, but not collective mobilisation. Overall, their actions were messy, incoherent and chaotic, their motives inconsistent and mixed. The mode, expression and targets of their dissent generated discomfort, unease and tension".[71] As mentioned earlier, fear prevented a section of the precariat, incarnating negative solidarity from both revolting and supporting 'gangs' and rioters. In point of fact, 'gang' activity and rioting have been repressed by successive governments over the years, thereby leading to a vicious circle. Police suspicion towards young people in depressed zones has been reinforced and harassment has worsened indeed.[72] Blacks were eight times more likely to be arrested and searched than Whites and Asians two times.[73] Also, people inhabiting neighbourhoods subject to near-permanent recession have increasingly been stigmatized and criminalized.[74] Hence, reasons for rebelling have constantly multiplied. Even though 'gangs' and rioters are produced by common bad, they achieve some measure of positive solidarity. In fact, on the one hand, one may claim that they resist social abandonment and that their voice was unintentionally carried by the coalition and the mass media in a way. On the other hand, the *Guardian*, whose covering of urban disorders was as damaging as that of the gutter press,[75] published a joint study with the LSE for instance.[76] The work looked into the causes of the 2011 riots and stressed the protesters' circumstances. Even Scarman argued that "violence, though wrong, is a very effective means of protest".[77] Indeed, one may analyse the two forms of subcultural protest movement under study in terms of the self-empowerment of powerless citizens blighted by galloping marginalisation; stigmatisation along racial, class, and territorial lines; the correlation between material poverty and the denial of social dignity;[78] the provoking absence of judiciary reaction to crime where the rich and powerful were concerned.[79] 'Gang' members and rioters are not only synonymous with the pursuit of

[67] Drury et al., *Re-Reading*, 10; Sadiya Akram, "Recognizing the 2011 United Kingdom Riots as Political Protest: A Theoretical Framework Based on Agency, Habitus and the Preconscious", *The British Journal of Criminology*, 54.3 (March 2014).
[68] Slavoj Zizek, "Shoplifters of the World Unite", London Review of Books (2011), *www.lrb.co.uk*.
[69] Henry A. Giroux, *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism (Popular Culture and Everyday Life)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), xiv.
[70] David Moxton, "Consumer Culture and the 2011 Riots", *Sociological Research Online*, 16.4 (2011), *www.socresonline.org.uk*.
[71] Sarah Lamble, "Unpalatable Dissent and the Political Distribution of Solidarity", *Law Culture and the Humanities,* 16.2 (November 2018), 9.
[72] Douglas Sharp and Susie Atherton, "To Serve and Protect?: The Experiences of Policing in the Community of Young People from Black and Other Ethnic Minority Groups", *British Journal of Criminology*, 47.5 (September 2007).
[73] Mark Smith, "Young People and the 2011 'Riots' in England: Experiences, Explanations and Implications for Youth Work", *Infed.org*, (2011), *www.infed.org*.
[74] Simon Hallsworth and Daniel Silverstone, eds., "'That's Life Innit', A British Perspective on Guns, Crime and Social Order", *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 3.9 (2009), 373.
[75] The gutter press specialises in shocking stories about crime for instance, and shows no interest in the ins and outs of an issue. Violence is constantly presented as the product of deviance. Gaffney, "L'Interprétation", 34-35.
[76] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading*.
[77] Scarman, *Brixton,* 36.
[78] Zygmunt Bauman, "The London Riots-On Consumerism Coming Home to Roost", *Social Europe* (2011), *www.socialeurope.eu*.
[79] Daniel P. O'Donoghue, *Urban Transformations: Centres, Peripheries and Systems* (London: Routledge, 2014), 91.

common bad as averred by the coalition. On the contrary, one may consider the crackdown on 'gangs' and riots implemented following the August disturbances as the product of negative solidarity, as the government has seemingly acted against the interests of a whole section of the community, infringing upon its rights and freedom.

3. Negative Solidarity in Disguise

The position of the coalition as to why the riots had erupted was clear from the beginning, consequently it commissioned no public inquiry on the Scarman model. A mere panel was formed, which published a report riddled with Victorian-like, Thatcherite references to deserving and undeserving poor.[80] The opportunity of thrusting 'gangs' into the limelight and in some measure indirectly branding them "domestic terrorists" to quote US gang buster Bratton,[81] came as a boon and was not to be lost. Cameron set about confronting violence allegedly to protect citizens, for the common good. Still, since the process involved installing a 'culture of fear' and repression with the help of the mass media and the so-called gang industry through the instrumentalisation of 'gangs',[82] one may express doubts as to his genuine purpose. In actual fact, the authorities manipulated the figures – 28% of the people arrested during the riots were initially announced to be 'gang' members. Next, the rate was revised downwards to 19%, then to 13%, this time for the whole country. This forced the government to downplay the role of 'gangs' in the unrest, all the more as, on the one hand, the figures corresponded to individuals who had been caught red-handed, as they were known to the police, and not to participants.[83] On the other hand, regional police services relied on different definitions of 'gang'.[84] Hence, one may affirm that the authorities lied to the population as to the nature of the real threat society was faced with. Undoubtedly, they bore in mind that in today's "risk society", where security has taken over employment security,[85] electors' fears define government policy.[86]

Logically, the coalition also lied when claiming it retaliated against protesters and 'gang' members to protect society, all the more so the measures it implemented didn't aim to definitely annihilate 'gangs'. Firstly, the government's myth-driven policy agenda was directly inspired by an expensive American experience of gang suppression which has failed because it hasn't tackled poverty.[87] Yet, in 2009, an influential group had already urged the authorities to adopt the successful (American) Kennedy method,[88] like 77 other cities around the globe, but the advice was not taken.[89] Other more progressive programmes such as Slutkin's public health approach, implemented by Scotland, were

[80] The Riots Communities and Victims Panel, *After the Riots*, 16.
[81] Terry McCarthy, "The Gang Buster", *Time Magazine* (2014), *www.time.com*.
[82] Liberal commentators, politicians or academics who deal with the 'gang' issue and who, sometimes involuntarily, give the impression the nation is under the influence of 'gangs'. Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young, "Gang Talk and Gang Talkers: A Critique", *Crime, Media, Culture,* 4.2 (August 2008).
[83] The Guardian-LSE, *Reading,* 21.
[84] Home Office, *Overview*, 34.
[85] John Pitts, "Americanisation, the Third Way, and the Racialisation of Youth Crime and Disorder", in John M. Hagedorn, ed., *Gangs in the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminology* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois, 2007), 274.
[86] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1992), 49.
[87] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 14.
[88] Criminologist Kennedy's method entails having gang members enter training schemes or take a job under penalty of punishment. The Centre for Social Justice, *Dying to Belong: An In-Depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain: A Policy Report by the Gangs Working Group* (London, 2009).
[89] The Centre for Social Justice, *It Can Be Stopped: A Proven Blueprint to Stop Violence and Tackle Gang and Related Offending in London and Beyond* (London: CJS thinktank, 2018), 7.

overlooked as well.[90] Secondly, the post-riot zero-tolerance stance thus adopted by the coalition combined disproportionate penal sanctions and welfare benefit restrictions.[91] The coalition strengthened the legislative framework governing 'gangs', with the creation of a gang-mapping database by the Metropolitan Police among other measures. Intelligence collected for this Gangs Matrix, through doubtful means such as social media monitoring and sometimes in breach of the law, stigmatised young Blacks and their culture, and was shared with other agencies such as housing associations.[92] Noteworthy is the fact that social services indeed played a crucial role in the criminalisation process, as they were in a position to closely watch the poorest and as they were encouraged to collaborate with the police and the judiciary. Thirdly, Cameron sought to tackle the issue of troubled families, injecting morals, parental discipline, and individual responsibility (for people to go back to work for example) into so-called problem populations.[93] In substance, his management of insecurity came down to criminalising social problems. Instead of punishing criminals, he penalised the precariat in its entirety, thereby also lying as to who was to be repressed. Criminalisation is a way for apparently weak governments not only to maintain control, but also to distance themselves from a social or political interpretation in order to weaken the link between deprivation and dissent.[94] The whole dynamic constituted a provocation for the underclass who was given superfluous further reasons to join 'gangs' or to riot, therefore to be repressed. As it were, the government badly needed 'gangs' because they embodied its alibi, so that the anger it expressed in August 2011 was presumably faked. Hence, poverty was needed too and shouldn't be fought, all the more so as neoliberalism depends on it to function. It appears that the population, electors, were deceived by the coalition to neoliberal ideological ends – legitimising and imposing its Big Society project, in other words, feral capitalism as the solution to its own crisis.[95]

It should be added that the field work undertaken by the author has revealed a very different process the authorities allegedly use in order to sustain gang culture. Some conspiracy theory concerning the circulation of firearms in those areas hit by cycles of riots is at stake here. Social workers, active or former 'gang' members, and inhabitants seem to be firmly convinced that gun culture is sustained by the government, who purportedly lets firearms be stolen from military bases or circulates them. Guns are not expensive and easy to find in so-called 'gang' hotspots. The same respondents believe the government sees to it that the zones are resupplied with drugs. Needless to say one should be very careful in the face of such accusations. Nevertheless, however fanciful they may sound, they speak volumes in terms of how the people concerned feel they are perceived and treated. In their view, the authorities in fact not only try and demographically regulate a population who cannot adapt to neoliberalism and who is regarded as a burden on society, especially when it rebels. But the authorities also try and keep their alibi, the demonised 'gang' culture, alive and kicking.

Concomitantly, citizens were evidently manipulated by the influential (right-wing) mass media,[96] which embarked on an umpteenth scapegoating campaign, publishing pictures from CCTV footage

[90] To the epidemiologist, gangs are to be tackled as one would tackle an epidemic – violence should not be considered as a simple law-and-order issue. See Monia O'Brien Castro, "Pornographie idéologique: l'américanisation de la croisade contre les 'gangs' britanniques", in Monia O'Brien Castro and Alexis Chommeloux, eds., *Américanis/zation* (Paris: Le Manuscrit-Savoirs, 2021).
[91] LSE Public Policy Group, *The 2011 London Riots* (London: British Politics and Policy, 2011).
[92] Amnesty International, "Met Police Using 'Racially Discriminatory' Gangs Matrix Database, Trapped in the Matrix: Secrecy, Stigma, and Bias in the Met's Gangs Database" (2018), *www.amnesty.org.uk*.
[93] Department for Communities and Local Government, *Government Response to the Riots, Community and Victims Panel's Final Report* (London, 2013), 16.
[94] Gaffney, "L'interprétation", 90.
[95] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 14.
[96] James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018).

and calling the public to "shop a moron" or "name and shame a rioter".[97] They demanded zero-tolerance policy to be implemented against the rioters, even backing the idea of having Bratton appointed as top adviser on 'gang' warfare,[98] as well as the remoralisation of the nation.[99] When most urban youth violence had nothing to do with 'gangs' in Britain,[100] the mass media supported the gang-based narrative emanating from Whitehall.[101] The media have the ideological duty to support the State, playing on citizens' apprehensions and orchestrating moral panics about crime in times of crisis,[102] laying down a dumbing down culture,[103] in order to deflect concerns away from capitalism-engendered problems.[104] Biased narratives sustaining racial prejudice[105] account for the fact that the public came down in favour of the punitive measures implemented by the State. A poll was released from a sample of 2,019 individuals over 18, which revealed 88% agreed with the sanctions implemented against rioters and considered they seemed light; 69% held 'gangs' responsible for the riots; 75% supported the police.[106] Neither the correlation between the ecology of marginalized zones and the proportion of Black youths in such groups, nor the fact that research shows 'gangs' are the corollary to structural determinants was underlined.[107] One also has to emphasize the fact that as a rule the mass media pay no attention to White 'gangs', even though they do exist, especially in areas like Northern Ireland, where immigration is not a strong feature. If they did, then they would have to precisely focus on structural similarities rather than on cultural and racial differences.[108] In addition, criminologists' and sociologists' views were not welcome to the debate around the issue for fear they would suggest the causes might be more complex. Such specialists hadn't sufficiently insisted on this reality upstream, thereby creating a vacuum[109] generously and dangerously filled by self-styled (right-wing) experts.[110] Much general effort was then put into providing a narrative which hid the fact that the coalition shirked its responsibility towards a specific category of citizens.[111]

As stated earlier, Hannah Arendt's concept of positive solidarity highlights the centrality of political responsibility and entails empowering citizens to exercise their rights and duties, irrespective of where they live. Positive solidarity should strengthen and sustain a common world.[112] Yet, the combination of a pervasive 'culture of fear' with collective social and penal repression in response to the English riots – based on the use of a bespoke ideological instrument, 'gangs' – are proof the coalition did not practice this form of solidarity. In substance, the Welfare State gave way to the Punitive State, a Janus State which, on the one hand, showed itself liberal and permissive (i.e., the reassuring face) towards middle and upper classes and firms. Indeed, one should remember the

[97] Christian Fuchs, "Behind the News: Social Media, Riots, and Revolutions", *Capital and Class,* 36.3 (2012), 384.
[98] Chris Greer and Eugene McLaughlin, "Trial by Media: Riots, Looting, Gangs and Mediatised Police Chiefs", in Tim Newburn and Jill Peay, eds., *Policing: Politics, Culture and Control* (Oxford: Hart, 2011), Chapter 7.
[99] Jasbinder S. Nijjar, "'Menacing Youth' and 'Broken Families': A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Reporting of the 2011 English Riots in the *Daily Express* Using Moral Panic Theory", *Sociological Research Online,* 20.4 (2015).
[100] Ian Joseph and Anthony Gunter, eds., *Gangs Revisited: What's a Gang and What's Race Got to Do with It? Politics and Policy into Practice* (London: Runnymede Perspectives, 2011), 12.
[101] The site of main government offices.
[102] Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1998), 7.
[103] Yvonne Jewkes, *Theorizing Media and Crime* (London: Sage Publishing, 2015), 19.
[104] Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), 31.
[105] Sarah Neal, "The Scarman Report, the Macpherson Report and the Media: How Newspapers Respond to Race Centered Social Policy Interventions", *Journal of Social Policy*, 32.1 (2003), 59.
[106] Daniel Briggs, *The English Riots of 2011*: *A Summer of Discontent* (Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2012), 10.
[107] Joseph and Gunter, *Gangs,* 4.
[108] See Monia O'Brien Castro, "White Niggers' Street Corner Society: les 'gangs' de rue dans l'Irlande du Nord post-conflit", *Observatoire de la Société Britannique*, 22 (September 2018).
[109] Joseph and Gunter, *Gangs,* 3.
[110] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 3.
[111] Pitts, "Americanisation", 275.
[112] Arendt, *Men*, 82-83.

political scandals which made the news at the time.[113] On the other hand, it showed itself paternalistic and punishing towards the poorest (i.e., the frightening face).[114] Then their rights and opportunities were denied along class and race lines, while they were forced to behave under the aegis of a cultural trope and put under surveillance.[115] Implementing such policy of "social insecurity" intrinsic to neoliberal democracy,[116] even if it took infringing upon equality and freedom, the neo-Darwinism government not only evaded its responsibility,[117] but also devolved it to the people. Incidentally, the idea of the Big Society was only materialised in pragmatic local initiatives set up by an empowered civil society.[118] The overall result was collective and political irresponsibility on the part of the coalition – the regime was seemingly undemocratic.

The point is that one may argue that the state has a criminogenic function – labelling, criminalizing, and punishing the deviants in the interest of the ruling class, while it may violate the law with impunity.[119] The concept of "Thug State" seems to perfectly apply in the British case, as, motivated by the interests of the elite, it claims to be democratic while perpetrating criminal acts against its citizens or allowing/encouraging criminal acts to be perpetrated against them. Furthermore, the Thug State resorts to arrests, prison, surveillance, informers and armed forces do dominate, discipline, and punish a non-elite population. The latter includes the poor and minority community members, all selected to be repressed, and whose fundamental democratic rights and opportunities are denied. Additionally, it builds a maximum security society in order to deter rebellions generated by its lack of investment in education and social protection. What's more, the Thug State can be characterised by corruption, deficiency of responsibility, and activities which, albeit not illegal, exploit individuals or betray their trust.[120] The victims of the Thug State need to get organised so as to gain political power. Nevertheless, as mentioned previously, the coalition persisted in maintaining divisions to prevent effective mobilisation.

Division is a key tool enabling the state to rule more easily, as only a united, organised oppressed class could oppose authoritarianism effectively. The coalition certainly deepened divisions at two levels. Firstly, just like Thatcher at the time, it intensified the struggle between two nations – the productive (i.e., of unsubsidized goods and services) and the parasitic (i.e., the various pauper classes and those whose work is "unprofitable to capitalist forms of accounting").[121] Secondly, the government reinforced the struggle within the poorest section of the community, with some members considering 'gang' members and rioters as mere direct or indirect vectors of degrading living conditions on a daily basis and in the aftermath of riots. An almost entire population paralysed by fear, namely the fear of 'gangs' and rioters, and the fear of government, was tamed by a coalition who, as its representatives, had a free hand as far as implementing its ideology and pursuing the common bad was concerned. There cannot be democracy without conflict, but the deliberate and constant persecution of the poor culture somewhat hushed the opponents to the state. As a result, the genuine pursuit of the common good by 'gang' members and rioters against a contemptuous, morally corrupt,

[113] For instance, see Patrick Hennessy et al., "David Laws Resigns over Expenses Claim", *The Guardian* (2010), *www.theguardian.com*.
[114] Wacquant, *Punishing*, 312.
[115] Joseph Wresinski, "Le pauvre est en liberté surveillée", *France Culture* (1976), *www.franceculture.fr*.
[116] Loïc Wacquant, "Ordering Insecurity: Social Polarization and the Punitive Upsurge", *Radical Philosophy Review*, 11.1 (2008), 12.
[117] Meaning the government favoured some type of natural selection and the survival of the socially fittest in the population. Wacquant, *Punishing*, 312.
[118] Monia O'Brien Castro, "Entre gestion sécuritaire et mobilisations citoyennes: les émeutes londoniennes de 2011 comme révélateur d'une gouvernance déficiente" (to be published).
[119] Ian R. Taylor, *The New Criminology for a Social Theory of Deviance* (London: Routledge, 1973).
[120] Stephen Richards and Michael Avey, "Controlling State Crime in the United States of America: What Can We Do About the Thug State?", in Jeffrey Ian Ross, *Varieties of State Crime and Its Control* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 31-33.
[121] Bob Jessop et al., eds., *Thatcherism. A Tale of Two Nations* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 87-88.

authoritarian, repressive, and irresponsible state in a "legitimacy crisis",[122] namely a state perceived as illegitimate as it privileged profit over Keynesian redistributive policies, was certainly hindered.[123]

The time when Cameron advocated to understand "the background, the reasons, the causes" of crime had definitely been long gone when he declared war on 'gangs'. The latest study published on the 2011 English riots stated that indeed, blame could not be put on "the bad", "the mad" and "the bad leading the mad",[124] as claimed by Murray-inspired authorities endeavouring to escape responsibility and hide structural problems.[125] Ultimately, 'gangs' as well as rioters, epitomised an ideological force rather than an explanation to the disturbances.[126] While they were both the symptoms of the failure of Big Society, that had been announced as the antidote to "broken society", they ironically appeared to be the emblems of cohesion, solidarity, and sense of community.[127] 'Gang' members and rioters pursued the common good, when the government stood for the archetype of division. All in all, the crux of the issue lay in a "broken state" in pursuit of the common bad.[128]

Assuredly, the coalition terrorised British citizens as a whole and the disintegrated working class that had become socially and politically invisible even more, pretending to tackle the "disease" it had identified.[129] Refusing to remedy poverty, the absolute disease blighting society, and criminalising the poor guaranteed the perpetuation of 'gangs', undoubtedly the triggering of riots in the future, and a healthy neoliberal capitalism. The coalition depended on all these factors. The use of Thatcherite 2.0 coercive power amounted to democratic regression as "the injustice machine accelerated in the cause of law and order and the safeguarding of people's rights and civic entitlements were considered an almost obscene concern".[130] On the contrary, scratching the surface there was evidence that continuously angered 'gang' members and rioters tried and negotiated the position of their community within mainstream society, thereby empowering themselves and acting as legitimate citizens taking part in the democratic process, however controversially.

Their chaotic pursuit of the common good may seem to be doomed as history has tended to repeat itself. Still, the *Guardian* as previously alluded to, cared to give the rebels a voice, teaming up with LSE to look into the causes of the 2011 riots. In addition, a young man the author met in Tottenham was one of those who explained that the media had not paid attention to the peaceful march to Scotland Yard he and 2,000 Blacks had participated in prior to the riots, in reaction to Smiley Culture's death. The 1980s reggae star had died while police officers searched his home. Many a rioter had been able to detail their difficulties on a daily basis thanks to the August disorders though. Was this the beginning of a slow yet virtuous process that would modify the media's portrayal of the younger elements of the underclass, have public opinion break free from the manipulation it had been subjected to via the 'culture of fear', thus restricting the authorities' leeway, and allow dissenters to get together in traditional structures and achieve bona fide common good?

[122] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).
[123] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).
[124] Drury et al., *Re-Reading*, 16.
[125] The American political scientist avers the Welfare State maintains the poor in poverty as they are not encouraged to get out of it. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
[126] Hallsworth and Brotherton, *Urban,* 16.
[127] Scottish Centre for Crime Justice Research, *Gangs and Global Exchange: Confronting the Glasgow Gang Complex-Conference Report* (University of Glasgow, 2011), 10.
[128] Tom Slater, "From 'Criminality' to Marginality: Rioting Against a Broken State", *Human Geography*, 3.4 (2011),1.
[129] Tapsfield et al., "PM".
[130] Gus John, "Oh Dear! That Criminal Minority Again! – Handsworth, Brixton, Tottenham", *Race Today*, 16.6 (January 1986).

Brad Bullock

Anger and Identity in the Divided States of America

Abstract: Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger* provides a paradigm for making sense of the current global rise of authoritarian populist movements that sanction violence and social unrest. This paper uses Mishra's framework and primary themes to illuminate the extraordinary 2020 U.S. Presidential election and its aftermath, including a mob attack on the U.S. Capitol building: a violent attempt by angry loyalists of Donald Trump to stop a peaceful transfer of power. After presenting evidence that Trumpism is a unique form of populism, the work closes with some discussion about how to mitigate such movements.

Keywords: *Trumpism*, *nationalism*, *postnormal*, *postfactual*, *authoritarian populism*, *activism*

In his provocative work *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Pankaj Mishra provides an extremely useful comparative-historical framework for making sense of recent events, placing them within a coherent set of broad and long-term trends.[1] Specifically, he presents a striking investigation of current, shared global experiences – e.g., the rise of right-wing extremism, violence, social and political unrest – that define an era dominated by universal angst, resentment and outrage, a time when divisive messages are magnified by newer forms of social media that fuel seemingly intractable culture wars, both within and between nations.

I will use Mishra's framework and primary themes to illuminate the extraordinary 2020 U.S. Presidential election and its aftermath, including a shocking mob attack on the U.S. Capitol building: a violent attempt by angry loyalists of Donald Trump to stop a peaceful transfer of power to his newly elected rival, Joe Biden. This main focus is further related to other such major events around the world, including some suggested by Mishra's book.

This paper starts with an overview of how Mishra's arguments predict and then explain the rise of what may be called 'Trumpism' and its persistence in the current global context. In some ways Trump and Trumpism – an authoritarian, right-wing form of populism – fit remarkably well within the paradigm put forward in *Age of Anger*, yet I will argue that in some aspects they are notably unusual and uniquely American. Trumpism's potential threat to U.S. democracy deserves particular attention because of the real and symbolic weight of America as a model for liberal democracies everywhere (a very different sense of 'American exceptionalism' than the version usually sold by the political right). Finally, I contend we must address something that Mishra and most public intellectuals do not: what practical steps can we take to unravel the threads of dangerous populist movements? In the U.S. case, can the most disruptive parts of movements like Trumpism be dismantled?

1. History of the Present: Sowing the Seeds of 'Negative Solidarities'

Mishra's basic point is that the present global rise of combative, increasingly violent forms of right-wing populism was set up quite some time ago. Viewed in their proper context, the vicious attacks of far-right nationalist groups on their own democratic governments, their national institutions, and their fellow citizens are neither sudden nor random. Rather than bewildering, they are instead predictable.

[1] Punkaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

What is today justifiably called a worldwide, modern 'crisis of democracy' has been brewing, says Mishra, since the eighteenth century, when new and powerful forms of 'liberalism' took hold. While Enlightenment thinkers began to peddle a historically radical ideology focused on universal, individual human rights – including the entitlement of common people to happiness and personal fulfillment – a new class of industrial capitalists simultaneously began to show the power of mass production to supply common people with a wealth of material goods while preaching the gospel of economic modernism and trade liberalization. In short, what we are experiencing now is effectively the result of the failure of Enlightenment liberalism to deliver the goods as promised after it was widely embraced as the way forward. Or more precisely, Mishra argues that, in comprehensive terms, liberalism has brought great benefits to a relative few, mostly in the West. Global capitalism has distributed its bounty in a highly unequal way, while the arrival of globalized social media has made it possible to spread, exponentially, the lifestyles and assured privileges of the 'haves' along with the frustrated disillusion and disappointment of the 'have-nots'.[2]

What Enlightenment liberalism has bequeathed to everyone is a "culture of individualism" that, Mishra says, "went universal, in ways barely anticipated by Tocqueville, or Adam Smith, who first theorized about a 'commercial society' of self-seeking individuals", and he continues:

> Thus, individuals with very different pasts find themselves herded by capitalism and technology into a common present, where grossly unequal distributions of wealth and power have created humiliating new hierarchies. This proximity, or what Hannah Arendt called 'negative solidarity,' is rendered more claustrophobic by digital communications, the improved capacity for envious and resentful comparison, and the commonplace, and therefore compromised, quest for individual distinction and singularity.[3]

Whereas those bound by these 'negative solidarities' could once count on traditional community or family ties to absorb the shocks of modernity and technology, they now feel left behind, exposed, disregarded and disaffected.

Mishra also disputes as myth the narrative that liberal modernism has mostly proceeded peacefully in the West or that, for example, U.S. progress should stand as a model for the rest of the world. Instead, he recounts a brutal slog into modernity: social Darwinism, race wars, crimes against ethnic and religious minorities, and so on. Thus, Mishra contends that "the history of modernization is largely one of carnage and bedlam rather than peaceful convergence"[4] and he locates the birth of modern fascism not with Hitler or Mussolini but with their obscure and inspirational predecessor, Gabriele D'Annunzio, a self-proclaimed messiah who briefly held an area of Italy during a power vacuum following WWI. D'Annunzio's crusade encompasses all of the hallmarks of today's authoritarian, nationalist counter-movements: a return to some former greatness, a violent purification of society from the perceived abuses and inequalities imposed by a decadent 'elite', and purging masculinity of any flaccid weakness.

As promises of Enlightenment liberalism fail to materialize, Mishra suggests that "the old West-dominated world order is giving way to an apparent global disorder",[5] while returning to 'what was' is not a real option. Essentially, the world is in for a rough ride. We can expect the continued growth of sociopolitical movements that incorporate "[a]n existential resentment of other people's being, caused by an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness [which] poisons civil society

[2] Ibid., 7, 13.
[3] Ibid., 12-13.
[4] Ibid., 17.
[5] Ibid., 34.

and undermines political liberty, and is presently making for a global turn to authoritarianism and toxic forms of chauvinism".[6]

The relevance of all this to a discussion of Trumpism should be painfully obvious by now. Though Mishra is referring to non-Western nationalists who are reacting to a recent colonial past, he might as well be speaking of Trump's base when he writes that they, "suffer from the fact that old certitudes about their place in the world – including their sense of identity and self-worth – have been lost along with their links to traditional communities and other systems of support and comfort and sources of meaning".[7]

Mishra's formula aids us in seeing how Trump's rise to capture America's Republican Party is a logical apotheosis: Trump's movement is both foreseeable and typical – just another demagogue in a storm of right-wing populism.[8] Nationalism has been 'going global' since the late 19th century, and all such movements demonstrate "An anxious struggle for existence, a deep fear of 'decadence' and emasculation, and a messianic craving for a strenuous ethic, a New Man and New Order".[9] Mishra's description of Gabriele D'Annunzio might as well be for Trump and much of his base: "a parvenu who tried to pass himself off as an aristocrat ... an opportunistic prophet for angry misfits ... who saw themselves as wholly dispensable in a society where economic growth enriched only a minority and democracy appeared to be a game rigged by the powerful".[10] The ironic difference from other historical movements is that Trump's base supports its primary oppressors.

Trump's supporters resemble the disaffected foot soldiers of nationalist movements everywhere, people who feel cheated or left behind in relation to modern, consumerist promises and who espouse hatred of the perceived beneficiaries of a biased government and economy.[11] As Mishra puts it, "[r]egardless of their national origins and locally attuned rhetoric, these disenfranchised men target those they regard as venal, callous, and mendacious elites. Donald Trump led an upsurge of white nationalists enraged at being duped by globalized liberals" and "while supporting despotic leaders they talk endlessly of their superior 'values' – a rhetoric that has now blended into a white supremacist hatred, lucratively exploited by Trump, of immigrants, refugees and Muslims".[12] Trumpism, then, may be seen as the latest act in a long play, since the history of the U.S. is littered with white supremacy, racists laws and segregationist policies (e.g., against Chinese immigrants and African Americans).

Yet, however much our angry present may be explained by the past, there are aspects of the current era that are historically unprecedented – predictable only in their unpredictability. These aspects are best described as 'postnormal': they create new, specific 'conditions' for anger and resentment in what Zia Sardar[13] calls postnormal times, characterized by "uncertainty, rapid change, realignment of power, upheaval and chaotic behavior ... an in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have yet to be born, and very few things seem to make sense".[14] Sardar argues that the postnormal phenomena of 'complexity, chaos, and contradictions' are now the primary features of our

[6] Ibid., 14.
[7] Ibid., 13.
[8] Ibid., 8, where Mishra observes, "demagogues of all kinds, from Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan to India's Narendra Modi, France's Marine Le Pen and America's Donald Trump, have tapped into the simmering reservoirs of cynicism, boredom, and discontent".
[9] Ibid., 30.
[10] Ibid., 2.
[11] Mishra wisely states that nationalism is ultimately: "a mystification, if not a dangerous fraud with its promise of making a country 'great again' and its denunciation of the 'other'; it conceals the real conditions of existence, and the true origins of suffering, even as it seeks to replicate the comforting balm of transcendent ideals ... [for] ... people who feel left behind by the globalized economy or contemptuously ignored by its slick overlords and cheerleaders in politics, business, and the media". Ibid., 274.
[12] Ibid., 76, 6.
[13] Ziauddin Sardar, "Welcome to Postnormal Times", *Futures*, 42 (2010), 435-444.
[14] Ibid., 435.

era's zeitgeist, and that together they affect all natural and social systems, including epistemology. This means that, by default, 'any' political or economic system will face problems of instability and a sense of being unmoored from the past.

The world has become increasingly complex since everything is connected to everything else; in both the economic and geopolitical realms, globally interconnected developments increasingly happen simultaneously and with greater speed. For example, consider how suddenly and simultaneously Russia, China and India have risen to test the world order established by US hegemony. When such systematically intertwined changes come, thick and fast, then "no single model of behaviour, mode of thought, or method ... can provide an answer to all our interconnected, complex ills. The 'free market' is as much a mirage as the suggestion that science or liberal secularism will rescue us from the current impasse".[15]

Sardar, like Mishra, acknowledges the role of social media and the advent of a 24-hour news cycle to sow chaos and disinformation, yet Sardar also stresses the exponential speed at which all web-based, digitized systems can create chaos (e.g., the instantaneous nature of financial trades pushed by computer algorithms). As to contradictions, Sardar particularly considers those that proceed from the accelerating nature of changes that progressively force people to face paradox and uncertainty, including uncertainty about knowledge itself. This psychosocial condition created by the experience of "too much change, too fast", meaning our limited ability to deal with the 'pace' of change, is famously analyzed in Toffler's bestseller *Future Shock*.[16]

One pillar of Mishra's argument is that the Enlightenment experiment has created immense inequalities, both within and between nations; rather than guaranteed uplift for all, vast swaths of the poor and uneducated have been left further behind. This includes a gap in the acquisition and use of factual knowledge, as opposed to 'information', yet all is increasingly produced and consumed on the web. People who are ignorant, either willfully or by circumstance, are easily manipulated by the powerful, even more so in uncertain times. Postnormal times mean that uncertainty and potential for conflict is perpetual, and perhaps such times also forecast what is the most important feature of Trump's populism – that it is 'postfactual'.

2. Creating Trumpism: Nurturing Negative Solidarities

Clearly, a lot of Trump supporters are angry and have lost faith in their government. In response to the rise of Trumpism, the Trump administration's undisguised attacks on democratic institutions and traditions, and to the startling events associated with the most recent U.S. Presidential election,[17] many

[15] Ibid., 437.

[16] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970).

[17] Details of incidents associated with the 2020 U.S. presidential election are generally well known – a simple review of them should suffice. Begin, perhaps, with revelations that Trump and his 2016 campaign staff were aware of Russian efforts to favorably influence the 2016 election, including hacked emails and phony websites dishing dirt on his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton. Trump's 2020 campaign not only welcomed additional Russian meddling in that election, but under the threat of losing U.S. aid and support, Ukrainian leadership was pressured to back a politically damaging narrative about his rival Joe Biden's son, Hunter. Clandestinely, Trump's personal lawyer was sent as an operative to emphasize the threat, and Trump himself went so far as to bully Ukraine's newly elected president, Volodymyr Zelensky, in a personal phone conversation – revelations that finally led to Trump's impeachment. When Trump lost the 2020 election, he and a cabal of supporters refused to acknowledge defeat and tried coercing state legislatures and election officials (most infamously, Georgia Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger) to overturn the election by 'finding him more votes', disallowing votes for Biden, declaring state elections illegal, and even sending alternate slates of electors that would cast their votes for Trump in the tally that officially closes the election. Trump menaced his own Vice President to refuse the results of the electoral votes when the tally was presented to the senate. Trump helped organize and publicize a 'stop the steal' rally on January 6, 2021, encouraging supporters to interrupt the senate's proceedings to transfer power to president-elect Biden, leading directly to an angry, violent mob breaching the Capitol in an unprecedented insurrection that forced the building into lockdown; legislators had to flee for their

pundits and observers have posed questions such as: How can this happen in the United States? Why do so many people among Trump's Republican base vote against their own interests? To fully address such questions, Mishra's grand scheme may be augmented by some more unique aspects of the U.S. context: What else is making us angry? In what ways may Trumpism be distinguished from other populist movements?

In the last few decades, in a postnormal U.S., we find creeping apathy and a jaded disassociation from the political process generally. This trend has given more license to those who would manipulate political and economic systems, and has surely added to the sense that chaotic things simply 'happen' to individuals who, already, keenly feel their vulnerability to forces beyond their control. We might ask: what are U.S. Americans doing instead of engaging in politics?

An interesting answer is supplied by sociologist George Ritzer, who speaks to how the advent of modern advertising and credit has transformed citizens into distracted 'hyper-consumers', and normal social life into priorities for shopping and entertainment. Consumer capitalism has created what Ritzer calls "cathedrals of consumption" (e.g., lavish shopping malls and Disney World).[18] New types of consumerism overwhelm consumers with choices, constantly create new wants, and 're-enchant' the habit of consuming as a daily practice that promises to deliver both happiness and meaning. In exchange for the brief joy of a new product or service, this 'new religion' requires an endless cycle of spending, consuming, debt anxiety, and long hours at work to pay for it all. "The beauty of this system for capitalists", says Ritzer, "is that people are kept in the workplace and on the job by the need to pay the monthly minimums on their credit card accounts and, more generally, to support their consumption habits".[19] One may reasonably assert that, in the US and the West, consuming has become our primary, if not our exclusive, civic responsibility.

So, are U.S. Americans these days more distracted and tired than they are angry? Much more than the Gulf Wars of previous decades, recent images of conflict, suffering, and carnage from Afghanistan, and now Ukraine, is recorded and viewed in real time. Rather than our living room televisions, the ugliness of war now appears on our cell phones – literally placed into our hands. And mostly what we see is devastation, especially for common people or non-combatants. It's too early to tell whether this new way of consuming warfare will shock us long and hard enough to jolt us into prioritizing peace, either at home or abroad. But given the 24/7 news cycle, siloed news outlets, and the new consumerism enumerated by Ritzer, it seems rather doubtful. If we add to these confused, postnormal times the more openly-voiced suspicions that all information is somehow untrustworthy, then perhaps people are driven quickly from anger to exhaustion, and then resignation.

We must also consider the appeal of populism even when economies are reasonably functional and people's prospects aren't bleak. With the decline of stable social and national institutions – the order they provide and the normal roles they require – conflict, or war itself, against real or perceived enemies, can begin to organize life. This may be observed of both foreign and domestic terrorism. For example, war correspondent Chris Hedges, after a long career, concludes "[t]he enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent".[20] Behind all modern populist movements is a call to war.

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lives, while Trump refused to intervene and apparently spent hours enjoying television coverage of the event. For such actions, Trump was impeached a second time – also unprecedented – but his party refused to cooperate in removing him from office and many continue to back Trump's delusional claim that he won the election.

[18] George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2005).

[19] Ibid., 26.

[20] Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 3.

In comparison to authoritarian populism in other advanced, Western nations, some distinguishing features of Trumpism are: how long and how carefully it has been nurtured by the conservative political party, the primacy of religious belief and practice among its supporters, and its nature as postfactual.

The Trump cult is not something that happened randomly or suddenly. It is instead the result of decades of Republican Party efforts to hold onto power by fostering fear and anxiety, especially among white Christians. At least since 1968, when Richard Nixon was successfully ushered into the White House by their 'Southern Strategy' – i.e., purposely using wedge issues like race, abortion, and gun rights to appeal to white voters in traditional Democratic states – Republican strategists have made villainizing their opponents as either dangerous or anti-American into something of an art form. President Reagan, in the 1980s, was noted for undermining trust in government itself, while House Speaker Newt Gingrich in the 1990s made it a practice of Republicans to refuse bi-partisan compromise to the point of shutting down the government. That obstructionist stance has been perfected under the long-standing influence of Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell, affecting a kind of gridlock that makes a poorly functioning government a self-fulling prophecy. In brief, the overarching strategy cultivates division, practically requiring Republican representatives to demonize both the opposition and its supporters, to attack the political system, and to refuse bipartisan compromise. Trumpism, then, represents a willingness of Republicans to proceed that much further along the path to censuring not just 'liberals' but, more importantly, a constructed 'liberal' version of the United States.

Unlike other technically advanced and powerful nations, the U.S. remains highly religious. Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Charismatic Christians – groups who reliably vote Republican – constitute around 40% of the U.S. population.[21] Despite Trump's categorically non-Christian attitudes and behaviors, these conservative Christians overwhelmingly identify as Republicans and remain a large proportion of Trump's base. Likewise, white supremacists emphatically identify as both Republican and evangelical Christians. Robert Jones, in *White Too Long*, argues that white supremacy is inextricably intertwined with American Christianity; from his extensive survey research he reports that, rather than church attendance, the best predictor of someone claiming a Christian identity is how high they score on a racism index.[22]

Drawing heavily from European scholarship, the excellent work *Populist Discourse* (2019) demonstrates that populism is a complicated and slippery concept. Its editors provide definitions of populism as: 1) a strategy; 2) an ideology; 3) a discursive style; and 4) a global phenomenon.[23] However, as a right-wing populist figure, Trump fits any and all of their conceptual categories. As a discursive mode, they say populism requires a strong figure who stands as the genuine mouthpiece for 'the people' – one who clearly defines and vilifies those on the other side as impure enemies, and delivers to adherents a sense of moral superiority and assurances that they are always right (regardless of factual truth). Yet note: these are identical to characteristics that describe charismatic, religious fundamentalism. And it is the central nature of religious fundamentalism that distinguishes Trumpism from, e.g., European forms of populism (in this light, Trumpism may be compared to Modi populism in India; in fact, Trump's brand is arguably the model and inspiration for Modi's).

Heather McCallum-Bayliss uses conceptual metaphor theory and quantitative cognitive analysis of Trump's public remarks to conclude that he revealed as a conqueror rather than a populist – i.e., he is

[21] Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Religion, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 429.
[22] Robert Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).
[23] Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio et al., "Introduction: Unravelling Populist Discourse", in Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio et al., eds., *Populist Discourse: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

centered on solidifying his own power and self-aggrandizement over any real concern for 'the people'.[24] Yet, this analysis is another that does not consider the importance of the religious and racist narrative that drives Trump's base; they know that he is self-serving, even a lying narcissist,[25] but he supports their essentialist vision of a white, Christian social order, and this is why he gets a pass. In this sense, 'the people' are using Trump rather than the other way around. This also explains why all viable Republican candidates must become some version of Trump.

It's common for analysts to express the deep, political divisions between Democrats and Republicans in terms of 'culture wars' stemming from differences in economic class, education, and geography. However, for hordes of these cultural warriors who embrace Trumpism, religion is paramount. Republican strategists have successfully coupled fighting Democrats with God's calling, so that the culture wars are melded to the greater religious war of God's Kingdom against the triumph of liberal secularism. Elsewhere, I argue that, "[f]or many, 'patriot' simultaneously signifies a place in *God's* army – modern-day Crusaders against creeping secularism, sacred warriors fighting for America as a (white) Christian nation, designated by Providence to preserve 'God's Kingdom' around the world".[26] I don't think this point could be overemphasized.

Trump has not only granted license to be mean and virulently contemptuous, openly at war with an 'enemy' of liberal, Democratic 'snowflakes'[27] – his brand of populist rule moves the U.S. precariously into a postfactual era. Many of his followers admit that Trump chronically lies, but they also admire his bold habit of espousing his own 'truths' (or, as his aide Kellyanne Conway suggested, "alternative facts") – particularly when aligned with what they value or believe about America.[28] It's not just that Trump models a 'refreshing' dismissal of polite civil debate: he legitimizes the idea that facts and truth are merely a matter of what you prefer to believe.

It's common fare for authoritarian demagogues to attack a free press and to marginalize as treacherous both scientists and other educated 'elites' – Trump has done this routinely, labeling mainstream press outlets that oppose him 'lame-stream media' and declaring that troublesome scientific studies (e.g., about preventing the spread of COVID or climate change) are not just unreliable, but part of some conspiratorial 'liberal' (read Democratic and secular) agenda. Such attacks are likely necessary to assert authoritarian control within any democracy.[29] But Trump's most enduring legacy is truly more damaging to democracy: making it acceptable for his followers to construct reality from belief, unencumbered by the need for real facts, and then to ignore any inconvenient truths that dispute that reality.

Mishra emphasizes the growing role of new forms of social media[30] to promote not just an agenda but alternate world views: "Marshalling large armies of trolls and twitter bots against various

[24] She states: "A Conqueror does not need to represent the people and Trump does not". Heather McCallum-Bayliss, "Donald Trump Is a Conqueror", in Hidalgo-Tenorio et al., *Populist Discourse*, 255.

[25] It's important, of course, to acknowledge the persuasive power of social media platforms to influence people's reality: a portion of Trump supporters actually believe the lies.

[26] Brad Bullock, "A Postnormal Election in Postnormal Times", *World Futures*, 78 (2021), 87-100; see 97-98.

[27] Though highly relevant, space limitations prevent a discussion of hate speech; e.g., see Caitlin Ring Carlson, *Hate Speech*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021); Stanley Fish, *The First: How to Think About Hate Speech, Campus Speech, Religious Speech, Fake News, Post-Truth, and Donald Trump* (New York: Atria, 2019).

[28] Along with other scholars – see, e.g., Ewan Speed and Russell Mannion, "The Rise of Post-Truth Populism in Pluralist Liberal Democracies", *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 6(5) (2017), 249-251 –, Hildago-Tenorio et al. underscore the "post-truth" nature of movements like Trumpism (which, typically, includes racism, xenophobia, anti-elitism or anti-intellectualism, and anti-globalism); see Hildago-Tenorio et al., "Introduction", 6.

[29] See Steven Livitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018). Their comprehensive study claims that the most important criteria for identifying authoritarian leaders are: denying the legitimacy of opponents, tolerating violence, and attacking the press.

[30] See also Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 2016).

'enemies' of the people, the contemporary demagogues seem as aware as Marshall McLuhan that digital communications help create and consolidate new mythologies of unity and community".[31] Yet beyond this, postnormal times seem to have created a universal, global dualism where people everywhere are grouped into one of two camps: those for whom progress is forward and unknown, and those who somehow hope to go backward. This dualism has now metastasized in the American body politic, and it operates to tug the U.S. in two, diametrically opposed directions. As the Capitol insurgency illustrates, the U.S. is literally at war with itself.

Trump understands the power of the web to spread a false message – the greatest blow to his power was not losing the 2020 election, but the decision by Twitter to block his account.[32] For those who reject autocratic rule in favor of strengthening democracy in the U.S., even the potential to re-elect Donald Trump as president in 2024 comprises a particular nightmare, but despite Trump's considerable personality cult, any other aspiring demagogue will find it easy enough to raise the banner. Trump's postfactual legacy likely means further entrenchment into opposing camps touting very different 'realities' about America, even if one is notably manufactured from lies and misinformation. In this context, a declaration by Hannah Arendt from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* remains especially disturbing: "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist".[33]

3. What Now: Unraveling Negative Solidarities

As a diagnosis of current times, Mishra's *Age of Anger* is truly a stunning 'tour de force'. Here again is Mishra's argument in a nutshell: autocratic nationalism is "a seductive but treacherous antidote to an experience of disorder and meaninglessness: the unexpectedly rowdy anticlimax, in a densely populated world, of the Western European eighteenth-century dream of a universally secular, materialist, and peaceful civilization".[34] In a steady voice, he also delivers a global prognosis that is rather bleak: effectively, we can expect additional retreat into authoritarian populism and various forms of tribalism, more rage, and violence. In the end, however, he leaves us all rather in the dark as to what we might do about this. He finishes the book with a call, especially for the West, to engage in some transformative thinking.

Mishra well-deserves his acclaim as a public intellectual, but like many analysts he sticks with reporting and raising our consciousness. He ultimately refrains from practical suggestions about what to do now in the *Age of Anger* – as dangerous times and existential crises loom, it's hard not to feel he's like a fellow who raises the alarm that the house is burning, gives a detailed explanation of how it will burn, but then doesn't join the bucket brigade. Maybe the house will burn down and something better built atop the ashes, but I assume that the transformative thinking Mishra calls us to is about finding effective ways to pour water on the fire.

I've spoken already to some unusual ways that nationalist populism has emerged in the U.S. – including a type of racism and white supremacy developed from a long history of slavery in a religiously Christian nation – and I'll remain focused on recent, watershed events surrounding the

[31] Ibid., 269.
[32] The $44 billion takeover bid of Twitter by Elon Musk now complicates matters, since he originally announced plans to restore Trump's account; in May 2022, the rather unpredictable Musk announced he had suspended that decision pending more investigation into 'misinformation' and 'fake accounts' on the popular site. In October, 2022, he reinstated his intention to buy the company.
[33] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 474.
[34] Ibid., 166.

2020 election. However, in an effort to further extend the usefulness of Mishra's analytical scheme, I'll address issues of immigration and national identity in the U.S. before turning to some ways that troublesome movements like Trumpism might be undone.

Mishra certainly mentions increasing immigration into the West – both as a cause of growing nationalism, and as the ironic result of production and consumption patterns established by global capitalism touted by the West. People generally migrate either for resources or to flee conflict and violence stemming from a lack of resources. While selling the Enlightenment dream, Mishra says that "liberals and technocrats rarely considered such constraining factors as finite geographical space, degradable natural resources and fragile ecosystems".[35] It's instructive, though, to put current immigration trends into historical context. Varying estimates of world population in 1920 center around 1.86 billion people,[36] whereas today it stands at about 8 billion – meaning that in only a hundred years human population has increased more than four-fold. Mishra is right to stress how the Enlightenment raised expectations about individual rights and quality of life. The speed and volume at which the promised beneficiaries have increased, however, is an essential reason that the demand for a Western, capitalist lifestyle has not been satisfied. There is hope that a set of universal human rights, already embraced in principle by a vast majority of nations, may still become a global reality. But the promise that modernism would distribute a cornucopia of material goods to all, arguably utopian from the start, now stands revealed as sheer folly. Any effective policy to address real issues associated with immigration, terrorism, and climate change will have to take human numbers into account.

Immigration and population trends deserve particular attention in the U.S. for many reasons. America is truly a nation of immigrants: not only are the overwhelming majority of citizens descended from mostly European settlers or the people they enslaved, but about 15% of the current U.S. population is comprised of people born elsewhere, with Mexicans constituting about a quarter of these. The U.S., known historically as the land of 'plenty' and 'opportunity,' remains a top receiving nation for immigrants and, by comparison, has received during its short history the largest and most diverse population of immigrants in the world. Now the world's third most populous nation, the U.S. has grown from about 106 million in 1920 to a country of 334 million today, more than tripling in size. Just since 1965, the number of immigrants in the U.S. has increased by 400%, and without the arrival of immigrants each year, America's population would actually be decreasing. All of this is highly relevant to the rise of Trumpism and what comes after.

It has long been a Republican strategy to weaken the power of the social contract by starving government and then running on a platform that it doesn't work. Especially after 9/11, conservatives have used the 'global war on terror' to great effect, spinning a narrative that creates Islamophobia and a perpetual 'us versus them' scenario captured best in Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*.[37] The backdrop of global culture, where external threats are everywhere, is vital to this narrative – not just to stir up feelings of nationalism but to shift discussion away from inadequate domestic policies. Immigrants and refugees are easy targets for populist fury.[38]

Mishra notes how Trump gained attention using "repeated threats to Mexicans and Muslims".[39] Simply witness Trump's attempts to build a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico and thwart travel

[35] Ibid., 18.
[36] See Population Reference Bureau's official website, *prb.org*. This is about the same size as today's worldwide population of Muslims, a group Mishra argues has been largely failed by liberal modernism.
[37] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
[38] Mishra does discuss this in a subsequent piece. See Punkaj Mishra, "The Religion of Whiteness Becomes a Suicide Cult", *New York Times* (2018), *www.nytimes.com*.
[39] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 272.

into America from Muslim countries.[40] And Mishra previously observes, "[i]n the absence of reasonable debate, conspiracy theories and downright lies abound, and even gain broad credence: it was while peddling one of them, 'Obama is a foreign-born Muslim', that Donald Trump rose to political prominence".[41] There is reasoned debate in America, just not among Trump and most of his supporters, who see no reason to debate anything.

Posing the question of why so many Trump supporters vote against their self-interest overemphasizes rational individualism; tribalism and national identity provide better frameworks for the answers.[42] Political wisdom holds that winning elections is about jobs. Nationalist populism isn't about jobs but rather preserving a cherished cultural identity. High anxiety and anger from the notion that Caucasian culture is being undermined by non-white or Muslim immigrants is the common theme behind nationalist movements throughout the West. For his supporters, Trump's slogan 'Make America Great Again' easily translates to 'Make America White Again', the thrust behind the Republican use of 'replacement theory'.[43] But more than elsewhere, nationalist populism in the U.S. incorporates a primacy for maintaining America's religious identity: specifically, that of a 'Protestant', Christian nation.[44] Concern about America becoming a secular nation is what consistently motivates religious conservatives to vote Republican, along with a form of Christianity that comfortably coexists with racism and xenophobia.

Liberals mistakenly continue to believe that rational thought and reasonable presentation of facts will ultimately win the day. Liberal modernism's value-neutral tenets naively ignore the essential fact that people finally understand themselves and the world through a shared cultural story. What selective cultural or historical knowledge is chosen to construct the story we live in matters profoundly. People can, and often do, create and populate conflicting cultural narratives.

While Trump's far right supporters routinely call themselves 'patriots', it's important to distinguish them instead as nationalists, using national symbols to validate their vision of America. For them, the flag they prominently wave at protests and rallies represents an America carefully selected from the past, an exclusively White, Protestant Christian America that's never truly existed. America is now undeniably at odds with the official country described in the 2020 decennial census: a country that's no longer predominantly white, nor Christian, nor racially segregated, nor rural, nor male-dominated.[45] They prefer to live in a different national story about where the country is going, a country authenticated by Trumpism, unchallenged by demographic or scientific facts: appeals from the left tied to virtue, facts, or 'patriotism' are unlikely to alter this dynamic. The riotous Trump supporters who

[40] Mishra also comments on how "Samuel Huntington fretted in his last book, *Who Are We? The Challenges of America's National Identity* (2004), about the destruction of white American culture by Hispanic immigration – a theme taken up vigorously by Donald Trump promising to make America great again". Ibid., 274.

[41] Ibid., 176.

[42] White conservatives who vote Republican typically cite group values like patriotism and national security when choosing a president; see Larry Bartles, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the Gilded Age* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2008).

[43] Consider that 'replacement theory' has now moved from the conspiratorial fringe of far-right websites into mainstream Republican dialog. The 'theory' – that Black and Hispanic immigrants are being used by Democratic elites to replace White Americans – has been particularly amplified by the ultraconservative Fox host Tucker Carlson as an effective way to foment anger and increase his ratings.

[44] Conservative Protestants are willing to work with 'Catholic allies' on common issues (particularly abortion). Replacement theory also commonly includes anti-Islamic or antisemitic messages, as made clear in the infamous and deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.

[45] Trump's administration repeatedly pushed for changes to the 2020 census that experts reported would intentionally undercount documented immigrants. Trump and his supporters continue to assert utterly false claims that illegal voting by undocumented immigrants stole the election from 'real' Americans.

stormed the U.S. Capitol represent not just an attack on American democracy, but a fierce rejection by populists of a conception of the U.S. they've been emboldened to hate.[46]

Those on the left continue to fail strategically because they fall back too much on enlightened self-interest (who does the most for me, a kind of rational exchange theory) or enlightened reason (what are the facts). Moreover, they remain willfully ignorant of the religious values expressed by Trump supporters in this very religious nation, or write it off as whacky supernatural rubbish undeserving of serious attention. Religion is also a force that gives meaning. This is fully understood by Scott Atran, who in *Talking to the Enemy* says of Islam abroad or Christianity in America:

"Secularists see believers as believing in what is crazy; believers see secularists as mired in what is meaningless. Each side demands that the other come to its senses and seek unconditional surrender. Or else. That's a prescription for conflict and war, not for democracy, tolerance of diversity, or global consensus".[47]Atran also states that "[r]eason's greatest challenge – in politics, ethics, or everyday life – is to gain knowledge and leverage over unreason: to cope with it, compete with it, and perhaps channel it; not to fruitlessly annihilate it by reasoning it away".[48]

The rapid spread of social media platforms can encourage political engagement, but alone doesn't ensure activism. These days, on the political left or right, self-expression outperforms political action.[49] As to what to do for countering Trumpism and restoring a healthy U.S. democracy, I've stressed before the importance of reviving modes of 'nonvirtual' social activism that have been effective in the past – sustained grassroots movements; physical and real-time protests that require citizens to take to the streets.[50] Civil rights for African-Americans, ending the Viet Nam War, recognizing the full citizenship of women, homosexuals and same-sex couples: all required this more costly form of activism. In fact, those are the same modes of activism used by conservative movements such as the Tea Party and Trumpism to alter the social and political landscape.

We should also acknowledge that the anger that drives Trumpism, the frustration expressed by Trump's base that their government no longer prioritizes their needs or that educated, urban professionals are content to ignore them or leave them behind is at least partially valid. While it's certainly unfair to single out Democratic 'elites', Mishra correctly states that, e.g., "support for Donald Trump's white nationalism connects with middle-aged working-class men, who have suffered a dramatic deterioration in mortality due to suicide, and an increase in morbidity because of drug and alcohol abuse".[51]

In the closing section, I'll address what is the hardest and unavoidably necessary form of activism for unraveling Trumpism or other forms of authoritarianism: finding ways to establish a dialog with those currently enthralled by nationalist populism.

4. Talking to the Enemy

Trumpism is a form of cultural fundamentalism with a distinctive religious quality. The violence committed by Trump supporters is a form of domestic terrorism; it cultivates, as Mishra says, "the

[46] Mishra suggests that populists the world over share a suspicion that the 'elites' who control the government are enemies of freedom, and states: "The fierce contempt among these groups in America for Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton reflects more than just a misogynist backlash against the gains of feminism, or deflected hatred of minorities; it reflects a diminished respect for the political process itself". Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 341.
[47] Ibid., 476.
[48] Ibid., 426.
[49] For too many, 'taking action' now means donating to an organization that does your civic work for you, or merely signing an online petition and re-posting links to commentary you 'like' – a form of political behavior labeled 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism'; see Brad Bullock, "Big, Bad Trump", *Critical Muslim*, 28 (2018), 53-64.
[50] See Bullock, "A Postnormal Election in Postnormal Times".
[51] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 326.

sentiment, generated by the news media and amplified by social media, that anything can happen anywhere to anybody at any time".[52] Trump populists who participate in castigating 'liberals' and 'elites' would be surprised by how much they resemble the Islamic terrorists they hate. The 'near enemy' for Trump's Republicans are fellow citizens who they reflexively reject and villainize, even to the point of using violence and killing for their cause, comparable to radical fundamentalists everywhere. Right-wing Christians who insist that the U.S. and its laws should conform to their own religious notions don't just contradict the indisputable intent of America's constitutional founders to protect religious freedom by separating church and state: their views resemble those of Islamic fundamentalists in theocracies like Iran, ruled by Sharia law. With this in mind, strategies for successfully engaging Trumpists might take a page from the playbook of Scott Atran, a cultural anthropologist and international expert on anti-terrorism.[53]

Both Mishra and Atran recognize similar trends and draw comparisons between the fundamentalist violence wrought by angry and disaffected groups abroad and in the U.S., those who have lost faith in the viability of the current order. For example, Mishra contends that "Trump and his supporters in the world's richest country are no less the dramatic symptom of a general crisis of legitimacy than those terrorists who plan and inspire mass violence by exploiting the channels of global integration".[54] Or, here is Atran: "There's a lot in common, for example ... between the jihadi movement and the Christian Identity Movement vision of Revelation and the bloody apocalyptic fantasies of Tim LaHaye's Left Behind series (around 50 million copies sold)".[55] Returning to Mishra's account of D'Annunzio's revolutionary message of purging and purifying the 'real' country, adherents of Trumpism who resort to hatred and violence compare with Atran's description of Islamic radicals who "learn to live in a conceptually closed community of comrades bound to a cause, which they mistake for the real world" and who preach withdrawal from a corrupt society, mobilizing around a "message of withdrawal from impure mainstream society and of a need for a violent action to cleanse it".[56]

In *Talking to the Enemy*, Atran claims that U.S. anti-terror policies have largely failed because, in overreacting to Islamic terrorism, we have relied on military intervention, occupation, and supporting corrupt governments rather than recognizing the continued power of religion to organize and sustain collective commitment and sacrifice.[57] We cannot expect to sway religious fundamentalists anywhere by running roughshod over their values while appealing to science and reason – even promises of jobs and infrastructure won't be enough. Religion has coevolved with the need to encourage large-scale cooperation among non-kin.[58] Religious rituals, or quasi-religious nationalist ones, foster "cooperation within the group [while] making it more competitive with other groups".[59] Religious fundamentalism,

[52] Ibid., 10.
[53] Like Mishra, Atran is a formidable public intellectual who is also a co-founder of the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford University.
[54] Ibid., 342.
[55] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 473.
[56] Ibid., 268, 270.
[57] In fact, Atran contends that the more costly, absurd, counterintuitive and unreal the religious beliefs required of adherents, the more collective commitment and sacrifice they produce.
[58] Recent work by Joseph Henrich makes a convincing argument that religion was necessary to allow small tribal societies to 'scale up', and that without it there would have been no way to create modern societies that encourage large-scale cooperation beyond kinship ties. Moreover, without effective replacement of loyalty to a Catholic church over kin groups, there would never have been an opening for Protestantism to forge the evolutionary side path from which Western liberal societies emerge. For example, long before the Enlightenment, Protestants insisted on providing its adherents with individual self-determination and literacy. Put another way, religion has ultimately wrought citizens who may openly criticize or personally reject religion (we might call that 'freedom of speech' and 'the separation of church and state'). Joseph Henrich, *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2020).
[59] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 456.

and the terror networks they sometimes spawn, are less about politics and more about feeling a part of a family or tribe that delivers meaning through sacrifice to a larger cause; this is counter to a social goal centered on individual rights or personal advancement.

Atran also reminds us that religion in the U.S. has developed as a voluntary and civic organization. Among our religious conservatives is a historical mistrust of institutional authority that explains, e.g., the appeal of politicians like Sarah Palin – a Charismatic Christian who peppers her speeches with spiritual references that make "the absolute and arbitrary boundaries of 'the sacred' ... markers of cultural identity".[60] Rather than limit religious experience to church activities, there is a call to infuse all aspects of life with religious fervor. Atran notes that "'[a]ction', 'challenge' and 'change' are the watchwords of the Charismatic movement, which encourages people to ... wage 'spiritual combat' where the forces of good and evil, God and Satan, may battle".[61] This is why it's a problem that Democrats are now associated with evil, as in the 'Pizzagate' episodes, or with strict secularism and atheism; they are rendered unpatriotic by default.

Mishra's analysis remains highly relevant, but at least in the case of the U.S., there is more to anger and violence than disappointment with unfulfilled material promises: religion is a problematic constant. On one hand, Atran acknowledges: "It was not Enlightenment views of humanity that drove the abolitionist movement in America in the first half of the nineteenth century ... or the civil rights movement in the second half of the twentieth. It was the religious reckoning against 'the national sin', pulsating from the pulpit in thunderous throbs".[62] Yet Christianity was also essential for reestablishing white, racist control in the post-Reconstruction South: "Preachers in white Protestant churches railed against the loss of traditional sacred values – of honor, duty, and respect – to modern Yankee vices of crass commerce, sexual license, and drunkenness".[63] Atran relates how 'leaderless resistance' cells used by Islamic terrorists were practiced earlier by the Ku Klux Klan, and how the apocalyptic screed *The Turner Diaries* by American William Pierce was not only the inspiration for Timothy McVeigh's 1995 bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City, but also for the 9/11 attacks.

The political divide in the U.S. is also a religious divide. So, how to begin bridging the distance? Generally, citizens who care about preserving democracy and rule of law on both sides can create or seek out constructive conversations about a common future. Not all Republicans support Trump or Trumpism (consider The Lincoln Project), nor should liberals join in the populist behavior of hating or shunning them as somehow irredeemable; many are just as appalled by the fascist elements of U.S. populism (like somehow standing for 'law and order' while also bringing down government, or claiming to protect the Constitution while standing behind an insurrection by 'patriots' who attacked the Capitol to stop a critical procedure mandated by the Constitution).

People need viable alternatives to fear, war, conflict; it's imperative to find meaning in a common story. Even those who abhor religion can practice non-hostility to religious people and – without accepting what is unacceptable – seek the threads of a common narrative: what do you most want for the country or the future of our children? Are you for fairly-drawn voting districts? Better schools or better jobs? Mishra himself suggests that finally we must consider "the irreducible human being, her or his fears, desires and resentments. It is in the unstable relationship between the inner and public selves that one can start to take a more precise measure of today's global civil war".[64]

If we wish to blunt or dismantle the anger that drives Trumpism, we have to fashion ways to reengage the angry in uneasy conversations about creating a common national and cultural story, and this won't happen by writing off religion as either silly or irrelevant. We might start by sacrificing a

[60] Ibid., 472.
[61] Ibid., 465.
[62] Ibid., 470.
[63] Ibid., 470.
[64] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 35.

superior or dismissive position concerning religion and the religious. Just as those on the secular left, like myself, would be uninterested in arguments that champion religion or promote it, those who are religious should not be forced to convert to secularism as the price of conversation.

Intentional conversations in other countries likely involve non-extremist nationalists who are unmotivated by religion: the function is the same. Practicing respectful engagement with others you disagree with in everyday life – face-to face conversations in real time – is more powerful than virtual exchanges, since neither party can hide behind a buffer or the anonymity that makes online forums so conducive to escalation. Beyond reengaging willing family members, people already share a common space with neighbors and community members: starting local conversations is a form of activism.

One-off events rarely change the dynamic. Willingness to help organize or attend serial events designed for constructive dialog, in libraries or community centers, boosts both the courage and commitment of others to engage. James and Deborah Fallows' bestseller *Our Towns*[65] is full of stories about how common citizens in places across the U.S. have bridged extreme differences in political and religious views to successfully overcome long-standing community challenges, with the common side-effect of tamping down distrust and dismantling what appeared to be intractable conflicts.

As with other forms of activism, this takes effort, time, and some nerve. But even if such forms of civic engagement don't immediately bring healing or common understanding to a deeply divided country, they do have potential to defuse tensions that may easily undermine both a functioning democracy and the rule of law. Atran presents research showing that, in comparison to liberals, U.S. conservatives report less distance between themselves and 'the other side' and argues, optimistically, that "[d]espite the moral differences inside America, and even despite the 'culture wars' that sometimes seem to erupt from them, there is still broad consensus about the 'proper' mix of moral elements within a fairly narrow range compared to other societies around the world".[66]

Atran's book ends with what he calls Abe's Answer. During the American civil war, a woman reputedly berated Abraham Lincoln when he spoke too sympathetically about Southerners when she believed he should have been speaking of destroying them: "'Why madam,' Lincoln answered, 'do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?'" To be effective activists, we also have to listen and learn. Atran concludes, "[o]n some things, we'll find, we won't change minds, and on some things we shouldn't. But who knows what a world could be made if we listen and learn at the camps of fallen angels? Then we must act to make it".[67]

[65] James Fallows and Deborah Fallows, *Our Towns* (New York: Pantheon, 2018).
[66] Atran, 460.
[67] Ibid., 479.

Giuliana Regnoli, *Accent Variation in Indian English. A Folk Linguistic Study* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 412 pp., ISBN: 9783631864142

Reviewed by Roberta La Peruta

Giuliana Regnoli's *Accent Variation in Indian English. A Folk Linguistic Study* explores direct and indirect language attitudes and perceptions towards regional accent variation in a transient Indian student community studying in Heidelberg, Germany, in 2018.

The data are gathered from "sixty speakers […] aged 21–30, coming from sixteen Indian states, speaking fourteen different languages as L1 (one Germanic language (English), 9 Indo-Aryan ones, 4 Dravidian ones) and the same number of IndE regional dialects" (117) and are based on sociolinguistic interviews collected using network and ethnography sampling methods. More specifically, the author follows a 'friend-to-friend' approach to target language users, accessing the community – and their subgroups – and eliciting "participants' information for each of the social variables already partially defined in other sociolinguistic studies (gender, ethnicity and time spent in Heidelberg)" (116). In doing so, Regnoli is the first to examine language perception and use in an Indian diasporic group located in Germany through a sociolinguistic lens and to provide a detailed perceptual landscape map of English dialects in India. Therefore, what makes this contribution particularly enlightening is the research gap that it aims to fill. Indeed, while accounting for *stankos* – borrowing from Bloomfield – or folk beliefs about perceived accent variation, it investigates an Indian local community whose peculiarity is entailed in its very nature: the speakers of Northern and Southern Indian English (IndE) varieties represented in the interviews constitute a transient, short-lived, dynamic multilingual community that is based in non-anglophone settings, two areas of research which have so far been neglected in Indian diasporic studies.

The research questions and aims of the present study include a) the perception of different accents by members of the aforementioned community – as well as shared assumptions and knowledge related to the same –, explored with the help of mental maps; b) the collection of self-reported folk attitudes towards phonological variation in the range of IndE varieties spoken by the interviewees, and the degree to which the perceived accents index regional ethnic identities; and c) the interaction between language variation and network integration within their community in terms of linguistic awareness and attitudes arising from the recognition of different dialectal traits.

The detailed methodology used to uncover (perceptually heterogeneous) folk perceptions of different Indian English accents in the investigated multilingual speech community combines perceptual dialectology and language attitudes research through an *ad hoc* deductive mixed-method approach relying on dynamic data collection techniques. Indeed, over the last fifty years, methodological triangulation has often been selected by researchers in the field of social sciences, among which (socio)linguistics, in that it enables the validation of data from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, and "allows researchers widen their inquiry with sufficient depth and breadth" (Dawadi, et al. 2021:27).

The volume is divided into six chapters. In Chapter One, the author introduces the matter at hand as well as the community under scrutiny, the research aims, and its design.

Chapter Two defines the key terms used throughout the study and offers an overview of sociolinguistic theory, folk linguistics, and perceptual dialectology, as well folk metalinguistic awareness, or overt knowledge and attitudes about language by nonlinguists. It also includes sections dealing with one of its central topics, namely how language attitudes (and especially accent variation) affect identity and what these concepts stand for, with specific reference to Indian diasporic environments. Finally, it focuses on the definition of a speech community and the role, uses, and features of L2 English in transmigrant diverse societies, with a focus on Indian ones.

The volume proceeds with Chapter Three, which defines the research area, providing a historical account of the Indian diaspora in Germany and Heidelberg, and describing the demographic distribution of its population, as well as its varied degree of socioeconomic, sociocultural, and political integration.

Chapter Four illustrates the experimental research design and methodological triangulation used to elicit and interpret the results, including a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, it provides information on data collection, fieldwork experience, and statistical testing.

Chapter Five is the core of the volume, and is divided into two sections presenting, respectively, the quantitative (Section 5.1) and qualitative (Section 5.2) data analysis. The first subchapter describes data extraction and coding along with the sociolinguistic variables included to provide a more comprehensive understanding and contextualization of the sample, which also – but not only – tackles the question of ethnic identity and representation. The second subchapter is based on a bottom-up qualitative content analysis (adapted from Mayring 2014) which aims at addressing the themes of indexicality (Section 5.2.1) and metalinguistic awareness (Section 5.2.2), expanding on and adding to the quantitative results shown in the previous section.

Finally, Chapter Six summarizes the research findings and brings to light the study's implications and suggestions for future research. It is followed by bibliographical references and appendices.

Through the analysis of questionnaires, semi-structured recorded interviews, accent identification tasks, and cognitive maps, this research successfully depicts the multifaceted accent perception and phonological variation in Indian students living in Heidelberg, addressing the role of diasporic IndE in Germany, metalanguage, and identity within the theoretical framework of transient multilingual speech communities. Results validate the innovative mixed-methods design adopted and highlight the emergence of precise social stereotypes that are linked to accent variation, viz. Northern accents are perceived as being closer to the norm – and function as a superordinate norm within the student community at hand – whereas Southern ones are deemed to steer away from the standard. As a matter of fact, cognitive boundaries arise from this analysis that suggest dialectal awareness and salience regarding the North vs. South accent divide, showing how distinct phonological features serve as indexes of different ethnic identities, which are often fluid, prismatic, (re)negotiated and (re)negotiable in different (or foreign) sociocultural contexts.

What makes this study interesting is not only the cutting-edge methodological approach but also the choice of examining a transient linguistic group and giving space and voice – an accent, in fact – to one of the many mobile, mixed, and dynamic language communities that are born out of contemporary migration processes which do not allow for "homogeneity, stability and boundedness of languages" (Blackledge and Creese 2019:100). More specifically, in 2018, Indian non-residents living in Germany were estimated to be around 109.000 (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018), a figure that has been increasing over the past few decades, and largely encompasses skilled and educated immigrants. Though being one of Germany's biggest immigrant groups, the study of linguistic variation in Indian speech communities is considerably overlooked, as has been IndE internal variation. Investigating overt and covert language attitudes, Regnoli is the first to draw scholarly attention to this particular group, adding to the growing body of academic literature that is interested in creating a coherent sociolinguistic model for exploring the complex identities of mobile people and the linguistic processes involved in their representation.

To conclude, this much-needed contribution offers a sociolinguistic take on the problem of heterogeneous perceptual identity representation within a transient multilingual speech community as well as on accent variation as an important identity index. Its exceptionally well-explained content makes it a worthy read for scholars, students, and sociolinguistic enthusiasts who wish to further their knowledge of accent variation in diasporic communities and their "ethnography of speaking" (Hymes

1964), as well as those who are interested in mixed-methods approaches and methodological triangulation.

Cristina Bacchilega and Jennifer Orme, eds., *Inviting Interruptions. Wonder Tales in the 21st Century* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), 254 pp., ISBN: 978-0-8143-4700-3

Reviewed by Luca Sarti

In 2017, in her lecture at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA), Cristina Bacchilega asked herself and her audience: "Where Can Wonder Take Us?" While, on that occasion, she answered that 'wonder' could take us "everywhere and nowhere", in the past decades, her scholarly works clearly proved that 'wonder' took her on several intriguing 'journeys'. More recently, 'wonder' has taken her and Jennifer Orme at the 'rediscovery' of contemporary tales from several parts of the world – tales eventually collected in the anthology *Inviting Interruptions: Wonder Tales in the 21st Century*.

Published in February 2021 by Wayne State University Press (Detroit), *Inviting Interruptions* consists of twenty-four 'wonder tales' of the new millennium (or shortly before). Specifically, the collection is divided into two parts and brings together what Bacchilega and Orme call 'interruptions' and 'invitations', namely textual and visual 'wonders' – either introduced or followed by a thought-provoking editors' note – created by twenty talented writers and artists between 1990 and 2020. Enriched with a detailed introduction and sections about the authors and editors, sources and credits, as well as works consulted and further readings, the book stands out for at least two reasons: 'multimodality' and 'intersectionality'. Meaningfully, this innovative anthology gathers works of several genres created through different media (from short stories to films, from comics to sculptures and paintings) – narratives and artworks capable of speaking to people with various backgrounds and desires while addressing current topics. Although each tale would deserve mention, for space constraints, I will name just a few in order to highlight the book's peculiar 'heterogeneity'.

In the first part, "Inviting Interruptions", the editors gather eleven "engaging disturbances that ask us to stop and rethink in new ways" (xii). The first one is "Once Upon a Time": an evocative book sculpture by English artist Su Blackwell aimed at reflecting on both "the wonders and fears of childhood" – for its content – and "the precariousness of the world we inhabit and the fragility of our life, dreams and ambitions" (2) – for the medium employed. This opening 'wonder' is followed by other works that, by depicting 'unconventional' characters and events, "seem to suggest new ways of thinking" (xvi). Among the others, we find three adaptations of stories that are much steeped into our culture – using the terminology proposed by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes: La lítterature au second degré* (1982), 'hypertexts' dealing with their 'hypotexts' in different ways. The first one is Emma Donoghue's "The Tale of the Cottage", a retelling of the "Hansel and Gretel" tale (ATU 327A), originally included in the collection *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, published by the Irish-Canadian writer in 1997. This 'inclusive' tale stands out because it "invites us into the mind of an unnamed girl with cognitive difference" (7), who tells the story not only from her point of view – as usually happens in Donoghue's fairy-tale retellings and feminist adaptations in general – but also in her own language from the very beginning: "I once had brother that mother say we were pair of hands one fast one slow. I once had father he got lost in woods. I once had mother" (4). Similarly, Maya Kern and David Kaplan include 'unusual' fairy-tale characters in their reimagined tales. For example, in "How to Be a Mermaid" (2012), a comics adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid", Kern focuses on female desires. Moving away from Disney's representation, she tells the story of Princess Abigail, a human being, and Yaya, a "sharp-toothed mermaid" (44), which concludes with an unhappy ending – highlighted by the dark shades of the ending page that oppose to the bright colours of the opening one. In the film adaptation of

"Little Red Riding Hood" (ATU 333), directed by Kaplan in 1997 and based primarily on the French tale "The Story of Grandmother", we find a protagonist – interpreted by a young Christina Ricci – who has "more agency over her own sexuality in a modern context" and is involved in what Pauline Greenhill, author of "Wanting (To Be) Animal: Fairy-Tale Transbiology in *The Storyteller*" (2014), would call a 'transbiological relationship' with a dancing wolf.

The second part, "Interrupting Invitations", contains thirteen works that unsettle "mainstream fairy-tale expectations" (xii). In other words, they are "images and texts that appear to us to be a little more explicit in their use of wonder to intervene in the assumed 'innocence' of fairy tales" (xvi). The section opens with Rosalind Hyatt Orme's "Medusa", a figurine made by Orme's niece, whose image has been used for the front cover of the whole book. With her hot-pink skin and black 'living' tentacles, this faceless character appears polite and disquieting, thus giving contrasting feelings despite the lack of eyes and mouth. This artwork is followed by "Fairytales for Lost Children" (2013), a tale written by British Somali author Diriye Osman, in which it is possible to identify a harsh critique of the hegemonic fairy-tale model created by Walt Disney. Like other stories in the book, this tale – one of the longest – is characterised by what Genette calls 'transtextuality' since it explicitly refers to well-known fairy tales, such as "Sleeping Beauty". Besides, it perfectly represents the 'intersectionality' that distinguishes the anthology. Indeed, the protagonist, Xirsi, is a ten-year-old refugee who moves from Somalia to Kenya and tells his "fragmented experience" (95) by using a mixed language made up of Kiswahili, Italian, Somali, and English. Meaningfully, he falls in love with another boy, but, in the end, he understands that "none of the fairytales [he] had read had prepared [him]" (93) for an unhappy ending. Following this story that, like many others, tries to break what Jack Zipes calls 'Disney spell' since 1999, another 'wonder' that stands out in this second part is without a doubt "Bare Bones" (2002) by Joellyn Rock. As a matter of fact, this retelling of the Russian tale of Vasilisa and Baba Yaga is an example of hypertextual 'digital' storytelling. Available at *www.rockingchair.org* since 2001 and printed in the following year in the journal *Marvels and Tales*, this interactive work allows one to explore different possible versions of the same tale – in this case, a visual prose poem that "builds a bridge for the fairy-tale audience between traditional media and new media" (198).

Among other 'wonders', this anthology includes "Still Rather Fond of Red" by Jamaican Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson – a collage portraying a black woman challenging "the white male colonial gaze" (160), also used by Bacchilega for the cover of her book *Fairy Tale Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder* (2013) – and works aimed at reflecting on environmental issues. It is the case of Shaun Tan's "Birth of Commerce", a pastel and charcoal artwork showing strange creatures that the editors define as "the least recognizable beings we encountered in this anthology" (46). Indeed, except for some organic beings that one can barely notice, the Australian artist illustrates entirely (or almost entirely) mechanical 'living' beings trading tiny objects like buttons and marbles in a dystopian scenario where pollution is overflowing. As pointed out in the questions at the end of the editors' note, these beings could be cyborgs, aliens or even a possible evolution of human beings if they do not understand that they have to respect the world they inhabit.

As can be seen, while gathering a small sampling of 'wonder tales' "that put pressure on and reanimate the genre from perspectives that are not accounted for in its mainstream interactions" (ix), Bacchilega and Orme adopt an intersectional approach instead of focusing only on gender. Indeed, to quote the title of Cathy Lynn Preston's chapter book in *Fairy Tale and Feminism: New Approaches* (2004) by Donald Haase, the anthology does not just include tales 'disrupting the boundaries of genre and gender'. Through the depiction of characters with 'different' identities, backgrounds, stories, desires, traumas and concerns, these 'new' tales "directly address contemporary issues in nuanced and intersectional ways" (xi), focusing on debated topics such as environmental concerns, disability, and abuse of power.

In conclusion, it can be said that it is not surprising that this well-finished and well-organised book has been praised by renewed scholars in the field of fairy-tale studies – to name but one among others, Marina Warner. Due to its characteristics, it really represents a significant contribution for both scholars in the field of fairy-tale studies and 'readers' ready to be 'interrupted' or 'invited'. As Zipes points out in his praise, these narratives and artworks "reflect the troublesome times in which we live", and, as Greenhill observes, they contrast with the mainstream "fairy-tale world wherein the best prevail". In other words, these 'wonders' "invite us to imagine the world ... differently" and "to see ourselves differently, interrupt complacency, and imagine Otherness" (xiii). Eventually, while highlighting the transformative power of fairy tales, they offer alternatives, new models, and different possibilities; and, to use an expression coined by Bacchilega, they enrich what she defines as the "fairy-tale web".

Notes on Contributors

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Luca Sarti got a Ph.D. in Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". His doctoral thesis in Anglophone literatures, *I* fairy tale *irlandesi nelle raccolte del terzo millennio: identità, trasmissioni, nuove narrazioni*, focused on Irish fairy tales collected and (re)told in the new millennium for both children and (young) adults. His major research interests include speculative fiction, popular culture, audiovisual translation, and media, postcolonial, and gender studies. He has presented academic papers in Italy, England, Ireland, and Scotland. His published works include journal articles and book chapters on fairy-tale adaptations, Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Tim*e, and Deirdre Sullivan's books. He is a journalist since 2018 and the director of the sci-fi and fantasy scientific journal *ContactZone* (AISFF). Currently, he teaches English language, literature and culture – as well as World literature – at high school and Università degli Studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli".

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