# THE AGE OF ANGER

## POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE BROKEN PROMISE OF POLITICS

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# Preface

In an age saturated with disillusionment and political volatility, this book emerges as both a critique and a lamentation—a political-theological meditation on the crumbling edifice of modernity and the promises it failed to keep. What began as an age of enlightenment, grounded in secular rationalism and liberal hope, has now transformed into an era marked by anger, resentment, and fragmentation. The so-called emancipation of the modern subject has ironically left behind a legacy of wounded identities, contested sovereignties, and disenchanted democracies.

This work is born from the conviction that the sacred has never truly disappeared from the political; it has merely taken on a different form. From ancient sacrifices to modern parliaments, from divine kings to constitutional authorities, politics has always carried within it an echo of the sacred. To understand the age of anger, one must listen to the silences that lie beneath secular rationalism—the myths, rituals, and theological residues that shape collective action and belonging.

As a scholar of political theology, I have endeavored to navigate the complex terrain of political philosophy, critical theory, postcolonial thought, and contemporary politics, offering a compelling narrative about how the sacred animates—even haunts—the political sphere. This book invites readers not merely to critique liberalism or nationalism, but to recognize how deeply theological assumptions have undergirded our modern political institutions and imaginaries.

The Age of Anger—is not simply an academic inquiry—it is also a personal intellectual journey. Born in Shillong, I write from the vantage point of a postcolonial society grappling with the ghosts of empire, the illusions of liberal democracy, and the pull of the sacred in a secular age. I hope that this work will offer critical tools to

scholars, students, and engaged citizens seeking to understand the deeper structures of power, identity, and political meaning.

Let this book be read not only as a critique but also as a call to reimagine the political beyond abstraction, and to reclaim the sacred not as dogma but as the space where justice, dignity, and collective life might once again become possible.

# Acknowledgments

This book could not have come into existence without the contribution of many minds, hearts, and hands. I am indebted to my mentors, whose critical insights and moral clarity gave shape to the core arguments presented in these pages; their encouragement and challenges sustained me through the most challenging stretches of thought and writing.

My gratitude goes to my family, Mrs Lisforty Mawlein, Mr Aibor War, Mrs Vanda A. Warjri, Mr Bakynsaidor B. Warjri, and Mr Bashngainlang B. Warjri, whose patience and unwavering belief in this project are owed more than words can express; their love and grounding presence offered me the stability I needed to reflect, dream, and write.

I am especially grateful to Prof. Prasenjit Biswas, who has been a source of inspiration throughout my academic journey. Also, to my friends and colleagues—thank you for the spirited debates, profound conversations, and enduring companionship. Each chapter is enriched with your voice, support, and thoughtful critiques.

I am also indebted to the libraries, archives, and public institutions whose resources and environments made this intellectual labour possible. This book is part of a collective intellectual, one that reaches across borders and disciplines.

Above all, I thank God for His unlimited blessings and for the many unnamed political actors, protesters, thinkers, and others whose anger, resilience, and vision for justice animate the spirit of this book; this work is dedicated to them. The inclusion reflects the appreciation that many voices, heard and unheard, have contributed to the work's spirit and purpose.

**Khublei Shibun.**

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

## 1. Anger and the Crisis of Modern Politics

Anger directed at political adversaries once again assumed a prominent position in global discourse. Previously regarded as a peripheral or inappropriate emotion within rational democratic deliberation, contemporary commentaries suggest that anger now characterizes the essence and substance of 21st-century politics. This phenomenon is evident in both liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, as demonstrated by the insurrection at the Capitol building in the United States and the fervent rise in Majoritarian nationalism in India. Political anger has manifested with electrifying and occasionally destructive intensity. The evidence is unequivocal: the deterioration of civilised discourse, populist leaders capitalising on widespread indignation, and citizens who perceive themselves as possessing an infallible sense of justice, identity, and historical consciousness. This resurgence of anger represents not only a sociological transformation but also a profound crisis concerning the theological and moral foundations of contemporary politics. The current political climate is permeated with ressentiment—Nietzsche's term for the reactive emotion of the powerless, characterized by their moral revulsion towards the powerful. However, unlike in previous eras, this anger is not confined to the disenfranchised poor. It transcends the boundaries of class, race, gender, and generation. It manifests as a desire for a return among the populist right, as justified indignation over systemic injustice among the radical left, and as a realm of performative outrage over algorithmic acceleration in digital contexts (Smicek 2017).

The erosion of trust in liberal institutions, the commodification of identity, and the reduction of justice to mere procedures and

moralistic gestures have fostered an environment conducive to the proliferation of anger. Although anger is a common experience for ordinary citizens, a focal point for the media, and a significant element of the political landscape, it remains insufficiently examined within the field of political philosophy. This oversight is intentional. Since its Enlightenment origins, liberalism has consistently sought to suppress emotion—particularly anger— in favour of reason and institutional equilibrium (Rawls, 1993). Consequently, it is intellectually and morally unprepared to navigate a political milieu dominated by passion rather than reason. Anger has reemerged as a fundamental force that not only expresses emotion but also drives political dynamics. In "The Age of Anger" (2017), Pankaj Mishra explores the historical emergence of new emotions, desires, and aspirations unleashed by modernity, which it can only partially fulfill. This has resulted in a world where the aspirations for equality, dignity, and meaning—once heralded as the ultimate expression of democratic modernity— have been devolved into disillusionment, resentment, and rage. In this context, anger serves as a symbol; it conveys more than it articulates and possesses the power to unify, divide, destroy, and even take lives.

This book argues that understanding the nature of political anger today requires consideration of political theology. It's more than just a look at religion and belief: it's a look at sacred sources, myths, and moral tales, and how these are constitutive of ideas about legitimacy in politics. Anger is not merely a psychological state; it is a theological reaction to betrayal, injustice, or profanation. Anger is an experience through which something sacred (justice, identity, country, and flesh) has been violated. Yet, this sacred element of anger is usually lost in the squeamishness of secular liberalism, where deep emotions are concerned. Rediscovering political theology helps recover some of the depth of political rage, whose sources are not found only in economic or institutional failures, but also in desperate spiritual malnourishment and the decline of meaning and authority. This is not an argument for the re-sacralization of politics, but an insight into how political

rage often takes the form of displaced religious yearning. Whether in the anger of white evangelicals in the American Midwest, the grievance of Majoritarian nationalists seeking historical revenge, or the wrath of young activists facing climate disasters, political anger rouses us with myths about redemption, sacrifice, and cosmic justice.

Long before and in the modern world, political theorists as diverse as Plato and Arendt recognized the importance of anger in political life. In Plato's Republic, Thumos is identified as the 'spirited' part of the soul, and it is the source of spiritedness, or thumoeides, and the judgments that they bring about, especially in the context of political life. Spiritedness also causes us to be passionate about honour and perceive good and bad as honourable or dishonourable. Thus, it can also participate in the governance of appetites with the appetitive part of the soul, and therefore diminish the need for laws and for making laws respected from the outside. Aristotle characterizes anger as a moral emotion, justified when it aligns with reason and is of the right degree, directed towards something that is truly unjust (Nussbaum, 2001). In liberal moral psychology, now so dominant on the left, anger is a symptom of a moral, psychological, or emotional disorder. Undermine an established sense of identity: A political vision of identity risks undermining not only Hobbes and Locke's confidence that identity is based on the individual's rational quest for self-interest or the imposition of contractual modes of reasoning on society, but also the broader concept of identity itself. The modern reified concept of the nation-state was, in the last analysis, devised to contain the "excessive" form of political emotion that no one can help but generate in their bid to avoid constantly staving off civil war (Schmitt, 2005).

Paradoxically, the accomplishments of liberal projects have contributed to their own decline. In this process, liberalism has not only dismissed anger as unjustified; it has also dismissed it as irrational. Still, it has also failed to recognise anger as a political

force in its own right—not merely as a reaction to injustice, but as a demand for recognition, significance, and reparation.

The suppression of anger has not eradicated it; rather, it has transformed it into something perilous. It is not the absence of politics that we are witnessing; it is the resurgence of rage now veiled in theological terms. Consequently, political anger is neither irrational nor arbitrary in this context. This represents a profound ethical issue. However, this moral vision is susceptible to corruption when alternatives are unavailable and shared symbolic frameworks disintegrate. Contemporary disillusioned citizens have lost faith in parliaments, universities, courts, and the media. They feel betrayed. As Kierkegaard notes, betrayal engenders not merely disappointment but existential rage. Thus, the crisis is not solely political but eschatological—a crisis of purpose, direction, and faith.

Anger has become a new sign of authenticity in a populist political order. It is really leaders who incite ire in the disaffected public rather than offering rational guidance. The result is politics as a circus, protests as tea parties, and outrage as daily Facebook posts. The religious themes of martyrdom, selfsacrifice, and revenge are even exported into secular settings. In India, Hanuman is feted as a nationalist mascot, while in the U.S., political rallies are steeped in Christian apocalyptic and messianic discourse. These themes are just as prevalent in secular Europe, where conversations about immigration, sovereignty, and nationalism suffuse the languages of purity, betrayal, and corruption. This book aims to reveal the theological roots of current political divisiveness while also pointing the way toward greater peace and reconciliation. Located at the crossroads of history, philosophy, and theology, this volume engages with the thoughts of Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas, as well as decolonial thinkers such as Pankaj Mishra and Aditya Nigam, to address the various roots of the problem. This is not to absolve anger or to praise it without reservation, but to understand its political logic and spiritual gyroscope.

And one can ask: what happens if the new political optimism— of progress, equality, and peace —collapses? What fills the void in this failed promise? Instead, anger takes over that space.

Anger has become a substitute for waning hope and a surrogate for lost trust. This means that political rage is not just a mark of derangement; it is also an indicator of a deeper historical rupture: the decay of the liberal project and its once-sanctified narratives. To understand this fury, one would need to delve deeper than the fields of political science and sociology. It is necessary to venture into the realm of theology, not to revive dogma, but to discover how structures of meaning, sacrifice, transcendence, and community shape political existence. Political theology is not about religion or any of these things, but rather concerns the transcendent aspects of power, suffering, and hope. Anger is not only a symptom, but also a gauge of what is happening here. This book examines how political anger manifests in various domains, including liberal, nationalist, neoliberal market-oriented, digital, postcolonial, religious, and climate change contexts. These discussions will reveal the unconscious aspects of anger and pose a deep concern once more: Is it possible to build a political theology of peace in the aftermath of anger?

In an era of skepticism towards institutions, the breakdown of public discourse, and the resurgence of identity politics, the pertinent question is not only whether theology can still inform political thought, but whether political thought can survive without acknowledging its theological foundations. One needs to revisit these functions of political theology as part of the theoretical reflection on its symbolic and moral crises in modern politics. As the assumptions of secularist liberalism continue to crumble, political theology not only emerges as a subfield but also as a necessary lens through which to understand and engage with the contemporary political situation. Conventionally understood in the terms of Carl Schmitt (2005), political theology examines the secularization and reemergence of theological concepts in political discourse, such as those of sovereignty, sacrifice, redemption, and

judgment. Schmitt contended that “all the important concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts’ (p. 36). Sovereignty, for example, is an indication of God’s divine omnipotence in the state’s determination of exceptions. However, political theology has transcended Schmittian authoritarianism to investigate a wider set of sacred underpinnings of authority, legitimacy, and collective sense-making (Kahn, 2011).

The reimagination of political theology is not an act of nostalgia for the theocratic Middle Ages so much as a reaction to the insufficiency of secular political rationality in the face of the intensity of modern political passions, in particular, rage. In the Rawlsian paradigm, liberalism assumes the existence of a rational public sphere in which individuals deliberate in terms of justice, fairness, and neutrality (Rawls, 1993). Yet, according to the skeptical voices of Mouffe (2000) and Connolly (2005), liberalism suppresses the confrontational, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of politics. If we excise the sacred from our discourse and politics, we are left with spiritually desolate politics, unable to handle legitimate crises of legitimacy. Political theology is therefore vital for understanding modern anger insofar as it takes account of the moral imaginations that underpin political activity. Every form of politics is based on original violence, a definition of justice, and the anticipation of redemption. It is spiritual; it is even when we discuss it in secular terms. In today’s climate, when citizens feel betrayed by liberal promises, political resentment is generated not only by a sense of material deprivation or procedural injustice, but also by a violation of the sacred — the sense that something of greater importance than mere legal corpus or judicial procedure has been desecrated.

Consider the role of anger in nationalist politics, for instance. The appeal to a sacred homeland, an imagined idyllic past, or the role of a heroic martyr figure serves to highlight the religious matrix of nationalist thinking (Anderson, 2006). In India, the return of Lord Ram as a deity and warrior king cites this resurgence. In the same way, in the United States, the saying of “One Nation under

God" or the fetishisation of the Constitution also betrays a similar sacralisation. Political theology is useful in that it enables us to understand why religious symbols are reinterpreted in political narratives and why anger is evoked in response to perceived profanation. Second, political theology brings into view the eschatological element in anger; its concern with the end of history, the coming of justice, or the final settling of accounts. Anger does not typically sound like a call for incremental reform; it tends to take shape as an insistence on radical change. In the case of climate activism, for instance, it is not just about carbon emissions, but about a sense of betrayal of the future —a breaking of the pact with life itself. In that sense, Greta Thunberg's famous lecture — "How dare you? —serves a theological purpose, one that is theologically necessary, which is that it points not merely to policy failure but to a deeper moral failure.

The failure of secular political theory to grapple with these dynamics is no accident. This is nothing short of the intentional suppression of passion and transcendent moments that have historically given meaning to political life. Disenchantment in the Enlightenment, as illustrated by Kant's attempt to ground morality in reason alone, sought to replace religious authority with autonomous reason. Yet, as Weber (2004) warned, instead of freedom, this rationalization leads to a feeling of disenchantment with the world and a sense of lifelessness within the bureaucratic machine. In an unenchanted world, anger is a response to existential dislocation. Political theology offers a different perspective: that politics is never completely secular, legitimacy is never purely procedural, humans are never solely utility-maximizers or rights-bearers, but rather creatures of faith, myth, and sacrifice. When rituals and narratives that underpin a political order disintegrate, the anger that emerges is both a form of grieving and protest. The latter phenomenon is reflected in the postcolonial situation, in which freedom did not bring fulfillment, but rather another kind of alienation. Thinkers like Frantz Fanon and AiméCésaire saw this anger not merely as a result of economic destitution but of more

profound ontological violence — the failure to recognise dignitas, humanity, and sacred belonging.

Today's philosopher-scholars, Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe, conduct a theological analysis of politics that demonstrates how the modern state operates according to the principles of inclusion and exclusion, reminiscent of the politics found in ancient religions. The Agamben idea of the homo sacer, a life that can be killed but not sacrificed, shows how sovereign power retains a quasi-sacrificial structure even in the heart of democratic formations (Agamben, 1998). From this perspective, political anger is not a response but rather an unveiling of the deepseated violence embedded in liberal societies, and hence invites theological inquiry. Yet, political theology is not merely diagnostic; it provides an opportunity to rethink what political hope might mean. In theological arguments, anger is not necessarily a negative emotion. In the Hebrew Bible, divine anger often represents love distorted by disloyalty. The prophets are not angry because of "negative" feelings toward Israel, but because of their great love and their feeling that this love cannot continue when the nation is corrupt. Theologically, political anger can indicate a longing for moral restoration in a covenantal society based on justice, acknowledgement, and shared responsibility. Political theology enables us to read this anger not as a kind of irrational fury, but as a misdirected longing for a sacred community.

In the context of digital political cultures, this insight is particularly significant: anger is not only magnified but also monetized and instrumentalized for political gain. They are also designed to be addictive, and outrage is an easy way to capture attention and stimulate interaction. However, beneath this performative outrage lies a deep despair, especially among the young, who feel shut out by political institutions, abandoned by economic systems, and betrayed by political leaders who refuse to listen. Political theology insists that we listen not only to the din of anger but also to its silence—the sacred emptiness it reveals. Political theology provides the necessary critical perspective for

deconstructing the myths that accompany the mythology of liberal neutrality. No view is free of bias, and no politically constitutive position is without metaphysical underpinning. In many cases, the cleavage between the ambit of religion and polity serves to mask the imposition of a particular shape of theology that promotes proceduralism, individualism, and the idea of historical progress. Indeed, as Charles Taylor and Talal Asad, among others, have noted, secularism is a theology in its own right, one that reorders beliefs, rituals, and authority under the guise of neutrality (Asad, 2003; Taylor, 2007). The phantasm of sovereign political theology exposes and promotes epistemic modesty in political theory. The role of political theology today is, therefore, not to add a theocratic kernel to political discussion, but to comprehend the sources of political unrest in the disordering of symbolic orders. It provides a way to read discontent as a moral, even spiritual, response to the loss of meaning, the breaking of promises, and the betrayal of ideals. It thereby opens up the possibility, however distant, of renewing political communities, not through the instruments of technocratic policy-making or rhetorical moderation, but through a recommendation to the sacred aspects of justice, dignity, and belonging.

In the following chapters, we will employ political theology to examine several forms of political anger: the dismemberment of the liberal subject, nationalism as a sacred enterprise, the moral basis of neoliberalism, the sacrificial logic of martyrdom, and apocalyptic fears of a world in crisis. Throughout these analyses, we return to the core issue: How far, freed of its sacred stories, can this politics still be just or only anger-inducing?

## 2. Modern Politics and Its Discontents

Once held up as the ultimate in progress and victory of democratic governance, the politics of the moment are mired in the biggest, deepest crisis. Politicians are despised globally, and there is a growing distrust of democratic institutions, the vilification of elites, increasing polarization of public discourse, and a growing sense of alienation among large parts of the population – in both the

Global North and South – from systems that are meant to represent them. This betrayal is not simply that of broken promises of prosperity or equality, but one that calls into question the legitimacy of the liberal-modern political order. Solutions to this crisis will need to offer something more than a critique of individual policies; they will need to ask what myths, hopes, and assumptions have sustained modern politics since its inception. The classical liberal viewpoint, as evident in John Rawls' (1993) notion of the "political conception of justice," posits that people from diverse backgrounds can agree on the basis for justice and coexistence in the neutral public square through rational discussion. At the heart of this framework lie several suppositions: that people are rational and will cooperate if the conditions are right; that institutions are fair; and that justice can be achieved through the mechanisms of due process. However, this perspective ignores the symbolic and emotional aspects of political life. It views politics as administration — not as the realm of conflict, myth, and meaning. This posture, according to Chantal Mouffe's (2000) political theory, suppresses antagonism while creating the very resentment that it aims to avoid.

Modern political perplexities are partly due to the self-imposed constraints of liberal proceduralism. Through its preference for reason and abstract universality, liberalism has often overlooked the special characteristics, emotions, and historical injustices of political actors. Impartiality has frequently become an ideology of exclusion. Feminists, postcolonialists, and critical race scholars have long argued that purportedly neutral liberal subjects have been gendered, racialised, and classed as male, white, bourgeois, and Western (Pateman, 1988; Mills, 1997). The present disaffection — its historical traces can be found in the movements of racial justice, decolonial resistance, or identity affirmation— is to be understood as the return of the voice of the marginalised in the political arena. This discontent is not new, but what is unique at this moment in time is its widespread, global, and nearly simultaneous expression. The Arab spring, the Occupy movement, Brexit, the ascendancy of Trumpism, the freedom chants of

Hong Kong demonstrators, the farmers' protests in India, and youth uprisings everywhere demanding that leaders stop playing with our children's future by fiddling while the climate is burning all reflect a popular belief: that the contemporary political system no longer reflects their lived reality or moral compass. What cuts through these disparate events is the pervasive experience of a lack of sovereignty, community, security, and meaning.

Contemporary political structures, on the other hand, offered the prospect of progress, peace, and sensible conflict resolution. However, despite the scientific and economic progress of the last century, the 20th century was full of wars, mass murders, imperial hegemony, and the breakdown of social integrity. The idea of the "end of history" or the final triumph of capitalism – first described by Francis Fukuyama (1992) when the Cold War ended – now seems like a sardonically humorous fantasy. History did not end with liberal democracy; it just stifled tragedy and spirit. Without a story of redemption, and without the sense that one's suffering is of any value, politics drains away from the search for a common good and away from the belief in an achievable justice, and drifts instead towards mere administration, expressing raw resentment, droplets of unappeasable anger at the world, at the one's in charge that have not even the dignity to seem like "the best".

Modern political disaffection is about more than just grievances; it is existential. The arrival of modern secularism, according to Taylor (2007), involved more than just the exclusion of God from the public sphere; it reconstituted the landscape of belief, relegating the sacred to interiority while endowing the procedural state with a regime of truth. However, this switch never gave birth. Therefore, states became theological entities sacralized in lieu of the divine monarch, worshipped in the form of constitutions, flags, and founding myths. To the extent that these intermediaries fail to produce justice or recognition, disappointment is not only pragmatic but also theologically freighted.

More recently, anger has been identified as the primary affective response to dissatisfaction. It is not just a revolt against

bureaucracy; it is rather a rebellion against the moral promise of the modern state. Liberal democracies often present themselves as defenders of universal rights and human dignity, and as executors of justice. The promises fail to materialise; however, when law enforcement acts with impunity, when refugees die at the border, and when indigenous lives are sacrificed for corporate profits, the distance between the promises and reality becomes untenable. Thus, anger is an outlet for this betrayal, a deep cry of false confidence.

Furthermore, the contemporary political crisis has been exacerbated by the commodification of the public sphere. Under neoliberalism, globalization has reconceived citizenship to privilege the market-oriented over the moral agent. Economic worth supersedes political identity, and public roles become consumer roles. As Brown (2015) argues, neoliberalism encourages citizens to become entrepreneurs, thereby hollowing out the ground for a collective structure. In this environment, politics is no longer a space for open speech but one of orchestrated grievances; the media stokes division, and populist leaders prey upon the angerof those left behind.

The theoretical implications of such transformations are immense. When there are no collective rituals, symbols, or sacred narratives, there is no hold on the echo chambers of emotions where low-emotion hostility prevails. Trust in expertise, procedural justice, and the legitimacy of state authority “drains”. The emergence of conspiracy theories, post-truth narratives, and messianic populism signals a lack of meaning in contemporary politics. Without a shared telos, a common conception of the good, politics becomes a brutal tribal struggle, pitting friends against enemies, with each side determined to prove that the other is blasphemous. Theology and politics have a way of making sense of this crisis, not just as an administrative disaster, but as a spiritual rupture. It is not merely that there are problems with contemporary politics, but that its decay has involved the erosion of the sacred authority of the political order. The aspiration of modern politics was not simply to manage effectively, but to ground human life in a

shared moral order. This promise, shrouded in rationalism and universalism, has come undone, revealing nihilism rather than neutrality.

The standard liberal frame – leading to more reason/thinking, procedural justice, and institutional reform – fails to capture the full extent of the crisis sufficiently. What is needed is not so much a technical fix as a reorganization of the political field. That is not to lapse into theocracy, but rather to acknowledge that all political systems are grounded upon stories of meaning, sacrifice, and hope. Where these things are absent, politics comes to feel remote, impersonal, and strange to those who suffer the effects of its decisions. In postcoloniality, this crisis manifests uniquely. Unfortunately, that is all too often littered with the imposition of modern source tools on colonized spaces, without regard for the native beliefs, holy traditions, and community we are part of. These newly independent states adopted the bureaucratic secular model of the modern state, but not the religious foundations that provide legitimacy in the West. As academics such as Partha Chatterjee (1993) and Sudipta Kaviraj (2010) have demonstrated, the rift between the state and society in many postcolonial nations has bred not only governance failures but also spiritual estrangement, generating anger, religious revival, and pervasive suspicion of the elite.

In such settings, anger does not simply represent resistance; it signals the need for moral repentance, reparation for historical wrongs, and the resuscitation of shared dignity. Political theology provides a framework for understanding anger, not merely as an irrational impulse of the heart, but as a political demand shaped by sacred memories and eschatological hopes. Whether it is the assertion of Majoritarian honour in India, the cry for decolonial justice in South Africa, or the Black Lives Matter processions in the United States, protests are rooted not so much in grievances as in seeking to reinstate the sacred in public life. Ultimately, disillusionment with contemporary politics stems from the absence of an ideal imagination. Modern politics has largely abandoned

utopian aspirations and limited hope in believing in oneself or in a Higher Power. It would render politics an empty, bureaucratic sequence of isolated responses and reactions that could never inspire, mobilize, or redeem anyone. The collapse of grand narratives—whether of socialism, liberalism, or religious destiny—has created a vacuum, and the atmosphere of anger has rushed to fill this gap. H. Bloch (1986) observed, "Man is a hopeful being." When hope no longer echoes, wrath demands it.

The point then is not to control anger, but to understand its theological motives and political consequences. Anger exposes the cracks in modernity, its promises unfulfilled, its institutions hollow, and its people restlessly, endlessly seeking a way to move beyond. Political theology does not solve the crisis, but it does provide us with terms for recognizing it, understanding its moral stakes, and perhaps even reimagining politics with fresh urgency.

### 3. The Collapse of the Liberal Consensus

For most of the twentieth century, liberalism was a dominant and forward-looking force in global politics. After the fall of fascism and the slow decline of colonial empires, liberal democracies—defined as those with constitutional government, a market-based economy, and respect for human rights—became the apparent natural outcome of the political landscape. This utopian dream reached its apogee in Francis Fukuyama's (1992) iconic claim of the 'end of history': the worldwide victory of liberal democracy, the best possible system, putatively, after the defeat and collapse of its ideological competitors. However, in a twist of history whose implications seem less celebratory than prophetic, the once-unassailable consensus is now coming unstuck. The collapse of the liberal consensus is not simply the result of institutional failure or ideological exhaustion; it signals the end of a moral order that once pretended to universality.

The liberal consensus encompasses a cluster of related principles, including the rule of law, representative governance, individual rights, markets, and progress achieved through reason and rational deliberation. 'These principles are based on a secular

morality which aims to complement divine law with human reason and theological hierarchies with institutional equality' (Habermas, 2008). After World War II, liberal institutions were established as antidotes to totalitarianism and as guardians of the peace, prosperity, and dignity of individuals. However, behind its seemingly neutral and universal face, liberalism contains immense exclusion. The liberal subject, which is theoretically universal, is practically constituted as Eurocentric, male, heteronormative, and property-owning (Mehta 1999). Colonialism, racial hierarchies and patriarchy, and capitalist exploitation are not aberrations but rather constitutive elements of the liberal order. Its basic contradictions, between formal equality and material inequality, and between personal freedom and structural domination, are mediated, deferred, and sometimes imposed with violence. What is collapsing today is not just an elite agreement but a myth of liberal innocence.

This breakdown is expressed in several domains: declining trust in democratic institutions, the resurgence of authoritarian populism, the proliferation of fake news, and the rise of alienated segments of citizens across the political spectrum. In every case, there is a debilitating loss of moral credibility. People no longer trust Liberal institutions to do justice, provide meaning, or offer security. The commitment to ensuring rights is integrated with the bitter truth of dispossession, and the rhetoric of freedom is dismissed as a screen for economic insecurity and cultural breakdown. Strung out across an overwhelmingly straightforward, relentlessly destructive presentation of structural violence, this language of equality rings hollow. Two factors that have exacerbated this weak social formation but cannot be exclusively attributed to its collapse are neoliberalism and globalization. Instead, they are a consequence of liberalism's inability to alleviate their fury. Liberal political theory, derived from the works of John Locke and Immanuel Kant, envisioned a politics where rule would be established through civility, deliberation, and rational debate. Emotions needed to be managed, and anger was considered a threat to public reason. In so doing, liberalism has been unable

to articulate a coherent moral vocabulary to make sense of the moral legitimacy of anger in politics, where such anger originates from what Arendt (1970) calls the democratic subject.

Anger has returned not as a passing irritant but as a substantial revelation throwing into sharp relief the cracks that liberalism had papered over: the ongoing racial injustices in liberal democracies, the moral wound to the body of society done by austerity, the land-grabbing of indigenous peoples, the disenfranchisement of the working class, and the continuing power imbalances between the Global North and South. From Black Lives Matter to the Yellow Vests and from Chile to Palestine, political anger writhes in areas where liberal values have borne no root. These are failures of policy, but also failures of moral vision. Its emphasis on individualism contradicts the liberal consensus. While the focus on personal freedom is, in ideological theory, empowering, in reality, it has led to widespread alienation and moral exhaustion. Where there is an absence of what is good and whole, or at least a sense of a commonly accepted vision of what would be good and whole in life, societies tend to sink into nihilism. Left are the procedural bones of democracy — elections, courts, and bureaucracies — without sacred narratives that once placed collective life in a meaningful order. In this vacuum of personal causes, political anger is pouring out because it is a decent way to express the feeling that the community has collapsed, that recognition, consideration, and moral sentiments have been trampled. Conscience and good feelings have been eroded.

Liberalism's lack of theological memory compounded this failure. In its zeal to purge the public life of religious symbols, liberalism suffered an affective and ontological amnesia about its origins within Christian and post-Christian moral horizons. The concepts of human dignity, natural rights, and the sanctity of the individual are all of theological origin (Milbank, 2006). Nor did their secularism remove sanctities from them. However, as liberal societies secularized public life, draining it of sacred influence without filling the void with a significantly different source of

guidance, they effectively leaned into the age's sense of loss. They thus created a vacuum — spiritual homelessness — that has been filled from within and without, not always productively, by identity politics, political cultism, and you-name-it populism.

Here, political theology serves not only as an exercise of historical curiosity but also as a means of analysis. Its name is Black, and it is the culmination of the collapse of the liberal consensus, a political as well as an eschatological fact. The progressive agenda, as we understand it—the notion of defending the endpoint of history, as it were—did not emerge ex nihilo in the 21st century, regardless of Silicon Valley's sense of exceptionalism. Therefore, its secession is like a fallen grace. This is why attacks on such liberal elites are not just political; they are suffused with a quasireligious character, charging them not just with incompetence but also with betrayal. There has also been criticism of liberal cosmopolitanism. Once a symbol of tolerance, openness, and global connectedness, liberal cosmopolitanism has turned into a synonym for elitism, detachment, and cultural annihilation. Rejection of the liberal consensus: The emergence of nationalist movements all over the world directly results from the perceived remoteness of the liberal consensus from local histories, identities, and moral standards. However, these responses are often expressed in theological language, including the call of destiny, blood and soil, sacred soil, and the concept of a chosen people. Political anger in nationalist movements does not merely signal a rejection of liberal proceduralism, but also a re-theologization of politics.

Advocates of liberalism tend to react to such crises by reasserting Enlightenment rationality, individual rights, empiricism, and technocratic management. However, this does not handle the current case well. Dissent is not about facts, policies, or expertise; it's about meaning, belonging, and moral authority. Rising political discontent comes from people who feel left out, disrespected, or disappointed. Emotional indifference and a dearth of ceremonies render the barren institutions of liberalism incapable of addressing

this need. They tell no one's fortune, as they neither love nor serve, and they contain no justice, as they offer no mercy.

The liberal state increasingly resembles some impregnable force, cold to the suffering of actual human bodies, and remote from the people for whom it purports to work. Instead of the implementation and administration of justice by a neutral official, we have bureaucratism — objectification, ranking, and denial of appreciation. They become numbers rather than individuals, cases rather than people, and consumers rather than you and me. It is in this sense that political dissatisfaction appears as a call for resacralization: a politics that should again provoke passion, loyalty, and ethical engagement —a type of politics that Richard Rorty dismisses as "too controversial" (Rorty, 1998). From the perspective of political theology, the collapse of the liberal consensus is not a call to return to the theocracy or authoritarianism of pre-modernity. Rather, it opens a space to consider what form a sacral order could be plausible in the post-liberal world. Can we conceive of a political community that is democratic, not technocratic, just, yet also symbolic, guided by rights without losing its shared meaning?

However, there is no theoretical speculation. Today, emerging political paradigms, both authoritarian and emancipatory, are struggling to supplant the pull of liberalism around the world. Religious nationalism, ecological spirituality, decolonial imaginaries, and radical social movements suggest partial fixes. Some are rooted in age-old traditions, whereas others invent new ways of practicing solidarity and care. Yet, they all agree on one basic truth: that politics without the sacred is doomed. It had, however, failed to do justice to the deep human longing for meaning, justice, and transcendence, assuming that economic gain and legal rights were sufficient to fulfill these needs. Yet, man shall not live by contract alone, but by covenant. Deviate from this contract, as in all these liberal systems throughout the world, and discontent is the inevitable consequence.

Thus, we had to theologise for this anger. We dare not evaluate it and impose our own agenda on it, or ”tap” it for an ideological agenda. Instead, we should be attentive to what it unveils—the limits of contemporary political promises, the search for moral content, and the belief—however dim—that an alternative political order might materialise.

**4. Tracing Disenchantment and Wrath**

Political anger in the present is not simply a spontaneous affective reaction to politics, nor is it an emotional or sentimental sentiment in response to occasional failures of government; it is the politics of affect, against the politics of the emotions sensu Pappas, it is a deep feeling that goes back to longstanding disenchantment with moral and symbolic promises of modernity. In this introduction, we have reviewed the contemporary cultural embodiment of political anger, the importance of political theology, the discontents of modern political existence, and the fraying of the liberal consensus. We outline the architecture of this argument and summarize the book’s central claim: that the issue of political anger cannot be properly understood or confronted without acknowledging the theological void at the heart of modern politics. In such an environment, disillusionment is not just about losing faith; it is the sundering of the sacred. The politics of modern liberal democracy—procedural justice and rational governance—once promised not just something functional but something deeper: security, dignity, recognition, and meaning. These promises were not simply political; they carried the moral force and quasi-religious candor of promises made. The disillusionment of our times lies in the recognition that such promises are not only unfulfilled but perhaps impossible to fulfill from the outset.

1. The Problem of Moral Authority

One of the clearest signs of disillusionment is the erosion of faith in conventional moral and political authorities. This is reflected in the decline in perceptions of the legitimacy of institutions such as political parties, the judiciary, the media, NGOs, and religious institutions. Once considered morally neutral and

procedurally fair, liberalism is now often seen as morally bankrupt or even complicit in terms of injustice. The authority no longer inspires respect, but suspicion. When people stop believing in the righteousness of authority, they often check out of civic life or drift toward more intense and exclusivist forms of identity, such as ethnic nationalism, religious fundamentalism, or charismatic populism. Such movements yearn for something, a higher authority, a sacred order that is "morally solid." Political theology explains that disenchantment with secular authority is not merely a matter of political dissatisfaction; rather, it denotes the erosion of moral faith, which constitutes a spiritual schism.

2. Symbolic Mediation's Breakdown

Modern politics no longer rests solely on a foundation of rules, laws, and policies; it is also sustained by symbols, rituals, and the webs of consciousness that bind people to their community. Objects such as flags, anthems, holidays (and narratives), and civic myths act as symbolic cements that bond disparate people together in imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). However, these mediating institutions have been severely hobbled in recent years. The commodification of culture, the fragmentation of media landscapes, and the rise of identity-based grievances are among the factors that have been jointly eroding shared symbolic worlds. As symbolic mediation wanes, people no longer see themselves reflected in the political body. Not indifferent, then, but resentment at what appears to be the destruction of a community, identity, or history. In this weakened sense, political anger does not arise only from being excluded from policy but also from being left out of the nation's moral imagination.

3. The Affective Economy of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has changed not only economics but also the emotional scales of politics. By individualizing people as 'selfentrepreneurs' and depoliticizing politics as mere management, it has weakened social and emotional bonds, such as solidarity, mutual dependence, and care (Brown, 2015). Rather, it has

encouraged anxiety, rivalry, and chronic instability. In these troubled waters, anger has become the dominant emotion.

They were movements of hope in a time of hopelessness, and today, that hope no longer animates social movements: cynicism and rage do instead. The disenfranchised no longer rally behind class consciousness as much as emotional alliances around perceived grievances and shared trauma. The political becomes psychopolitical, not the realm of the visionary or strategy, but where woundedness is proclaimed. Political theology helps us reflect on this metamorphosis: anger ceases to be an emotion and becomes an eschatological protest against a world no longer invested with ethical consistency.

4. The Emergence of the Reactionary Sacred Shapes

It is disillusionment that promotes the reactionary turn to investments in sacred forms. As secular modernity decays, new idols are born: the nation, the market, authoritarian leaders, and the ethnos. These powers rise beyond the mere political level and are objects of worship. They do not obtain their power by virtue of legal-rational legitimacy, but rather due to charisma and sacrality. This move towards the sacred amounts to a retheologisation of politics and is often distorted, exclusionary, and violent. There are plenty of examples: the God in Hindutva nationalism, the reinvented myth of American exceptionalism in evangelical populism, the cult of martyrdom in jihadist movements, and even the cult of data and technology in Silicon Valley techno-futurism. Each is an attempt to restore order amid moral disorder. Anti-establishment and anti-corruption narratives are not necessarily bad, but reactionary sacralities do not dissipate disillusionment; instead, they engage with it, encouraging anger to erupt as a desire for retribution rather than reparation.

5. Disruptions to continuity in time

The political rage was born of temporal dislocation. The story of the modern era has traditionally been told through the lens of modern politics, a liberal narrative of ‘progress’ in which a linear assumption has been made, projecting onto a faith in the possibility

of democracy and the natural sciences, or the articulation of a universal human right. However, climate disasters, economic downturns, pandemic disruptions, and generational injustices have destabilized that sense of temporal continuity. The future is no longer a horizon or a vision of possibility, but is instead something impeded, dystopian, or non-existent. In this temporal disarray, political rage acts as an apocalyptic consciousness, the cry of a generation betrayed by those who preceded it, and the robbed of a future with meaning. In eschatological terms, political theology offers a conceptual framework for understanding this scenario as the demise of a moral world, the void of a hopeful horizon, and the rage of abandonment. It also reminds us that such apocalyptic upheavals, however dangerous, can be productive and lead to new ideas about salvation and unity.

**5. Ethical Emptiness**

The twentieth century was once weighed down by a hope in progress and justice, as well as the more gradual achievement of human dignity under enlightened political regimes. Yet, as we slide further into the twenty-first century, it is no longer the voices of the margins that produce political anger; in fact, it is the expression of the centre, a mood that tints both mass discussion and inner turmoil. In its most fundamental terms, this rage is not merely an indicator of democracy; it is, foremost, a manifestation of an existential cry for a non-deceptive world that has lost the sense of something within it that allowed for an ethical repair. People do not become frenzied because of political betrayal, but rather because there is a lack of grace, moral restoration, and no word of forgiveness.

Writing after the Holocaust, Emmanuel Levinas (1985), a Jewish philosopher, reminded us of the precedence of ethics over politics. To Levinas, the face of the Other is not calculated space; it is a call. It calls to accountability prior to enabling perception. In contemporary political culture, however, the ethical aspect has been reversed: an ethical response is triggered only after the Other has been first judged, categorized, appraised, and evaluated, frequently in an algorithmic fashion. Within this tradition, it is anger not so

much at injustice as the loss of that original summons. And where there is no voice of ethics left, politics is forensic, adversarial and transactional. The sanctity of obedience to the stranger has been swallowed under the rubble of procedural impartiality and partisan tribalism.

The sentiment that is thoroughly timely in a world where anger has become the ethical expression of the dispossessed is the outlook characteristic of Levinas. In liberal democracies, people are no longer satisfied with legalistic apologies or piecemeal changes. They desire apologies, they desire sadness, they desire tears of authority. But enlightenment liberation spawns liberalism that is incapable of shedding tears. It is a grammar of rules, not regrets, and its vision is technocratic, not tragic. Therefore, the mourners down the road, the migrant who has lost his child in the drowning, the tribal, the forest, who has become mined, and the youth, whose future has been sold, lack ethical recognition. This unrecognised grief turns to rage.

That is why, as French poet-philosopher Charles Péguy (2001) stated, the perish of moral imagination does not start in disaster, but in bureaucratic normalization. Little was romantic in his mourning over the death of the spirit and his longing for mysticism, but at its highest, it was a political warning. He argued that morality is a theological virtue that was abandoned in modernity, which was fixated on efficiency and control. As long as governments only act within the calculus of risk management and market optimization, they stop telling moral stories that bind a people. They discard the stories of mercy, restitution and sacrifice. They are replaced by resentment.

In this sense, anger is eschatological: it not only announces the failure of justice but also the lack of a common moral future. It is the influence of ethical homelessness. Simone Weil (1952), while in the vacuum of political exile, was able to recognize that justice needs to be examined. Not track, not control, but a viewing eye that sets a blessing on the existence of another being. Today, scale and speed have rendered political institutions ineffective, and they are

no longer listening; instead, they have delegated moral considerations to algorithms and charity apps. The outcome is what Byung-Chul Han (2017) determines as the so-called burnout society, where empathy is artificial and solidarity is dissipated. In this state of being, anger can never be feigned; thus, anger is the only emotion in this situation that cannot be faked.

Yet, how did we arrive at a politics that is so morally desolate? The radical Catholic theorist Ivan Illich (1973) anticipated this threat when he criticized modern institutions for undermining organic communities of care. Instead of being cared about, people were put under care; instead of being advised, they were directed; instead of being judged impartially, they were de facto judged; instead of being reasonably treated, they were treated. In so doing, they cut off the soul of politics--the experienced fabric of reciprocal obligation. His censure is too sharp to be forgotten in the environment where the opposition is NGO-ised and conducts politics as a performance. We can discuss rights and dignity, but there is no sacred ground left for us to recognize each other. We have made justice abstract, removed it from the covenant.

When all this is removed of ethical support, political anger turns into a theater of symbols rather than an attempt to find restoration. What is not only coincidental is the current state of political discourse in which denunciation rituals (as opposed to transformation dialogues) have become the order of the day. According to Paul Ricoeur (1992), the kind of political reconciliation that will take place is influenced by a narrative identity, which is how a society can tell stories where the conflicting sides are morally involved, yet also directed towards forgiveness. Forgiveness is a term rarely heard in the current political landscape. In the present polices, the arrangement is to punish, not to pardon. Anger persists because the forms of restitution, ritual, confession, and grace are damaged or destroyed.

In addition, suffering has also turned into currency in neoliberal democracies, where identity is bought and sold and visibility is the coin of the realm. Anger ceased to be expressed; it is

being sold. Instead, the suffering of marginalised people is often reduced to pointer content, likes, and hashtags. Although this kind of strategy has created awareness, it has also desacralized the suffering because of this commodification of pain. The crying one is no longer heard; they are just seen. The ethics of Levinas require the exact opposite: a non-voyeuristic response, but a response of transformation. It is symbolic collapse, however, which political theology, in this sense, has to contend with, as much as it has to contend with the desacralisation of human grief.

Is it possible to go back? Not in reverse perhaps, but in a more fundamental state of reconfiguration. According to Ricoeur (1995), the logic of the promise may derive its political meaning from the shaky, human effort to relate a distracting future to the previous one through a word. The promises are devalued in a cynical era, but rancor remains, since the people still recall them. They recall the precious burden once associated with political speech: the oath, the pledge, the declaration. Nowadays, such weight in political language is being emptied, giving place to either managerial or populist aphorisms. And it is out of that linguistic poverty that anger takes its origins.

However, anger should not be destructive at all times. Righteous indignation is that form of moral clarity that the Hebrew prophets underwent. Something has to come out of it, though. It should not lead to revenge. Simone Weil (1952) points this out once more, saying that unless mediated by grace, the soul is turned into stone by force. In this regard, political theology will have an eschatological task not to theologize politics, but to give politics again the promise of grace, of undeserved forgiveness, of inexplicable reconciliation, and of divine care to the injured stranger.

The way to go, therefore, is not to deal with anger but to find out what it requires. It does not need numbers; it does not necessitate policy papers; it does not necessitate an online response. It is not an appeal to de-structure, but to sacramentalize structure — to have political form once more transformed into an ethical aim.

The other alternative is already evident: the demagogic democracies, characterized by traits reminiscent of the gladiator arena, with policies that resemble punishment, and where their citizens chant not of hope but of pain.

It is an era of people who have lost the moral ground. What is really political anger in its deepest form is the soul crying out after lost ground. It is the reverberation of a theological vacuum onto which modernity attempted to project law, data and spectacle. Yet the soul is not that easily duped. It requires atonement. And, when the redemption is too late, then sins remain behind as wrath. The only way to transform this anger back into a holy one is to revive an ethic of attention, promise and grace.

# Chapter 2
# The Genealogy of Political Rage

## 1. Anger in the Classical Thought: Plato, Aristotle and the Polis

To trace the genealogy of political anger, one must go back to the classical world of the polis, where emotion, ethics, and politics were not independent, fragmented domains, but were tightly structured. According to Plato and Aristotle, anger (thymos) was not just a personal feeling or a psychological state; it was an elemental part of political life, a force that could spread suddenly among the citizens of a city and impel them into acts of violence and retribution. It helped, perhaps above all, to determine what justice was and who could be a citizen and enemy. Modern restlessness has been viewed as a consequence of institutional failure or cultural decadence; yet, Enlightenment humanism has already provided evidence that there are many causes of dissatisfaction, including the way that desire, desperation, and resentment have, in competition, latched onto dissatisfied anger as an object of study and concern. Part of the most profound background to 21st-century disquiet about anger is ancient philosophy, in which anger was deeply interwoven into the moral patterns of the political arts of life.

This study examines the classical Greek philosophers' views on anger as both a threat and a resource for maintaining political stability. Plato considered anger to be a negative emotion, a feeling that everyone should avoid in their mind, and a disorder that needs to be controlled by reason and philosophy. However, Aristotle had a different perspective: he viewed anger as morally assessable, depending on its origin and intended outcome, and acknowledged that it could be either a just or an unjust emotion. Through comparing their separate but overlapping perspectives, we can

achieve a fuller understanding of political anger, "one that challenges both the modern liberal distrust of the emotions (from which the prohibition on anger is derived), and the contemporary populist idealization of rage."

Plato is far more subtle about such matters in the Republic and Phaedrus than he typically receives credit for: his political philosophy rests on a fine-grained and often threatening psychology of the soul, according to which the thymos—Stirling's "feeling" part—is both the sine qua non of human being and potentially the greatest danger. Rational part, spirit and appetite, Plato argued that an ideally organized soul consists of three basic elements: logos (reason), thymos (the spirited part or anger), and epithymia (desire or appetitive part) (Plato, trans. 1991). The best arrangement of these is for logos to rule, with thymos in second place and epithymia third, in the same way that the best regime has its order in the structure of the city. It is in this context that thymos becomes the guardian of the integrity of the soul, which feels indignation, experiences courage, and possesses a sense of honour — all "passions" that stand against the injustice and so motivate action. Thus, it is a necessary function of the guardian class in Plato's Kallipolis, the just city. Nevertheless, Plato realised that thymos could also be destructive if uneducated or if it acted against reason. When the honour-loving part of the soul becomes dominant, it does not lead to justice; instead, it gives way to tyranny, as we discover in the descent from aristocracy to timocracy to despotism in the eighth and ninth books of the Republic.

Plato's fear of anger in the political realm is evident in his critique of democracy as a form of government based on unregulated desires and emotions. The unchained rage of democracy, unreasoning, and city-shaking is abhorred. This objection is more than a criticism of collective sentiment; it is an articulate commentary on the frailty of political order in the absence of emotions shaped by the higher moral ends of the state. For Plato, although anger cannot be eliminated, it must be trained by paideia, a philosophical education that shapes the soul in a way that is

harmonious with justice. Thus, in Platonic philosophy, political anger is a two-edged sword. While moral courage and the protection of justice are essential, they can also lead to chaos and tyranny. In its conflict, paradoxical connection to thymos lies the seed of all that follows in political philosophy, of which the problem of political passion is among, if not the most important concern. By way of comparison with Plato's reticence, Aristotle provides a practical and psychologically rich analysis of anger. While anger, or orge, is not an emotion Aristotle frequently discusses, in the Rhetoric he defines it as "a kind of distress due to the imagination of something painful and destructice accompanied by a repressing of such imagination", and in the Nicomachean Ethics, it is an emotion that is not, in itself, a moral vice, but an inherent self-protective instinct when justified by the rules of law and reason, and controlled by virtues. He describes as aēdonē "a pain or distress, exciting desire, unattended by pleasure" and "an evil independent of the contemplation of any future good" (Aristotle, trans. 2007, Rhetoric, 1378a30 31). This emotion is essentially social, provoked by perceived injustices or insults, and carries with it a demand for moral retribution. Unlike Plato's fear of the unruly nature of thymos, Aristotle contrasts good and bad anger. Mildness: The virtue of mildness (praotēs) is not the denial of anger but the knowledge of how and when to become angry. According to Aristotle, a deficiency in justifiable anger is as much a vice as excess. It is essential to recognize that anger can be a manifestation of moral seriousness and a refusal to tolerate ethical violations.

This attitude is carried over into Aristotle's politics. He is concerned about democracy's fragility and the intensity of the masses, but he does not preach stoicism. Instead, he emphasizes the need for a mixed constitution that balances the interests and passions of different social orders. Through this framework, anger should be politically incorporated – not suppressed, but channeled through institutions that facilitate redress and dialogue. In addition, Aristotle was aware of the performative and argumentative nature of anger. He discusses in his Rhetoric a way that speakers can

evoke anger in their audience, albeit an artificial and constructed one, which is easy to break down. Far from irrational, anger is "a perfectly rational response to moral harm when it occurs, which is grounded in our social norm of honour, especially honour for those who are our peers." This view subverts modern liberal assumptions that posit that anger is irrational or uncivil. For Aristotle, speech that triggers feelings of anger is not necessarily manipulative; it can actually serve justice by stirring citizens to moral awareness. According to Aristotle, political anger is rational when it aims at just results. This Aristotelian notion of emotional rationality is often rendered defunct in modern political theory, typically pitting emotion against reason and private feeling against public discourse. Yet, it also provides invaluable assistance in understanding what we might call the legality and function of anger within democratic contexts.

Plato and Aristotle both consider anger a basic aspect of citizens' moral lives. Plato writes that the thymos of guardians must be nurtured to support justice. Aristotle,

On the other hand, it is claimed that a citizen's right to organize should be controlled, not eliminated. From two philosophical perspectives, political anger is connected to the ethical anatomy of the polis. Anger is a commitment to the community, its relationships, values, morality, and dignity. This is in contrast to the tendency of recent political theory, informed by Hobbes and Locke, to treat anger as a danger that legal mechanisms and social compacts can control. The purpose of liberal social order is not to systematically stimulate sentiment, but rather to neutralise it. Classical philosophy is therefore more morally attuned to emotions. Whereas, under modernity, emotion is often seen as dangerously disruptive of order, in antiquity, emotion supplies moral force—a morally hazardous yet potentially noble resource. However, this moralisation of anger is not without its own problems. Classical Greek society is patriarchal, elitist, and exclusive. The fury that Aristotle frequently extolled was the anger of aristocratic males, but not women, enslaved people, or

foreigners. It was not something one could unconditionally call a democratic common, but instead a selective moral community. Therefore, we need to be wary of reviving old views of anger – and its legitimacy – from antiquity. Nevertheless, despite these caveats, classical thinking does help us remember (what we might prefer to forget) that anger is not just a difficulty to be managed, but a moral problem to be understood.

The political and religious were not used to being in two separate compartments in autocratic times themselves. Rituals, Greek tragedy, and philosophy were closely associated with the consideration of " divine order." Mythological and theological explanations of anger were frequent, as one might expect in a world where the Wrath of Zeus, the revenge of Apollo, or the nemesis that follows hubris were part of the sympotic cultural air. Human anger was seen as a reflection of divine anger; to be angry at injustice was to take on "the moral structure of the cosmos", as he puts it within this cosmological paradigm. Despite his critique of Homer's anthropomorphic gods, Plato retained a view of cosmic justice. As Aristotle became more empirical, however, he came to believe in an organizing divine intellect behind the Cosmos. Thus, political anger was not just a human emotion, but it also reverberated with a higher moral order. Theological artefacts in the classical concept of anger leave the impression that political passion was reported by sacred narratives long before Christianity. This insight is essential in today's political theology. The modern liberal viewpoint also desacralized anger, making it a less important moral and ethical concern. Focus Classical thought, on the other hand, situates anger within a metaphysical order, leading us not only to wonder whether anger is effective or destabilizing but also whether it is just, noble, or consonant with the good.

Our return to ancient perspectives on anger is not an exercise in naive longing for the past. However, we are attempting to gain a deeper understanding of the current crisis. At a time when anger is resurgent in the political world in destructive and nihilistic forms, it is essential to recall that there were traditions that took anger with

moral seriousness. The Training of emotions, as philosophy teaches us, according to Plato, the Greek, does not begin by defining our emotions. Aristotle instructs us to make a distinction between just and unjust anger, acknowledging emotion as a crucial element in political judgment. These are not solutions, but rather thoughts that have been provoked. They urge us to reflect on the possibility of "reintegrating emotion and reason in modern politics" and to consider how the anger of today's politics could be redirected — not suppressed — in the direction of justice. The distant ancient polis gives us not a ready-made blueprint for our lives, but a language in which to frame our ethical dreams.

**2. Philosophical Echoes of Anger: From Metaphysics to Political Theology**

René Descartes, in his Passions of the Soul (1649), classified anger as one of the principal passions arising from the union of the soul and the body. Though Descartes was a rationalist par excellence, he did not advocate for the suppression of all passions. Rather, he argued that the proper function of reason was to govern the passions by forming "firm and determinate judgments" about what is good and evil (Descartes, 1649/1989). Anger, in this schema, could be helpful when directed by reason—as in the case of righteous indignation over injustice—but it posed a danger when it overtook judgment. Descartes' metaphysical dualism separates the soul (res cogitans) from the body (res extensa), and anger emerges as a signal of this disjuncture. It is a physiological eruption that requires rational clarity to be disciplined. This perspective has helped shape modern secular attitudes toward emotions—especially in politics—where anger is viewed as irrational, undesirable, or dangerous unless it is filtered through legal and deliberative norms. Anger becomes politically tolerable only when it conforms to the rational structures of order and self-governance.

Thomas Aquinas, in contrast, situates anger within the framework of natural law and virtue ethics. In the Summa

Theologiae, he argues that anger (ira) is not inherently sinful but can become so when it is directed toward an inappropriate

object, expressed with excessive vehemence, or pursued for vengeance without justice (Aquinas, 1274/2006). For Aquinas, the passions—including anger—are part of the soul's response to perceived good or evil, and as such, they are subject to the governance of reason and virtue. Aquinas points out three strict prerequisites to having a virtuous anger: (1) such an object must be incorrect in the very sense, (2) the reaction should either be equitable, and (3) the cause should be intended to seek healing and not revenge. Such knowledge links anger to the virtue of fortitudo (courage) to the degree that it inspires action in service of justice. According to his theological beliefs, Aquinas believes that God does not have a passion such as anger, but Wrath is the divine justice represented in word play. Therefore, when Rule by charity and prudence guides it, righteous anger is a kind of comparative involvement in the divine justice.

The major contribution that Aquinas' model adds to political theology is that anger should not be relegated to the realm of moral or political rhetoric, but rather linked to a transcendental conception of the good. This frame presents a sharp contrast to contemporary liberal paradigms, in which emotional containment can be easily mistaken for politeness, and in which anger is relegated to irrational or violent.

Two Treatises of Government (1689) by John Locke can be regarded as one of the foundational texts of liberal political theory, emphasizing constitutionalism, property rights, and individual freedom. However, in Locke's vision, the sentimental aspects of political life are notably muted. The liberal subject as such appears not as an incommunicado, not as an avid being, who in some sense needs communion, needs a sense of justice, but as a rational being, one who is driven by self-preservation, one who consents. In this connection, the realm of anger is not regarded as an emotionally caused moral issue, but anger must be effectively reduced in the name of the law.

Locke's ideas on toleration exacerbate this. In A Letter

Concerning Toleration (1689), he defends religious pluralism with strong limitations on manifestations that undermine civil peace. Any anger, especially religious or political indignation, is viewed as something destabilizing. From a political-theological perspective, Locke's liberalism subtly transforms the soul's longing for justice into a contractual obligation to obey civil order. By disenchanting the public sphere and marginalizing emotions, Locke helped create a world where anger at injustice was rendered unintelligible unless it conformed to the rational, legalistic idioms of the state. Thus, political theology must question whether liberalism's emotional deficit is partly responsible for today's outbursts of uncontrolled political rage.

Hegel provides a counterpoint to Locke's rationalistic restraint. In his Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), Hegel famously describes the struggle for recognition (Anerkennung) between self-consciousnesses, a dialectic that involves risk, conflict, and negation. At the heart of this encounter lies the possibility of anger as a moral protest—a refusal to be misrecognized or dehumanized. Anger, in this reading, is not irrational; it is the existential cry of a subject denied reciprocity, justice, or dignity. Hegel's model rejects the liberal notion of a pre-political, self-contained subject. Instead, subjectivity is formed through relational dynamics, often marked by asymmetry and injustice. The enslaved person in the master-slave dialectic is angry not simply because he is dominated, but because his inner worth is denied. This dialectic anticipates modern political movements of the oppressed whose anger arises from structural invisibility. In the Hegelian framework, anger becomes a necessary moment in the development of ethical life (Sittlichkeit), especially when political institutions fail to embody the rationality they claim to uphold. Importantly, Hegel's view of the state is not as a neutral arbiter but as an ethical organism that must give shape to freedom and recognition. If the state fails in this task, anger becomes not only understandable but justifiable. Thus, Hegel allows us to see anger not as a residue of irrationality, but as a dialectical response

to failed recognition—a condition in which the subject resists being made invisible by history.

The British idealist F.H. Bradley, though often overshadowed by Hegel, extended this analysis of recognition and moral response through his theory of ethical experience. In Ethical Studies (1876), Bradley argues that moral life is not reducible to utility or abstract rights but must be understood through social integration and recognition of others as moral beings. For Bradley, the self is not an isolated unit but is constituted through its relations and responsibilities to others. Anger emerges when these relations are violated or ignored. Bradley's critique of utilitarianism raises a severe reproach against liberalism, which simplifies ethics as the ability to satisfy individual needs. To him, moral identity is not at all atomistic, but rather social; the inability of others to understand a person's ethical position brings about a moral-emotional crisis. Anger here refers to the failure to recognize the moral standing of one another. It does not indicate a weakness of character, but rather a moral failure in the establishment of relations.

Bradley further leaves the possibility of incorporating theology into the field of moral philosophy. Not directly theological, however, his metaphysical predilections are towards a perfect wholeness beyond the fracture of modern existence. Politically, this implies that a society that pathologizes or deprives individuals of anger, or a culture that represses anger, is not only repressive; such a society is unethically disintegrative. The ideas of Bradley become particularly timely in an era when liberal institutions still manage to avoid the blame for structural injustice, pointing to the irrational nature of anger as a manifestation of populism.

In this section, it is demonstrated that anger is not marginal to political philosophy, but rather, it is an integral part of political existence itself. Locke tried to quench indignation in favor of civic calm; however, he was unable to consider the moral requirement of indignation. Hegel was aware that anger is an indicator of the rejection of being misperceived, which is essential in the dialectic of liberation. As Bradley reminded, anger indicates a sense of moral

dissolution in affairs, and a coherent moral life demands that mutual recognition of personhood takes place. These thinkers together challenge the liberal dismissal of anger as irrational or dangerous. Instead, they show that anger is a response to a failed promise of recognition, a protest against ontological neglect. In a time when politics is saturated with rage—often incoherent, sometimes righteous—the task of political theology is not to dismiss anger but to discern its moral and metaphysical sources, reclaiming it as a necessary part of ethical and political renewal.

While earlier reflections on anger emphasized its moral or dialectical value within political and ethical communities, this section turns to metaphysical frameworks that interrogate the very structure of the universe and the status of affect within it. Thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and George Berkeley offer distinct theological and philosophical perspectives on emotion, divinity, and political responsibility. In their views, anger is not merely a political or ethical expression but reflects one's relation to reality, to God, and to rational understanding. Through their divergent metaphysical lenses—rational determinism, pre-established harmony, and immaterialism—they present a more profound critique of modern affective disorders, including political rage, theological resentment, and misplaced desire for vengeance.

In his Ethics (1677), Spinoza presents a radical redefinition of emotions (affectus) that departs from dualist and voluntarist frameworks. For Spinoza, anger is not a freely chosen action but a passion—a modification of the body that reflects one's diminished power to act (Spinoza, 1677/1994). He defines anger as "a desire by which we are induced, through hatred, to injure one who has injured us" (Part III, Prop. 59, Scholium). This desire arises from an inadequate understanding of ourselves and others; hence, anger reflects our enslavement to passive emotions. Spinoza's solution is not to morally condemn anger, but to offer an ontological and epistemological path toward freedom through understanding. By understanding the necessity of things—recognizing that even what we call injustice has causes—we can transform destructive

emotions into constructive actions guided by reason. The free person, he writes, "is led by reason alone... and repays hatred, anger, and disdain with love or nobleness" (Part IV, Prop. 46).

Politically, Spinoza offers a fascinating scope of a passionate and vengeful drive in politics. A political system driven by emotions of reaction, particularly anger and fear, is unable to maintain deliberation and reason, or peace. Spinoza issues a warning in his Theological-Political Treatise of 1670 regarding religious and political leaders who resort to religion and terror to gain power, which ultimately leads to despotism. Spinoza believed that true political theology should have its foundation in rational freedom and knowledge of necessity, rather than an appeal to Wrath or divine punishment. Thus, Spinoza's critique of anger offers a metaphysical politics of liberation. It reveals the affective economy of modernity—where individuals and groups are trapped in cycles of blame, hatred, and resentment— as a condition of epistemic failure. Freedom lies in transforming anger not into apathy but into intellectual love—a love grounded in understanding both God and necessity.

Leibniz, in his Theodicy (1710), approaches anger from a cosmological and theological vantage point. His commitment to the principle of sufficient reason and the pre-established harmony of the world leads him to affirm that this is the best of all possible worlds, even with its evil and suffering (Leibniz, 1710/1985). Unlike Augustine or Aquinas, who permitted the metaphor of divine anger, Leibniz insists on the absolute benevolence and rationality of God, thereby eliminating any notion of divine Wrath or emotional reactivity in God. Leibniz's universe is rational and teleological: every apparent injustice, every burst of anger, must have a reason that fits within God's ultimate design. Human anger, then, is not a mirror of divine Wrath but a sign of epistemic limitation—our inability to perceive the whole. "We are like small children who cry over a doctor's bitter medicine," he notes; what we interpret as injustice or betrayal may be necessary for the greater harmony of the cosmos (Leibniz, 1710/1985, §120).

Politically, this metaphysical optimism has been both critiqued and celebrated. On the one hand, it can breed complacency in the face of injustice; in contrast, it offers a nonviolent theology, one that disarms anger by reaffirming the intelligibility and goodness of creation. For political theology, the Leibnizian model serves as a corrective to the politics of Wrath, particularly in times of despair or crisis. It encourages faith in order, dialogue, and rational reform over reactive violence. However, Leibniz is not entirely blind to political responsibility. He acknowledges that human societies must cultivate just institutions that minimize suffering and promote well-being. Yet even these institutions must be grounded in love, wisdom, and humility—not in the angry assertion of power or righteous indignation. Thus, his metaphysics supports a vision of politics that is teleological rather than tragic, optimistic rather than accusatory.

George Berkeley, though primarily known for his doctrine of immaterialism—the idea that material substances do not exist independently of perception—also offers a distinctive theological reading of anger. In Principles of Human Knowledge (1710), Berkeley argues that all things exist only insofar as a mind perceives them, and the ultimate perceiver is God. This metaphysical idealism collapses the distinction between natural and divine order, suggesting that the moral fabric of reality is grounded in the will and benevolence of God (Berkeley, 1710/2008). Berkeley leads to a re-sacralisation of the moral order in the sense that it invites a re-examination of the political theology. When reality corresponds to perception and the latter is ultimately divine, injustice and anger are neither symptoms of purely subjective answers but deviations from God's perfect moral sight. Politics in such a vision becomes an area of moral perception, rather than ideological warfare. Anger is not to be militarized, but rather repaired through the tools of prayer, ethical vision, and spiritual change.

Although Berkeley does not develop a distinct kind of political philosophy, his metaphysical postulates prove resistant to the

instrumentalization of feelings in contemporary politics. To a civilization consumed with the control and management of affect, i.e., through surveillance, propaganda, emotional engineering, the invitation to divine perception, and Berkeley's theology, this proposal presents an acutely countercultural message. It refreshes our minds that moral truth is not imposed upon the individual by compulsion, but rather it is revealed through spiritual alignment with the will of God.

These philosophers do not engage in escapism, but rather metaphysical criticism of modern political affect. At a time when the outrageous tone of populist outrage, culture wars, and ideology wars dominates the language game in the world, their explanations serve to reframe the issue: Where do we direct our anger, and can it be salvaged? In its reliance on all these metaphysical imaginings, political theology can reappropriate anger not as an instrument of accession or usurpation, but as a sign of spiritual displacement that offers us an opportunity to recalibrate ourselves in relation to a broader moral framework. Here, the politics of anger is not a claim on vengeance, but a claim for change in self, society, and the perception of the world.

At the turn of the century, a radical shift occurred in how emotion, meaning, and politics were perceived in philosophical thinking. Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida challenged the certainties of traditional metaphysics and theological dogma, thereby preparing the ground for a new consideration of finitude, affectivity, and the political crisis of humanity. They are engaged in quite dissimilar traditions, but they are united in the acknowledgement that the political disasters of modernity must be traced back to ontological dislocation. The experience of anger in both thinkers encompasses not only a moral response or a subjective state of mind, but also a phenomenological mood (Stimmung), which reveals the brokenness of being, language, and justice as a trace of historical rupture.

Martin Heidegger's seminal work, Being and Time (1927), does not treat anger explicitly in the way moral philosophers do.

Still, his exploration of Stimmungen (moods or attunements) provides a powerful framework for understanding political emotions. Heidegger argues that moods are not mere psychological states but ontological disclosures—they reveal how the world is opened up to Dasein (the human being as being-there) (Heidegger, 1927/2010). In this context, anger becomes a mood that discloses a world ruptured, unjust, or out of joint. Whereas fear discloses a threatening world and boredom a meaningless one, anger discloses a world in which our being-with-others has been violated, a world where the expectations of care and recognition have been shattered. In The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics (1929–30), Heidegger discusses profound boredom as a metaphysical mood; however, his broader framework allows us to interpret anger as a mood of political despair —a Stimmung of disillusionment with the public realm.

Heidegger's analysis of modernity as the "forgetting of Being" (Seinsvergessenheit) also carries implications for political theology. As being is reduced to calculation, utility, and control in technological modernity, human emotions are disenchanted, instrumentalised, or suppressed. Anger, under this regime, is pathologized or commodified—channeled into populist spectacle or therapeutic discourse. Yet true anger, in Heideggerian terms, is a disclosure of ontological destitution, the absence of ground, the loss of dwelling (Wohnung) in a world that no longer makes sense. This mood of groundlessness is also political. In his later work on the polis, Heidegger envisions a political order not based on power or domination, but on careful dwelling, poetic thinking, and remembrance. Anger, then, could be a prophetic signal—not of decadence—but of the need to re-ask the question of Being in the public realm. A political theology grounded in Heideggerian insight must attend to moods as revelations of historical crisis, not as psychological disturbances.

Jacques Derrida distinguishes between law (loi) and justice—the former being a system of rules, the latter an undecidable and infinite demand. Anger, for Derrida, emerges as a response to this

gap, the incommensurability between the law as it is and justice as it should be (Derrida, 1990). Derrida's thought does not moralize anger but exposes its structural necessity: in every legal system, there is violence, exclusion, and deferral. The law must decide, and in doing so, it always produces injustice. Thus, anger becomes the voice of the excluded, a protest against the system's closure. Yet Derrida warns that this anger must not be absolutized. Rather, it must be deconstructed—exposed to the event of justice that is always "to come" (à venir).

In his later writings on hospitality, forgiveness, and mourning, Derrida suggests that political life cannot be reduced to the logic of vengeance or retribution. True justice cannot be grounded in anger alone, because anger tends toward finality and closure. Instead, Derrida calls for a messianic openness, a deferral that maintains the possibility of justice without domination. In this framework, political theology must attend not only to the power of Wrath but to the fragility of justice, the impossibility of fully reconciling the demand for moral clarity with the ambiguity of human action. Derrida also critiques the sovereign pretensions of theology—especially those political theologies that claim absolute moral certainty. In Acts of Religion (2002), he examines how both secular and religious regimes invoke divine Wrath to justify violence. In contrast, Derrida proposes a theology of the "wholly other," a God who eludes our grasp and refuses to be enlisted in human projects of power. Anger, in this view, must remain open to interruption, delay, and mourning, rather than becoming a totalizing claim to moral superiority.

Having traced anger through the metaphysical, ethical, and ontological traditions of Western philosophy and theology, this work proposes a constructive framework for engaging political anger without reducing it to pathology or sanctifying it as justice incarnate. The challenge before political theology today is twofold: (1) to acknowledge that anger often emerges from legitimate experiences of injustice and exclusion, and (2) to resist the temptation to idolize or instrumentalize anger in pursuit of political

power. Drawing from the thinkers discussed earlier—Aquinas, Augustine, Hegel, Spinoza, Heidegger, Derrida, and others—this section offers a critique of modern political structures that suppress, manipulate, or exploit anger. It proposes a vision of redemptive politics grounded in humility, recognition, and theological discernment.

Based on its belief that reason, deliberation, and institutional neutrality would govern or sublimate the more unstable aspects of human emotion, modern liberalism, as influenced by Locke, Kant, and subsequent thinkers such as Rawls, believed that the political space could (similarly to the religious one) be controlled through deliberation. Anger in this schema emerged as an awkward relic of irrationality, a thing not to be discussed in society or to be tolerated only when it is tamed behind the veil of polite and procedural forms. However, as philosophers such as Hegel and Bradley observed, anger is often the expression of a lack of recognition, the spiritual scar of being unseen, unrecognized, or misrepresented. Liberal politics, in its pursuit of universal abstraction, often overrides the specific stories of distress that lend themselves to political outrage. It does the opposite of peace-building because it demands emotional restraint while never repairing the moral balance, sending whole populations rushing into ideologies that would pass on the moral penalty through indignation. This is not a failure in terms of emotions, but a theological one. It is the image of a political theology that has turned off passion and justice, grace and truth. By doing so, liberalism ushers in its own principle of crisis, as it either leaves them without feeling or with all ignited rage unrealized.

Instead of condemning and absolutizing anger, political theology can offer a third way: anger as a form of lamentation. Finally, the prophetic part of the Hebrew Bible tradition expressed anger in non-condemnatory terms, often as lament — desperate, transcendence-seeking complaints for justice, mercy, and restoration. This sacred Wrath fills the Psalms, and it is not vengeful, but it is a request for God to help. This fury is not a

frenzy; it is rather a covenantal protest, the mark of a faithfulness to the moral order when its aspect is lost. This kind of political anger plays a significant role in contemporary life. We can see it in the voices of the survivors and mourners in racial and ecological disasters or the disintegration of the community. They are not trying to take over but trying to testify--to say that certain things should not have happened, that there is still moral rebuilding to do and that we can not afford to be silent. Such anger has long been seen as a powerful force in liberation theologies, Black theology, and feminist theology. It is not hatred, but a call for dignity, honor, and identity. Here, anger is a quest for moral clarity, a move to rediscover the traditions, groups, and stories that will help make the suffering more understandable and the protest more worthwhile. Political theology must therefore seek to take on anger as an allowable object, but also as a changing mode, not funneled into warfare, but into covenant repair.

**3.Christianity, Wrath, and Divine Justice**

Christianity has played a unique and transformative role in the long and broad history of political emotions. It recasts the moral calculus of human emotions by situating anger within the context of divine justice, mercy, and the narrative of salvation. However, rather than simply condemning anger as a dangerous passion or valorizing it as a civic virtue, early Christian thought also confronted anger with deep ambivalence, recognizing both its potential for destruction and its connection to the demands of justice, and seeking to transform it through spiritual discipline and theological reflection. This section will examine how Christianity, particularly in its scriptural witness and patristic heritage, has influenced attitudes towards Wrath. It explores the relationship between divine anger and sacred texts, as well as the connection between human anger and moral considerations. It examines the paths made available for peaceful passion through theological considerations. Rather than suppressing political emotions, Christianity offered a profound metaphysical perspective that placed anger within the context of transformation and growth

through justice and holiness. In the process, it sets the stage for a distinctly theological response to injustice, one whose echoes can still be heard in contemporary political life.

The Hebrew Bible describes a worldview in which divine anger, far from simply being a case of anthropomorphism, is the specific form taken by God's moral concern. This divine anger is presented as righteous, measured, and purposive, proceeding not from capricious anger but from covenantal breach, injustice, and moral decadence. In books such as Exodus, Isaiah, and Psalms, the Wrath of God is considered a reaction to human attitudes towards God. It is often also associated with preaching repentance and is succeeded by restoration and compassion (Brueggemann, 1997). In the New Testament, Jesus is the embodiment of a profound redefinition of "wrath." Although Christ's teachings are preeminently full of love, mercy, and forgiveness, they are not devoid of righteous anger. His overturning of the tables in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13), his open repudiation of the scribes and Pharisees for their exploitation (Matthew 23:1-6), and his challenge to hypocrisy were all examples of this righteous anger against what is impure and against the exploitation of weakness. Therefore, in this case, anger is not opposed to holiness; rather, it is a fidelity to truth and justice. Theonom West does not deny the existence of Wrath; rather, it defines it as a divine prerogative, not a human possession. People in God's image use anger carefully, humbly, and spiritually discerningly. Not vengeance, but justice undergirded by mercy, is the divine archetype—an ideal that forms the ethical perspective of early Christian circles.

The early Christian Fathers addressed the question of anger from the perspective of spiritual progress and social stability. They saw rage as something that was both damaging and cleansing, depending on what or how it was directed. It was never understood as a morally indifferent emotion, but was instead assessed in reference to Christian virtues. "Woodcut in Chrysopilogus, and in 1481, John Chrysostom, famous for his eloquent sermons, had warned Christians about unrestrained anger, especially toward their

fellow brethren. It is true, however, that he acknowledged the importance of righteous anger in combating injustice and defending one's faith. Basil the Great similarly preached moderation, instructing Christians that anger, when used rightly, could sustain "the character of truth," but when unleashed , could destroy both the self and society (Basil, 1960).

Rage, in particular, is a complex subject and is treated in a nuanced manner by the prominent early Christian theologian Saint Augustine in his book, The City of God. He places human anger within the context of a larger story of salvation history. According to Augustine, the peace of the civitas Dei—the city of God—depends on the correction of the ordo amoris, including the proper subordination of anger to divine love. Although he acknowledged the role of anger in moral life, he cautioned that it often came packaged with inappropriate desires, such as pride, vanity, or the will to rule (Augustine, trans. 2003). However, he admitted that righteous anger against evil can, when directed by meekness and compassion, be a reflection of divine justice. These early Christian theologians reveal that a neglect of emotions did not characterize their theology, but rather an effort to develop a sanctified emotional life. Within it, anger can become a channel for grace, not violence, once purified. Converting anger into moral courage has become a key goal in Christian ethics.

The idea of Wrath is not simply a piece of theological reflection, but is woven into the Church's liturgical and social order. The invocation of divine justice was a recurring theme in early Christian liturgies, present not only in penitential rites but also throughout the hymns, prayers, and psalms employed by the early Church. The Kyrie eleison of the Greek ("Lord, have mercy') is not as much a request for mercy but a recognition of the immediate presence and action of divine justice. Monastic practice further cultivates this spiritual exercise. Desert fathers, such as Evagrius Ponticus or Abba Moses, spent time exploring passions, one of which was anger (orge), as an impediment to inner peace. They also taught the mitigation of anger through prayer, fasting, and humility,

rather than merely suppressing it from conscious awareness. These teachings shaped Christian views of communal life, which acknowledged anger but also used it for reconciliation and unity. Within this matrix, justice was no longer confined to legal and institutional limits, thus constituting a relational and sacramental act. Wrath was not what it was all about; it served to emphasize humanity's affliction and the need for God to step in, along with human empathy. In this light, political anger became a call for healing rather than vengeance. Today, secular opinions often attempt to separate religion from politics, but moral judgment concerning political anger remains deeply ingrained in theological traditions. The idea that justice requires resistance, indignation is reasonable, and public disgust can point the way to salvation is not solely dependent on rational consideration. These ideas have evolved from centuries of Christian thought on anger and the pursuit of justice. The Christian principle has been that anger is not inherently wrong, but rather must be rooted in love and directed toward restoration. This theological approach continues to shape contemporary discourses on protests, dissent, and civil disobedience, even among secular theorists. Even now, in the current hysteria of justice-seeking—so often spoken in a secular tongue—the sacred logic of righteous anger inspires it, the very outrage on behalf of the vulnerable and oppressed. That is not to imply that today's political anger accords perfectly with Christian ethics. Still, it is worth noting that the form contemporary anger takes has been significantly shaped, both historically and morally, by a tradition that took anger seriously, both morally and spiritually. The Christian conception of Wrath was always moderated by mercy, compassion, and the aspiration to change.

Christianity has profoundly shaped our moral understanding of anger by providing a theological framework in which anger is not only condemned but also transformed, redirected, and morally governed. By understanding divine anger as a response to wrongdoing and encouraging people to mimic divine mercy, Christianity sacralizes passion. In today's state of political upheaval

and elevated emotions, resurgence offers a balm to both apathy and unbridled anger. Christianity does not preach passivity in the face of injustice; instead, it preaches that everyone has a sense of what is right: humility, justice, and reconciling anger. And so it brings to our attention that peace, far from being the enemy of anger, may, so long as it is informed by love and directed toward the good, be a precondition.

**4.Enlightenment, Reason, and the Repression of Passion**

The Enlightenment was a turning point in the long story of political anger, not because it unleashed feelings, but because it worked to manage, temper, and repress them. Classical and Christian philosophies had once thought it possible to set some hope in anger, as the potentially righteous or redemptive outburst began to seem hopelessly old-fashioned to the enlightened imagination, which understood it as a menace to the rational ordering of existence in the age of sovereign reason. This section examines how leading Enlightenment figures reconceptualized passions in relation to reason, autonomy, and social progress. The point is not to offer a story of repression, but to subject to scrutiny how Enlightenment epistemologies and political visions rendered emotions, especially anger, an affair of the private and a register deemed out of place in public exchange. In the process, they gave birth to the modern political world, one in which increasingly few sources of anger were considered moral — unless they were disembodied, universalized, and abstract. This legacy continues to shape how liberal democracies attempt to regulate emotional expressions in the public sphere.

Enlightenment was essentially a movement dedicated to intellectual and moral improvement. Philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, and Hume tried to liberate human reason from superstition, dogma, and arbitrary authority. Rationality was defined as the universal power to create (objective) truth and (moral) freedom. However, in all such efforts, feelings - as long considered indispensable to moral and spiritual life - were distrusted. Descartes articulates a mechanistic account of the

emotions in his 1649 treatise The Passions of the Soul. He accepted that passions, including anger, were ineluctable features of human existence, but he argued that they must inevitably be under the control of reason. Unrestrained passion, he argued, could blind judgment and lead to rash or harmful behavior (Descartes, 1985). The self-contained Cartesian subject, who can govern his emotions through rational will, becomes the model of modern subjectivity. The authority of an automatic, selfregulating figure is dependent on emotional self-control.

Kant emphasises the superiority of moral reason over feeling. In the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785), he describes a moral agent as one who acts according to duty, not self-interest. Thus, feelings, even like anger, are not in and of themselves disingenuous. Still, they cannot be the foundation of moral actions, given their reliance on the contingent, subjective, and inconsistent nature of feelings (Kant, trans. 1997). The categorical imperative does not have time for emotionally based gripes; it seeks universal law. Kant argues that we cannot strive for justice to be done because we are consumed by anger about the injustice committed. This view has significant political implications, as it devalues emotions in ethical decision-making and citizenship.

Hume, taking a more optimistic view of emotion than the rationalist tradition, argued that emotional feeling, though subjectivized, was essential to the latter's theory of aesthetics. Hume famously claimed in his canonical A Treatise of Human Nature (1739–1740) that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (Hume, 2000). For Hume, solicited passions - particularly the moral sentiments of sympathy and resentmentare central to ethical life. In Hume's system, political anger is not celebrated as a positive or collectively enhancing virtue; emotions (third causality) are considered psychological events that can be subjected to empirical study. However, there is no sanction against indignation about perceived injustice — and that is what seems to be happening in France. Hume's theory of politics emphasizes stability, tradition, and the control of passions through habit and

instruction. In his view, an angry mob is less justified than the danger of mass irrationality. Therefore, while the rationalist and empiricist strands of Enlightenment thought differ, they agree that anger is a destructive power that needs to be controlled or transformed. The value proposition of the political system is not in giving vent to passion, but in denying it in favor of reasoned talk and institutions.

The most durable legacy of the Enlightenment is the notion of the Public Sphere, whose most famous theorist, Jürgen Habermas (1991), ironically emerged to sever its ties with the Enlightenment. This realm of reason-giving—the forum in which citizens enter as equals to reflect on matters of shared concern—rests on the normative ideal of dispassionate, rational conversation. The model citizen is not defined by anger, but by reason. In the past, emotional forms of public speech in cases where they belonged to a marginal social sector were excluded from this rational public space. Anger in politics, particularly when it comes from certain bodies, histories, and traumas, often appears irrational, uncivil, or disruptive. The conditions for such exclusion were prepared by the fact that the Enlightenment idealized impersonal reason. Absent from this model is the concept of the virtue of anger. When such communities stand up against structures of injustice, the outrage is not simply moral hysteria; it stands as a testimony to histories of unrecognized suffering. The Enlightenment's epistemic aversion to passion makes it blind to anger as a communicative act. This is especially true of the way in which the Enlightenment view of protest influences liberal institutions: it is permitted as long as it is peaceful, restrained, and rational, criteria that often hollow out the moral urgency of the oppressed.

The suppression of anger has never been entirely free from epistemic concerns and the global politics of the modern world.

European empires ruled through affective economies, whereby colonial anger was pathologized and imperial rationality was valued. The 'anger at the way things are' was seen as unsophisticated, and Rules that did not involve that emotion were

seen as civilized. Today, this emotional trend has an impact on our perception of international relations. While the anger of the Global South is often depicted as dangerous fundamentalism, the systemic violence of the Global North is presented as dispassionate objectivity.

This phenomenon is perhaps best captured by Max Weber's famous concept of "disenchantment," which is shorthand for one of the most basic processes of the secular Enlightenment: the emptying of the world of metaphysical significance and the consequent desacralization of political sentiments (Weber, 1946). Politics, now increasingly interpreted as bureaucratic and procedural, loses some of its existential and emotional charge. Feelings such as anger, sadness, or pleasure are privatised, confined to the personal or creative arena, and estranged from the rationality of Rule. This disillusion creates a paradox. On the other hand, the state becomes more secular, neutral, and stable.

In contrast, it stops listening to the moral claims of its people. Political anger, which used to be seen as a call for attention or a source of insight, is now understood as a matter of immaturity or a danger to order, and is regarded as a disturbance that should be tamped down, rather than a demand that should be fully understood. Political repression has several political consequences. When anger is discredited, it resurfaces in ersatz variations: populist uproar, nihilistic revolt, or apocalyptic radicalism. This Enlightenment project of depoliticizing emotion leads not to peace, but to a delayed yet boiling-over rage — a rage that simmered and boiled when denied formal expression. The modern rational state is, therefore, increasingly confronted with emotions it can neither fully fathom nor allow for.

The impact of the Enlightenment on the emerging history of political anger is complex and paradoxical. On the other hand, it espoused critical thinking, emancipatory ethics, and universal human rights. However, it also led to restraining lust, downgrading emotional protests, and isolating anyone whose anger failed to meet the standards of rational civility. It is this legacy that political

theology must confront. Rationalised politics has brought us innumerable advances in law, science, and governance, to be sure. Still, it has also thrust us into an environment in which anger (especially of marginalised groups) is refracted as random noise and not taken for what it is: the rhetorical signature of moral perception. To regain the ethical possibilities of anger, we must examine the Enlightenment beliefs that have shaped our understanding of emotion, reason, and human nature. This is not a plea to abandon reason, but to expand its reach. Reason ought not to exclude emotion, but instead engage with it — critically, ethically, and politically. It is only through this process that we can begin to mend the shattered relationship between ardor and justice in our political present.

# CHAPTER 3
# Sovereignty and Sacred Power

**1. Carl Schmitt — The Theologian of Power**

Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) stands as an indispensable and provocative figure in twentieth-century political theory, whose insights demand our attention. His groundbreaking works seamlessly integrate legal analysis, political philosophy, and theology, offering a profound exploration of sovereignty, decisionmaking, and the very foundations of political order. Schmitt's bold assertion that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts" (Schmitt, 2005, p. 36) positions him as a central authority in political theology. In this chapter, we will explore how Schmitt's ideas effectively illuminate the sacred dimensions of power, portraying the Sovereign as a divine parallel, framing the political exception as a powerful ceremony of authority, and defining the friendenemy dichotomy as a vital ritual of communal identity. Schmitt's portrayal of sovereignty not only reveals the theological roots of modern politics but also vividly illustrates how political anger and sacrifice are strategically harnessed to fortify power. His insights are not merely academic; they are essential for understanding the intricate dynamics of power in our world today.

Schmitt embarks on a compelling exploration of the origins of the modern state, challenging the conventional notion that it emerged from a rational consensus. Instead, he persuasively argues that it evolved from the profound Christian concept of a transcendent, omnipotent deity. Just as the medieval God-king wielded ultimate authority, the secular Sovereign must possess the unchallenged power to transcend higher laws in times of crisis.

Schmitt (2005) emphatically declares:

*"Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (p.* In a bold and compelling assertion, Schmitt's central thesis emerges with undeniable clarity: true sovereignty transcends the mere application of law, manifesting instead in the audacious capacity to suspend it. For Schmitt, the exception is not a trivial anomaly; it is the very core of sovereignty, where decisive action triumphs over established norms. This concept, akin to a divine prerogative, mirrors the power to intervene in history, to bestow blessings or mete out condemnation beyond the confines of ordinary rituals. Secularizing theological matters, such as omnipotence, exception, and judgment, by translating them into secular terms, Schmitt views the political domain as both sacred and profane simultaneously. This is similar to the relationship between law and creation, where both would serve as the source and benchmark of norms. In this context, political anger, because it transcends instrumentality, has the nature of a religious ritual. The resolution of the Sovereign is greeted with mass enthusiasm, invests the power with sacredness, and the submission is a must. This is not a sterile piece of legislation, but an act of a performance-shifting group, redirecting energy into union or segregation with manifest power.

In typical Schmittian fashion, he describes the state of exception as an important political ceremony, an operatic discovery, in which not only is sovereignty applied but also strengthened, steeled, so to speak. During proclaimed states of emergency, the Sovereign directly addresses the populace, navigating between fear and hope, while simultaneously redesigning the social contract itself. This exemption falls into two broad categories: it is an exemption in the legal sense, on the one hand, and an ultimate symbolic act on the other. Political Theology, a classic by Schmitt, provides an account of this dual nature, illustrated through historical examples and many instructive instances, such as senatusconsulta (decrees or resolutions) in Roman law, dispensations in the Middle Ages, or the martial law of today. He can keenly observe how, in an emergency, humans instinctively move away from written law towards the voice of the Sovereign. The feelings provoked by such

an encounter are fear of disorder, comfort in being in safe hands, and blind faith in the person who brings order again. It appears that this is not a simple policy choice or cultural concept, but something more profound and deeply rooted. In the case of Schmitt, political theology should be strictly concerned with both the juridical processes and the emotional implications of the thinking mode behind exceptionalist acts. This is the point where political anger is important. The king is not presented as an exception, but as an eminent antidote to the risks of death or betrayals. Enemies (both internal and external) are portrayed as a threat to the common good. It is this antisocial anger directed against such enemies that is strategically utilized in the defense of exceptional powers. The exception, therefore, becomes a sacrament of reconciliation as well as a strong justification for targeting the perceived enemies.

The central idea of Schmitt's theory is interesting and convincing, suggesting that politics is deeply concerned with the two extreme forms of friends and enemies. This is not the view of a political activist alone; it is a great way to gain insight into the political arena. To Schmitt, politics is actualized only through people defining themselves in an existential struggle. According to Schmitt (1996), the greatest political difference, and in some ways the costliest, is between the friend and the enemy, because, as conceived by the author, the friend-enemy distinction is the most significant. This act of demarcation transcends opinions and personal interests; rather, it is a profound statement of national self-identity. The Notions of friend and enemy are not labels, but are conceptualized through the actions of rejection and connection, hence the ontological nature of the political community. Such a movement reminds one of the old theological debate between covenants and chosenness. In the Old Testament, the Israelites defined themselves in opposition to other nations; in Christian symbolism, it was the body of Christ against the forces of evil. These archetypes were secularized by Schmitt, who views the political community as an assemblage of mutual fortunes and lives that are under siege by the otherness. In this instance, the politics of

enmity toward the enemy would take the form of a religious obligation, serving as a front for the sacred order of the state. This is not a purely hypothetical view, as it provides powerful insights into the more recent populist and nationalist movements.

Under these conditions, the sovereign and citizens band together against the cosmopolitan elite, immigrants, and ideological enemies. Anger is more than a feeling, but a ritual response: protesting in the streets, waving flags, and chanting rude songs, which is involved in sacramental politics. The question of who is a friend and who is an enemy encompasses more than just a concept; it is a pragmatic, inspirational reality that drives moral fervor, turns grievance into group therapy, and justifies their policies of exclusion. This is what our truth is in politics, and therefore should be considered and discussed.

Political theology by Schmitt is very strong in criticizing liberalism, overruling its premises with surprising lucidity. He demonstrated the failures embedded in liberal normativism, which was underpinned by cosmopolitan disinterestedness and an unwillingness to face existential crises. Liberal democratic adherence to the ways of dialogue, compromise and individual rights, according to Schmitt, is a disguise to the radical hostility that truly is politics. Negotiation is often the political way of decision-making in democratic systems, which assumes the homogeneity of the citizens. Nevertheless, in cases where underlying divisions in the country exist regarding national identity, threat management, and the role of religion, liberal mechanisms tend to break down, resulting in standstills or crises. Focusing on decisions and extraordinary cases, Schmitt tried to restore the principle of reality to politics. He argues that anger is not always a blind reaction, but a very important indicator to the sovereign and citizens about the disagreements that hinder rational talk. Schmitt reminds us that the liberal tendency to overlook the opponent or unusual situations increases chaos instead of considering it. This criticism, especially, is relevant nowadays as liberal societies face the challenge of integrating pluralism with existential threats to their sovereignty:

terrorism, migration and pandemic. Schmitt's emphasis on courage, decisionism, and the political precedence of collective will serves as a cutting counter to deliberative proceduralism. But at the same time, it is a solemn lesson by its example of what sovereign wrath uncontrolled becomes: tyranny, persecution, and the abrogation of fundamental liberties.

**2. Political Theology After Schmitt**

Even Schmitt's acknowledgement of the dangers inherent in his theories underscores the critical importance of caution. In his later reflections on political theology, he prudently moderated his earlier enthusiasm and accepted certain fundamental constraints on extraordinary power, as well as the necessity of normative foundations (Schmitt, 1976). He astutely recognised that such exceptions can only be justified infrequently and that a sovereign who may wield extensive powers during a crisis must subsequently be governed by law. Contemporary political theology is thus not only a heir to, but also a rigorous critic of, Schmittian formulations. Influential theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Giorgio Agamben (and more narratively, Adrian Pabst) employ his ideas to explore how the need for political decisiveness can be sustained without descending into sacrificial violence. They examine what types of institutions can regulate sovereign exception and prevent the onset of authoritarianism. These questions remain highly relevant in the current era of emergency legislation, executive overreach, and hysteria. Political theology seeks resources beyond Schmitt's binary opposition. It refers to a conception of sovereignty that aligns with traditions that emphasise responsible covenants, accountability, and sacrificial leadership (Moltmann, 1974; Sobrino, 1995). These approaches assert that sacred imaginaries shape politics, but power must be exercised for the sake of justice, mercy, and the public good. This is more than an intellectual critique; it is a clarion call for a more equitable and just political order.

The sacred dimension of political theology, as observed by Carl Schmitt in the depths of his works, concerns the understanding of sovereignty, decision-making, and collective identity, and as a

result, causes one to reconsider the basic elements of political authority. Schmitt critiques the secularization of theological ideas by exemplifying how an all-powerful God was now reinterpreted as an all-powerful sovereign, a divine exception now becoming a state of emergency, and sacramental actions now being perceived as symbolic state violence against the so-called enemy. He points out that political construction is sustained or sometimes created through the organized manipulation of important emotions, such as anger, fear, loyalty, and sacrifice. We are compelled to acknowledge this severe aspect of politics due to the open criticism of Schmitt, who is attempting to overturn liberalism by rejecting the idea of conflict; nevertheless, his warning on the dangers of exception cautions against a standard response. Political theology should incorporate Schmitt's knowledge within a broader framework of decision-making that balances the interplay between decision and deliberation, freedom and responsibility, wrath and compassion. Such a balance is the key to achieving the unfulfilled promise of modern politics and imagining what sovereign power would actually direct toward liberation —the transformative potential of anger, rather than oppression.

**3. Erik Peterson and the Challenge of Monotheism**

Erik Peterson's theological engagement with political theory represents a significant departure in the history of political theology. During the tumultuous interwar period in Europe, Peterson rejected the prevailing model of political theology as articulated by Carl Schmitt, particularly its theological foundation in monotheism as a legitimising structure for sovereign power. In his seminal 1935 essay, "Monotheism as a Political Problem", Peterson argued that the Christian doctrine of divine unity neither serves nor can it serve as the foundation for a theory of political sovereignty modelled on divine omnipotence. His critique constituted a profound challenge to theological appropriations by the political sphere, offering an alternative approach to understanding the relationship between God, power, and politics.

This section of the paper examines Peterson's theological response to Schmitt and elucidates the implications of his argument for contemporary discussions on sacred power. While Schmitt sought to maintain the theopolitical unity of theology and statecraft, Peterson disrupted this notion by asserting that Christian monotheism was inherently theologically incompatible with imperial political structures. The result is the decoupling of sovereignty from the sacred, a separation with significant implications for our understanding of political authority, legitimacy, and transcendence in the modern world.

Peterson's argument is deceptively simple but devastating in consequence. He claims that the traditional alignment of monotheism with political unity—most clearly expressed in the notion that "one God implies one empire and one emperor"— is a theological distortion. Drawing from his patristic studies and conversion to Roman Catholicism, Peterson insists that Christianity's articulation of monotheism in Trinitarian terms defies the idea of undivided, centralised, and unaccountable sovereignty. The doctrine of the Trinity, which affirms a tripersonal divine life, undermines any theological foundation for absolute political centralism.

His critique was aimed in part at the theological justifications of political order that had underwritten empires from the Byzantine model to the Hegelian state. But his immediate target was Carl Schmitt's claim that the modern sovereign state, in declaring the exception, mirrors the omnipotence of the divine legislator. For Peterson, this claim not only misreads theology but also corrupts the ecclesial witness of Christianity by tying it to political absolutism. The unity of God, he argues, cannot be replicated in the political sphere without a dangerous and idolatrous conflation of divine and human authority (Peterson, 2011). What emerges from Peterson's critique is a decisive break: Christian theology, when properly understood, cannot provide a foundation for any form of autocratic political sovereignty. This theological break does not entail the

rejection of politics per se, but it reframes the role of theology in political life—not as legitimator, but as critic.

At the heart of Peterson's resistance is a theological commitment to the Trinity as a safeguard against theological authoritarianism. In contrast to monarchical or modalist accounts of God's unity, the Trinitarian doctrine insists on relationality, mutuality, and internal differentiation within the divine life. This theological vision, far from being an abstract metaphysical claim, has political implications. It introduces plurality into unity, communion into hierarchy, and dialogue into dominion. By affirming the plurality of persons within the one God, Peterson challenges the conceptual move that links divine oneness to centralised power. This challenge has enduring significance in the field of political theology. It suggests that Christian politics, if it is to be faithful to its theological ground, cannot endorse a model of sovereignty that suppresses plurality or imposes uniformity through force. Rather, it must cultivate forms of political life that reflect mutuality, difference, and shared responsibility.

In this context, Peterson anticipates the later concerns of thinkers such as Jürgen Moltmann and John Zizioulas, who draw on Trinitarian theology to argue for political models grounded in relationality and participation rather than command and control. Political anger, in such a framework, does not find expression in the Sovereign's punitive action, but in the collective protest against exclusion and authoritarianism—a form of anger animated by the denial of communal belonging.

Peterson's critique is not only theoretical but ecclesiological.

His vision of the Church stands in opposition to the imperial logic that fuses theology with statecraft. For Peterson, the Church must refuse to mirror the structures of empire. It must be a community of witnesses, not an organ of state sovereignty. This position challenged both Protestant and Catholic traditions that had historically lent their theological weight to the nation-state. Importantly, Peterson did not retreat into quietism or privatism. His theology is not a renunciation of the political but a reframing of its

conditions. He insisted that the Church's task is to remind the political order of its limits, to resist the sacralisation of temporal power, and to embody a community where power is exercised in service, not domination. Such a vision aligns with the early Christian martyrs, who refused to acknowledge the emperor's claim to divinity, not because they denied the necessity of political order, but because they affirmed a higher loyalty.

In our contemporary age, where populism often mobilises religious symbols to consecrate authoritarian power, Peterson's refusal is timely. His insistence that theology must never become a cloak for empire challenges political theologians to guard against the state's co-optation of the sacred. Political anger, in this light, must be directed not only at injustice, but at idolatry—the making of human authority absolute.

Although Peterson's direct influence was limited in his lifetime, his critique has acquired renewed relevance in recent decades. In theological and political circles, his warning against conflating divine unity with political sovereignty has inspired critical reflection on the dangers of theocratic nationalism, messianic populism, and sacralised authority. Political theologians such as William Cavanaugh, Rowan Williams, and Catherine Pickstock have drawn on Peterson to argue for a reimagining of politics that resists coercive unity and reclaims the space for alternative forms of community.

Peterson's work is particularly salient in post-colonial contexts, where religion is frequently deployed to reinforce the authority of the state. In such settings, the Trinitarian critique becomes a resource for resisting both imperial legacies and contemporary authoritarianism. It suggests that true theological fidelity may require disobedience to political power, especially when that power claims divine sanction. Moreover, Peterson invites us to reconsider the emotional tenor of political life. If anger in Schmitt's framework is mobilised by the Sovereign to consolidate unity, in Peterson's account, anger may arise from the conscience of the believer who resists idolatrous claims of power. Such anger is

not destructive but prophetic. It is the anger of the martyr, the dissenter, the exile—the one who refuses to worship at the altar of the state.

The intervention of Erik Peterson is a vital shift within political theology. He breaks the association between monotheism and political unity to reveal the theological misconception behind most theories of sovereignty. His adherence to the Trinity as a solution to the assumption of power creates an opening for a politics of relation, struggle and servitude. Where political anger in the world tends to be fanned by authoritarian smearing or suppressed by ideological accommodation, one finds a model alternative to such offered by Peterson. His political theology has been characterized by silence, criticism, and adherence to the transcendent origin of justice, which no king can abstain from. He has a theology of limits, suggesting that the divine power, which is sacred when properly understood, is not a means to control, but rather a call to humility. Given that the modern world is still grappling with the process of re-sacralizing politics, another problem initiated by Peterson still stands: theology cannot serve the empire. There must be service of truth--even though it has to be served in exile.

**4. Agamben and the Problem of Bare Life**

One of the more philosophically breathtaking and politically disturbing treatments of the concept of sovereignty to be read in the wake of Carl Schmitt is Giorgio Agamben's. Following Schmitt's insight that sovereignty is characterized by the power to make decisions on the exception, Agamben goes further and discovers beneath the same political logics a more radical and dark one: the creation of the so-called bare life (nuda vita). In this conception, Agamben reads the Sovereign in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998) as one who does not simply suspend law during emergencies, but rather creates an excess of bare life occupying a space of exception in which life is part of the political order only by being excluded from it. To the modern sovereignty, then, is based the ability to deprive human beings of political and legal status, to

make them killable, but not sacrificeable, that is, to fix the boundaries of something that cannot be exterminated.

This part examines the theory of bare life developed by Agamben, which exposes a hidden theological economy in contemporary biopolitics. Following the genealogy of sovereignty through time, linking ancient Rome to the modern states of exception, Agamben demonstrates that the logic of exception and exclusion had been adopted as a rule of governance. In this context, political anger is not only the fury of the discarded, but a repressed howl of the homo sacer; the life deprived of its means, denied its dignity and exposed to disposal. From Schmitt to Agamben: The Exception Becomes the Rule.

Agamben takes up Schmitt's famous assertion that "sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt, 2005), but he reverses its implications. For Schmitt, the state of exception reveals the foundational role of decision in constituting legal order. For Agamben, however, the exception is not a temporary suspension but a permanent feature of modern governance. He argues that the state of exception, once an extraordinary measure, has now become a normative technique of control. What began as a provisional response to crisis has been generalised into a mode of rule.

This transformation has theological roots. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin and Christian metaphysics, Agamben demonstrates that the modern state retains a quasi-theological structure in which sovereign power mirrors divine omnipotence—not through benevolence, but through the power of abandonment. Just as God in certain theological traditions permits the damned to fall outside the economy of salvation, the sovereign permits certain lives to exist outside the economy of rights. These lives are not outside the law, but rather held within the law by being excluded from its protection—a paradox Agamben calls inclusive exclusion. In this framework, the figure of the Sovereign is not merely a lawgiver but a thanatopolitical force—the one who decides whose life counts and whose life can be disposed of without ritual, justice, or mourning.

The central figure in Agamben's thought is the homo sacer—a Roman legal category denoting a person who could be killed but not sacrificed. This paradoxical figure, both sacred and outlawed, occupies a zone of indistinction between life and death, law and violence, sacred and profane. The homo sacer is the prototype of modern subjects who are rendered expendable: stateless persons, refugees, detainees, the undocumented, the institutionalised, and even certain racialised populations.

Unlike the classical citizen who participates in political life, the homo sacer is politically invisible. Their death carries no legal consequence, and their suffering is socially unmarked. This production of bare life, Agamben argues, is not an anomaly—it is a structural necessity of modern political power. Herein lies the theological resonance: the homo sacer stands in for the sacrificial victim, yet without the redemptive framework that gives sacrifice meaning. They are not offered to the gods but cast out from the social body. Their exclusion is what secures the order for others. Thus, the logic of sacred exclusion persists in secular form. The modern state does not simply administer life; it decides who lives with meaning and who is left to die anonymously.

Agamben's most radical claim is that the camp—not the parliament or the courthouse—is the biopolitical paradigm of modern governance. From Nazi concentration camps to Guantánamo Bay to refugee detention centres, the camp is the space where law is suspended and yet fully operative, where bodies are managed outside political recognition. In the camp, sovereignty manifests not as representation or legislation, but as the absolute power over life and death.

The camp is a zone where the exception becomes spatially and temporally realised. Agamben writes, "the camp is the space that opens up when the state of exception begins to become the rule" (Agamben, 1998, p. 168). This space is not always marked by barbed wire and guard towers—it may also be evident in bureaucratic procedures, immigration protocols, and health regulations. What defines it is the exposure of life to power without

mediation. In such spaces, anger becomes inarticulate, resistance is depoliticised, and humanity is reduced to a biological fact. This insight bears profound implications for political theology. If sovereignty depends on the capacity to produce bare life, then any theology that legitimises state power risks complicity in the logic of abandonment. Political anger, in this light, must be more than reactive; it must name and confront the structural production of exclusion. It must re-politicise the abandoned body and reclaim the theological meaning of life beyond utility or sovereignty.

At the core of Agamben's theory is the ban—the mechanism by which a subject is simultaneously included and excluded from a community. The ban, inherited from medieval legal traditions, designates a person who is outside the law but still subject to it. This double-bind creates a sacrificial structure: the one who is banned becomes the victim through whose exclusion the community affirms itself.

Agamben reads this through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory and sacrificial anthropology. Yet he goes further: modern political orders no longer require visible rituals of sacrifice, because the process of exclusion is built into their structure. The excluded are not ritually slain; they are disappeared, warehoused, or rendered invisible. Their pain is not mediated by theological meaning but evacuated of significance altogether. This is the ultimate scandal for political theology: that the secular state, having displaced the sacred, continues to perform its functions in degraded form. Sovereignty, in Agamben's account, is not the solution to disorder but the generator of a hidden sacrificial economy. Political anger must therefore turn not only against unjust laws but against the structural mechanisms of abandonment that law disguises.

Despite the bleakness of his diagnosis, Agamben gestures toward a form of resistance. In his writings on messianism, particularly in The Time That Remains (2005), he invokes the Pauline concept of kairós—the time of interruption, the moment of divine intervention that suspends the existing order. Agamben does not propose a return to theology, but he draws on its motifs to

imagine a break in the continuity of sovereign power. The messianic does not restore the law; it fulfills and thereby neutralizes it. It renders the apparatus of exclusion inoperative.

This eschatological gesture is not simply religious—it is political. It calls for the unmaking of the structures that produce bare life, the deactivation of the exception, and the restoration of human life to dignity beyond legality. Political anger, in this framework, must become messianic: not merely vengeful or revolutionary, but oriented toward a radical rupture that redefines the very grammar of power. Agamben's messianism is austere, but it offers hope: that even in a world saturated by abandonment and biopolitical control, a new form of life—what he calls formof-life—might emerge. This is a life not captured by law, not reducible to function, not subject to sovereign abandonment. It is a life lived otherwise.

The theory of bare life, developed by Agamben, shows that the modern Sovereign not only legislates or judges, but also abandons. Popular consent is not the only way of maintaining sovereignty, but rather the silent generation of life, excluded from political value. The anger resulting from such abandonment is both symptomatic and a possible catalyst. As it comes to terms with the reality of the homo sacer, political theology is presented with a theological responsibility: not only to expose the logic of exclusion, but also to argue a form of community that is nonsacrificial. Agamben confronts us with the idea that sovereignty cannot be thought of solely as decision or exception, but also as a residue of theology that cannot be ignored. He is not utopian, not resigned: his vision is apocalyptic in the strictest meaning of this term: a unveiling of the guilty secret of modernity and an invitation to commit life thereafter.

**5. Sovereignty, Exception, and Modern Governance**

The fact that the concept of sovereignty remains active in contemporary regulation reveals a contradiction within modern politics. Although liberal political theory focuses on rights, the role of participation, and establishing checks, the Sovereign's ability to

suspend the norm to maintain order is still implicit in the organization of modern states. The state of exception can be found in states of emergency and martial law, in executive orders, in constitutional exceptionalism, and even within the modern state itself, in the logic of the exception operating within. That is not a remnant of authoritarian pasts; it is the basis of current crisis governance.

In this area, we outline the origins of the concept of sovereignty as exception within the Schmittian and post-Schmittian traditions, which are often situated within the supposedly liberal-constitutional order. It shows how the modern instruments of governance, including the legislature, the judiciary, and bureaucracy, as they are constructed, are not built in contraposition to exceptionalism, but rather in a dialectical relationship with it. Quite to the contrary, sovereignty not only does not succumb to the cloud of modernity but rather finds a new way of existence in more bureaucratic and technocratic forms. The outcome is a regime of control in which law, exception, and administration frequently combine, often out of reach of the population's scrutiny or democratic control, and the hidden Sovereign compromises constitutionalism.

Modern constitutional states frequently proclaim themselves as legal-rational polities governed by rules, institutions, and the separation of powers. However, Carl Schmitt's fundamental insight remains: at the heart of every constitution lies a moment of ungrounded authority—the decision that constitutes the constitution itself. Whether in revolutions, declarations of independence, or founding charters, sovereignty appears not as a product of law but as its precondition. Once the legal framework is in place, sovereign power does not vanish; it becomes latent. In moments of crisis—such as natural disasters, terrorism, or pandemics—the dormant sovereign reactivates. Governments invoke emergency powers, suspend constitutional protections, or enact sweeping executive measures. These exceptions, even when time-bound, normalise the

capacity of the Sovereign to override the norm in the name of survival.

What is troubling is not merely the use of exceptional powers, but their routinisation. In the United States, for instance, the post9/11 landscape saw the legal institutionalisation of indefinite detention, extraordinary rendition, and warrantless surveillance under the guise of national security. In India, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) grants military personnel extraordinary authority in designated "disturbed areas," often with minimal judicial oversight. In each case, the exception becomes a mechanism of governance, not an anomaly.

While classical theories of sovereignty focus on the figure of the monarch or executive, modern governance operates through diffuse networks of administration, regulation, and surveillance. Michel Foucault's work on governmentality helps illuminate this shift. Rather than the visible Sovereign who commands, modern power governs through population management, disciplinary institutions, and normalising judgement (Foucault, 2007). Yet, as Giorgio Agamben reminds us, this biopolitical turn does not abolish the exception—it reconfigures it.

Modern bureaucratic states operate through a complex interplay of legality and discretion. Civil servants, regulatory agencies, and technocrats hold significant authority in interpreting and applying laws. During crises, this administrative sovereignty expands dramatically, with emergency health orders, financial bailouts, and travel restrictions enacted with limited parliamentary debate. In these moments, governance appears as a technocratic necessity rather than a political decision, obscuring the underlying sovereign logic. Importantly, this form of sovereignty is impersonal and opaque. Decisions are issued in the name of public health, economic stability, or national security, often without naming a single sovereign agent. Yet the effects are sovereign in the Schmittian sense: they define the norm by deciding its suspension. Political anger under such conditions becomes difficult to direct, as

sovereignty is dispersed across institutions, algorithms, and committees.

Giorgio Agamben's claim that the "state of exception has become the rule" (Agamben, 2005) finds validation in the legal and political architecture of many modern states. Emergency powers are no longer temporary deviations; they are written into constitutions, treaties, and administrative codes. This juridification of the exception creates a structural ambiguity: the law authorises its own suspension.

This paradox has grave implications for democratic legitimacy. If the executive can invoke emergency powers to bypass legislative processes, dissolve dissent, or curtail rights, the constitutional order is undermined from within. The Sovereign no longer needs to declare war; it only needs to declare a crisis. Moreover, not everything is value-free in the declaration of exception, as it is often politically selective in many cases. Resistance, opposition, or minority actions are presented as a threat to the social order, or they invite extraordinary measures. Then the violence or economic dehumanisation of the state is even more legitimised. This asymmetry shows the existence of exception as a concept of political containment. Fringe anger is criminalized; center-based anger is justified.

Sovereignty in the twenty-first century cannot be confined to the land or to legislation; it has become an integral part of the digital world. States profess that they have access to the data flows, social media, and digital identities in the name of sovereignty. Such a form of digital sovereignty, however, is inclined to replicate the logic of exception. In the absence of a remedy or due process, material can be deleted, an account can be closed, or access can be forbidden.

Additionally, the algorithm becomes an exception agent. It defines visibility, reach, and even the validity of information in a way that undermines sovereign decision-making. Platform firms, in collaboration with states, create and delay the code of the digital public square. This platform governance occurs through ambiguous

terms of use and the automation of moderation using artificial intelligence, without adhering to legal norms.

Such political implications are theological. The exemption that was once owned by the king or the state is nowadays occupying the code. Algorithms, which redefine sovereign power, increasingly dominate the parameters of discourse, political mobilizations, and even vote counts. Helpless and designer-jammed, deflected and muted-down political anger can scarcely have any genuine opportunities to become palpable.

Given the entrenchment of exception in modern governance, political theology must ask: Is a different form of sovereignty possible? Can power be reimagined not as the capacity to decide on exclusion, but as the ability to foster inclusion, accountability, and care? Some thinkers, such as Judith Butler (2004), have proposed an ethic of vulnerability as a counter to the logic of sovereignty. Sovereignty, in this view, must be displaced by interdependence and relationality. Others, such as Achille Mbembe (2017), emphasize the need for "democratic sovereignty" rooted in the collective imagination of freedom, rather than in the reproduction of crisis.

Christian and post-Christian theology offer resources for this rethinking. The sovereignty of God in many theological traditions is not simply power over, but power for—the power to redeem, forgive, and empower. Such sovereignty does not suspend the norm to dominate but interrupts violence to restore. This theological vision, if translated into political praxis, could inspire a new ethos of leadership: one not rooted in exception, but in responsibility.

Despite liberal claims to rational governance and institutional neutrality, the sovereign exception remains a central feature of modern political life. It reappears in constitutions, crises, and codes. It is exercised not only by presidents and parliaments, but by bureaucrats, algorithms, and surveillance apparatuses. The political order remains haunted by the figure of the sovereign— the one who decides, suspends, and excludes.

Political theology must disclose this haunting. It must reveal the hidden logic of the sacrifice of our law, the blessed anger of our security rhetoric and the theology, which are suppressed in our bureaucratic processes. It must dream of more than criticism: alternatives, other forms of sovereignty that would also not require sacrifice but would provide it with its sustenance. The advocacy of rage is not being promoted in this case, despite the anger involved. It is to know the anger as such an index--a moral disturbance--of the power of violence within the norm, and the power of power which is that which is masked in exception. The failure to listen to that anger is also the failure to recognize the futility of the new kind of governance that is modern and the need to imagine things afresh. In this regard, the liberal promise of the secular age was, in part, a promise of containment: that secularisation of politics could be achieved, that the sacred could be individualised, and that political authority could be based on universal, non-religious propositions. However, in the twentyfirst century, an extraordinary reintroduction of the sacred into the field of politics has occurred. The post-secular condition has resurrected the theological in overt and underground forms; poor religious nationalism (with its weak politics) and populist investitures of divine sanction are only two of the myriad forms of revivification. The sacred, which the liberal imagination has long exiled to the furthest precincts of politics, also arrives once more to shake the political world: in the form of rage, in the method of legitimacy, and in the form of mourning.

This part explores how the sacred reappears in modern politics, not as a relic of bygone days, but as an organizer of political imagination and practice. Quite the opposite of fading into oblivion, the sacred now resides in both reactionary and emancipatory political practices. Political theology will consequently have to contend with sovereignty and exception as much as with the ongoing effectiveness of the sacred in rivaling, sanctifying, and segregating.

## 6. The Post-Secular Condition

The post-secular is a designation of one development in the direction of modernity. However, it is not a call to a premodern theocracy, but rather a rupture in the secularizing history of liberalism as an Enlightenment. Even in seemingly secular societies, intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas (2008) have acknowledged that religion continues to influence the paths of public reason and moral being. Other attempts, such as Charles Taylor's (2007), aimed at accuracy in following the complex evolution of secular modernity, which was a moral and spiritual phenomenon in its own right.

In the post-secular condition, religious discourse returns to the arena of the common, not this time as a solely individual belief, but as the resolution of individuality, contraposition, and force. Globalisation, migration, and the dysfunctionality of technocratic politics have contributed to the re-sacralisation of political belonging. The crisis of liberal institutions has compelled people to look back to more ancient narratives of divine order, transcendent purpose, and cosmic justice. This does not come in uniformity and with benignity. It is working its way in numerous opposite directions: in Islamic revivalism, Christian nationalism, indigenous cosmology and inter-faith solidarity. The aspect of sacredness is also visible in churches, temples, and mosques. Still, it is also represented in symbolic rituals and moral panic, which in the political life form and structure the political landscape. The profane, on the contrary, of crushing out the divine, has become its unpromising scene.

Crises of identity and belonging are frequently enfolded with the revival of the sacred in politics. Living in the precarious world of migration and alienation, the vision of sacred origins provides the hint of rootedness. Myths of divine election or civilisational destiny sacralise a national identity. The territory becomes sacred; the constitution is a divinely inspired document; the ruler becomes a chosen individual. This sacralisation places metaphysics at the centre of political life, making it blasphemous to disagree and

heretical to remain neutral. This force is more powerful in populist politics. Leaders are often introduced as messianic figures who speak in the name of a pure and holy people against a worldly elite. Anger is an energy that is roused in such politics, and this anger is not just an economic or cultural phenomenon; it is sacred. It mines richly on undrainable wells of resentment and salvation, sacrifice and innocence. It reduces political conflict to a struggle in the universe.

But the sacred ought not to be considered as reactionary. It also brings to life emancipatory movements. The sacred has been a source of protest, hope, and resistance in the Black Church during the American Civil Rights Movement, as well as in liberation theology in Latin America and elsewhere. In them, the sacred questions the legality of oppressive orders, ushering in a higher horizon of morality. Political theology should distinguish between these two differences: the domination of the sacred and/ liberation of the sacred.

Sovereignty in the post-secular age is not merely a matter of legal representation—it becomes ritualized. The legitimization of power occurs not just through procedure, but through reference to the sacred. Even in contemporary countries, it is clear that divine authority was the source of legitimacy for modern states, and this can be seen in oaths of office, religious references in parliaments, and appeals for divine protection.

This sacralisation is in many forms. In the United States of America, the motto says, on the currency and in the courtrooms, there is, in God we trust, and at the end of the utterances of a president stands, God bless America. In India, the country is often visualized as the goddess Bharat Mata, and her purity is guarded and revered. In Russia, the Orthodox Church became a close ideological ally of the state. They are not purely symbolic; they create a theological atmosphere within the state that blurs the distinction between civic loyalty and devotion to the state. This sacralisation is politically powerful. It protects power over criticism, creates adversaries as impure and absolute emotional

devotion. The indignation with the state is redefined as the indignation with the divine order. By doing so, the possibility of political power being accountable is immunized by its theological halo.

Sacred imaginaries typically inform the political anger that has become prevalent in the post-secular age. Complaints are often expressed in the language of betrayal of divine destiny, profanation of sacred ideals, or forsaking a transcendental crusade. This has the effect of intensifying the political effect when anger is righteous and vengeance is sacrosanct. However, the realm of mourning is also sacred. The sacred, in situations of group trauma, colonialism, genocide, and displacement, seems to provide a language of grief that cannot be redeemed or buyerized. The dignity of loss is maintained through sacred rituals, liturgies, and symbols, which acknowledge that certain injuries cannot be statistically measured or compensated. Such grieving itself may be politicized, opposed to the instrumentalization of suffering, in the cry for a more humane order. Political theology must attend to both dimensions of the sacred: as the site of dangerous absolutism and as the source of profound ethical resistance. The challenge is to disentangle the sacred from sovereignty without severing it from the concept of solidarity. To preserve its power to heal without weaponising it to harm.

The reappearance of the sacred in political life forces a rethinking of secularism, sovereignty, and anger. The sacred cannot be erased—it must be reinterpreted. The task of political theology is not to banish the sacred, but to reclaim it from its subordination to the state.

Can there be a sacred that resists sovereignty? A theology that empowers without dominating?A form of anger that purifies without destroying?

The answer may lie in alternative imaginaries of the sacred: those that emphasise vulnerability over might, communion over command, lament over victory. In such visions, the sacred is not the property of the state, but the shared horizon of those who suffer,

struggle, and hope together. In the age of political anger, the sacred will not disappear. It will either be used to sanctify power or to challenge it. Political theology must decide where it stands.

# Chapter 4
# Mishra: Liberalism, Imperialism and the Postcolonial Critique

**1. Historical Imagination**

Liberalism has long been defined as a political and ideological system that champions political democracy, civil liberties, and the rule of law. But from a postcolonial perspective, Liberalism is frequently denounced as an imperial instrument used to push Western-style culture on non-Western countries. Indian public intellectual Pankaj Mishra has been at the forefront of this critique, which challenges the universality of Western Liberalism, particularly in its imperial and post-imperial contexts. In his discussion of politics, democracy, and imperialism, Mishra explains how Western liberal values not only promoted economic or material interests but also created a particular understanding of modernity that relegated non-Western histories, cultures, and experiences to the margins of world history. Mishra's Critique of Liberalism This chapter maps his critique of Liberalism, examining how the idea itself spread to the Western end of the world, preaching the benefits of individual freedom and democracy, while largely hiding the economic and political exploitation of the non-Western world behind a myth.

Liberalism developed in the Western world in the

Enlightenment period, based on calls for mechanisms to subvert the previously absolute monarchies of feudalism. It drew on the philosophies of John Locke and Adam Smith, championing individual rights, private property, and the free market. Specifically, Locke contended that individuals had natural rights to life, liberty, and property, and that the purpose of government was to preserve these rights (Locke, 1690). This liberal ideal was most fully articulated in the political systems of Western democracies,

characterized by their constitutional order, rule of law, and market economics. However, as Pankaj Mishra (2017) has emphasized, the rise of the idea of Liberalism in the West was inexplicably tied to the rise of European imperialism. For whilst Liberalism approved those principles of personal freedom and equality visà-vis Western peoples, so too did it rationalise the subjugation and oppression of colonised peoples throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas. The British Empire, most notably, justified its imperial exercise in the name of bringing 'civilisation' and 'progress' to the 'savage' non-Western world, while extracting their wealth and labour (Mishra, 2017). Liberalism was thus not a disinterested ideology but one that served the imperialist appetites of the great powers.

Mishra criticises Liberalism as a "false friend" to postcolonial countries. Liberalism, he contends, announced freedom, equality, and justice for all. Still, in practice for all too many indigenous peoples and citizens of Asian or other descent, mothers and daughters and sons of enslaved Africans, settlers from anywhere except metropolitan France, it wrote the continued rule of colonial and imperial professionals. In his study From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia (2012), Mishra chronicles the manner in which thinkers and political leaders in postcolonial nations such as India, China and Japan were originally attracted to liberal ideas, but quickly discovered that liberalizing ideals often proved inadequate instruments in achieving political and social transformation. In that sense, such Liberalism was applied in its Western manifestation regardless of local cultural, social, and historical specificities. British colonial rule in India, for instance, was often represented as a civilizing mission, bringing the benefits of liberal democracy and free markets to a "backward" society. However, in practice, Liberalism was used to legitimate the exploitation of Indian labor, resources, and land by the British Empire (Mishra, 2012). The rhetoric of freedom and equality was for the coloniser; the colonised suffered oppression, violence and poverty. In postcolonial India, several intellectuals – from Bal Gangadhar Tilak to Mahatma Gandhi – condemned

Western Liberalism for its inability to acknowledge colonial exploitation. According to the philosopher and economist, Tilak, Western Liberalism is a materialistic philosophy that places its trust much more in individual will and the cedi[ng] character of economic gain, rather than in the context of spiritual and collective well-being (Mishra 2012, pp.105).

The contradictions inherent in liberal political thought are also revealed on various levels, including solidarity with colonization and imperialism. While Liberalism supported the ideals of equality and personal rights, it was contradictory in application. Liberal ideology justified the expansion of colonizers and their resource extraction in colonized territories. And, for the colonised, these values could lay an iron curtain over racial discrimination, cultural suppression and economic exploitation. This twofold character of Liberalism, a doctrine that, in the name of freedom and equality, becomes an instrument of imperial control, has induced many postcolonial thinkers to denounce colonial Liberalism as a "false friend." At the very core of Liberalism's contradictions is the priority of individual rights and freedoms above the rights of entire peoples subjected to colonial domination. For example, colonial India had British officers proclaiming that they brought democracy and justice to the Indian subcontinent. Yet, the Indian populace was not granted basic human rights, such as the right to self-determination, political freedom, agency, or economic sovereignty (Mishra, 2017). This contradiction between Liberalism's ideals and the reality of colonial rule was not unique to India; in other colonized zones, the gap between the promises of Liberalism and practice was often just as great.

Mishra's critique of Liberalism is more than an argument against Western ideology; it is a model for thinking about political and social order that looks to non-Western traditions and history. He emphasizes that postcolonial states, such as India, China, and Japan, have evolved their political systems that are not mere carbon copies of Western Liberalism. They are figures who, in the Indian context, looked up to figures like Gandhi and Tilak, who tried to

fashion a form of political identity based on Indian traditions and spiritual exercises that opposed the individualism and materialism seen to characterize Western Liberalism.

Moving beyond Gandhi's critique of Western Liberalism. In his critique of Western Liberalism, Gandhi was deeply influenced by Indian religious and cultural traditions. Gandhi repudiated the Western materialistic civilisation in his book, Hind Swaraj (1909), and stressed the need for moral and spiritual growth. He contended that everyone can achieve poornaswaraj, or "complete self-rule and self-restraint," only by cultivating a sense of moral obligation and responsibility, rather than pursuing self-centered financial requirements (Gandhi, 1909). Inspired by Indian traditions, this concept of self-regulation contrasts sharply with the individualism encouraged by Western Liberalism, which, for Gandhi, pulls people apart, leading to moral decline. Likewise, Tilak's critique of Liberalism was grounded in his conviction that Western individualism ignored the communal and spiritual impulses of the Indian community. He argued that Liberalism's emphasis on economic liberty and personal rights did not adequately account for the importance of social duty and moral vision in constructing a just society. Tilak advocated for self-rule for India, or Swaraj, based on a political and economic system rooted in India's culture and spirituality, rather than the values of Liberalism emanating from the West (Mishra, 2017).

It is remarkable that a vision teeming with contradictions, such as Liberalism, still plays a substantive role in the chrysalis of political imaginations in postcolonial areas. The imitation of liberal democratic regimes has been widely regarded in postcolonial societies as a means of modernization and participation in the global world. But the influence of Liberalism in these conditions, as Mishra (2017) noted, is far from straightforward. While liberal democratic forms have facilitated the practice of politics and the protection of human rights, they have also been repeatedly used by elites to perpetuate social and economic inequality. Thus, in India, the liberal democracy that emerged following independence has not

been able to accommodate the deep-seated inequities it inherited from colonial times completely. Individual freedom and rights are legitimized, but economic and social gaps persist, and the liberal lie seems to be holding back many people (Mishra, 2017). This discrepancy between liberal ideals and on-the-ground realities in postcolonial societies is the centerpiece of Mishra's complaint, as he challenges the idea that Liberalism is the answer to the problems non-Western countries experience.

The category of Liberalism, as understood within Western tradition, has had a significant impact on modern political philosophy. But as Pankaj Mishra's critique of it highlights, Liberalism's universalist principles of equality, freedom and democracy can be compromised by the fact of imperialism and colonialism in which those ideals are enmeshed. Liberalism in postcolonial settings has been employed as a tool of modernization and development. Still, its application often fails to take into account the socio-economic and cultural conditions of nonWestern societies. Examining the impact of such contradictions within Liberalism on postcolonial countries, we can appreciate even further the shortcomings of Western political theory and the necessity of alternative models for political order that draw upon the histories and traditions of non-Western societies.

Often extolled as the apotheosis of contemporary political thought, Western Liberalism, with its tripartite emphasis on personal liberty, free-market capitalism, and democratic freedoms, is perceived as representing modernity's fullest flowering. Nevertheless, as Mishra and other postcolonial theorists have argued, Western Liberalism does not always yield the intended consequences when imposed on non-Western states, with "postcolonial" state settings, such as those in India, China, and Japan, being notable examples. Instead of being a vehicle for true political sovereignty, Liberalism has frequently served imperialism, leading to economic dependency and political domination. This investigation examines the ways in which Western Liberalism, as the propagation of democratic ideals, has been disowned and

reinvented in postcolonial polities attempting to reconcile modernization with their own cultural, as well as social and political, backgrounds. By deconstructing Mishra's critique alongside other postcolonial thinkers, this discussion explores a 'liberal' critique of the limitations of Liberalism in the non-Western world.

After World War II, many Asian countries attempted to develop themselves along Cold War lines, trying to imitate, for example, liberal democratic modernisation. It was a powerfully attractive message, promising independence and freedom to recent colonies eager to shake off the yoke of colonisation. However, as Mishra (2017) notes, the embrace of Liberalism often does not take into consideration its distinctive historical, societal, and cultural backgrounds. Instead of liberating democracy and prosperity, Liberalism tends to entrench Western dominance and generate new forms of economic and political subordination. Indian nationalists saw liberal values as values that were imposed on Indians by British colonial rulers as a means of control and exploitation. Despite espousing democracy and the rule of law in the West, it legitimized colonial policies that inhibited political freedom in India. Nehru's creation of democratic India was weakened by the persistence of colonial institutions, which continued to wield influence over economic and political power. The country's political and economic architecture, although formally based on liberal principles, perpetuated structural inequalities that originated from the colonial era (Mishra, 2017). India, therefore, did not simply embrace Liberalism postcolonially in order to realise the ideals of democracy, but rather learned to broker its way through a complex political terrain, one that bore the unseemly mark of the imperial past.

Both China and Japan have faced challenges in integrating Western liberal ideas into their domestic political and cultural frameworks. Both countries underwent forced liberalization under Western rule, leading to their respective resistance movements and reform efforts. In Japan, the Meiji Restoration was primarily driven

by the need to update and import Western Europeaninfluenced technologies and political structures. However, Japan's appropriation of Liberalism was heavily conditioned by its desire to uphold national unity and foreign independence, resulting in a brand of Liberalism that emphasized national sovereignty over individual rights (Mishra, 2017). Also in China, the 19th and early 20th centuries saw Liberalism as a few failed attempts at introducing liberal ideas to the Chinese under the Qing dynasty and then later as a response to extreme disparities in wealth and power that Liberalism did not seem to be adequately addressing in the first half of the 20th century, which was still a time of colonialism in China.

Mishra studies the retreat from Liberalism in postcolonial countries, where the emphasis changed from individual liberty to national unity, sustainability, and security. In most other countries around the world, local governments prioritize economic protectionism, social harmony, and religious unity over the Western concept of personal freedom. This transition was especially pronounced in countries like India, where social divisions based on caste, religion, and regionalism made the universal application of liberal ideas challenging. The emphasis on national unity, which superseded these divisions, led to the imposition of protectionist policies and the restriction of individual rights, most notably in conflict areas such as Kashmir, where the clash between liberal democracy and national security intensified (Mishra, 2017). In India, the complex legacy of British colonialism has created a society with pronounced socio-economic inequalities. Despite the best efforts of the state to bring liberal democratic values, the entrenched realities of a caste-ridden society, religious conflict and mass poverty militated against it. Nehru's democratic architecture, with its liberal inclinations, needed adjustments to fit the contours of Indian society. This adaptation, however, led to contradictions, as Liberalism's emphasis on individual liberty was generally at odds with the need for the state to maintain social harmony and religious uniformity. Such tensions persist in India today, where there are

indications of an assault on the ideas of liberal democracy and individual rights, and a movement away from the liberal model of democracy towards a more illiberal version within the trend of Majoritarian nationalism, focusing power (Mishra, 2017).

Reinhold Niebuhr, the American theologian and political theorist, foresaw the trajectory of Western Liberalism during the 20th century. Niebuhr (1952) noted that, in due course, Liberalism's concern for individual freedom and free markets had evolved into a defense of corporate capitalism, in which individual liberties were, in fact, sacrificed to the dictates of corporate economic powers. The concept of the "public good" was overshadowed by the agendas of corporate globalization, and liberal democratic values were co-opted to justify economic exploitation and imperial control (Niebuhr, 1952). Mishra (2017) takes this critique a step further by examining how Liberalism's transformation into a capitalist ideology led to its abandonment of the social commitment to equality and justice it once represented. Liberal democratic economies have become increasingly driven by corporate interests (particularly in the West), with the result that economic inequality is growing within and between countries. Multinationals and financial capitalism, he argued, had altered the tenure of the individual at the heart of liberal democracy, instilling in its stead a regime where power lay in the hands of a select group of global economic elites.

The shift of Liberalism under postcolonialism to an appurtenance of capitalism is vividly demonstrated here, as its ideal of liberal democracy is largely subordinated to economic exploitation. For instance, in India, the liberalisation of markets in the 1990s was represented as a route to progress and modernity. The irony is that these reforms benefited only the rich and multinationals; the rest continued to live in poverty with no improvement in their lives (Mishra, 2017).

Postcolonial India experienced widespread frustration with Liberalism, leading to the development of ideologies that unambiguously rejected liberal democratic values. A salient feature of contemporary Indian politics is the ascendancy of Hindu

supremacism, embodied in groups of nationalist volunteer organisations and political formations like the Bharatiya Janata Party (the leading Parliamentary force since 2014). These are forces in favour of an India based on majoritarian nationalism and cultural identity, competing with the secular liberal underpinnings of the Indian state (Mishra, 2017). The emergence of Majoritarian supremacism, Mishra argues, is a reaction to Liberalism's inability to cater for the social and cultural uniqueness experienced in Indian society. The liberal stress on rights is often seen as antithetical to the profoundly communal and religious character of Indian society. What's more, a liberal emphasis on secularity and democracy can be seen as a foreign imposition, ignoring India's religious and cultural history. And to the extent Majoritarian supremacism is indeed seen to be advancing, that itself is widely seen to represent a repudiation of Liberalism's assertion of universalism, and a move towards a more culturally specific model of governance.

The waning of a totalizing political model, such as liberal Westernism, under the sway of postcolonial perspectives forces attention to the difficulty of imposing a homogeneous political language in diverse cultural and historical environments. Although Liberalism offered democracy, individual freedom, and economic growth, in practice, it often ignored the specific conditions of non-Western countries. If the liberal order is flawed, it must stem from some deep flaw in the liberal human being. Pankaj Mishra's jeremiad (mentioned earlier) goes on to say, "the recent election showed up not only a deeply divided America but also a dangerously deluded one." In postcolonial India, the ascendance of Majoritarian nationalism and contempt for Liberalism indicate a significant shift towards political systems that prioritize national cohesion, stability, and cultural identity over individual freedom and democratic principles. The postcolonial inheritance from Liberalism is challenging and ambivalent, and it has continued to influence political arguments in India and elsewhere.

## 2. Politics of Universal Manhood

The concept of "universal manhood" has been incorporated into the realm of postcolonial thought, where it serves as a site of interrogation, resonating more closely with the ambivalence of Western Liberalism. Logically, the "universal man" has a close association with enlightenment ideals of individual freedom, rationalism, and autonomy. However, as writers like Pankaj Mishra and other postcolonial theorists have noted, hidden within these values, which appear noble in promoting democracy and equality, lies a cover for domination and marginalization. The ideological construct of Western "universal manhood" repeatedly consigned marginalised populations — non-whites, women, indigenous peoples — to the margins of inferiority. This study examines the conflict between Western liberal aspirations for the "universal man" and the ways in which this promise is contradicted in the colonized world, as well as the now-threatened implications of this contradiction, as interpreted by Mishra and other theorists.

The myth of the 'universal human person' was first articulated in the European Enlightenment; people who one could deeply generalize as rational, autonomous agents played a central role in the conceptualization of modern Western political philosophy. Prominent philosophers, including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, elaborated on the notion of humans as free and equal beings capable of rational thought and self-government (Locke, 1690; Rousseau, 1762; Kant, 1785). This portrayal of the universal man was essential to the development of liberal political philosophy, which focused on the protection of individual rights, democratisation, and personal freedom. The image of the free, autonomous subject — the one implicitly assumed to be white, male, or European — came to be taken as representative of humanity. However, as I've argued elsewhere (see Pankaj Mishra 2020), men, qua men, were never truly considered universal by the West either. It was merely a European template that excluded numerous populations of the world, including non-Western people, women, and colonised individuals. Whilst

European intellectual tradition glorified individual freedom and autonomy, it has been the colonial justification for the oppression and exploitation of other races' cultures. The liberal principles of equality and liberty were implemented, if at all, mostly for white European men, and the rest of the world was under racial hierarchies and imperial subjugation. The universal subject of Western Liberalism — man — is inexorably linked, therefore, to racial, economic and gendered exclusion.

Mishra's reading points up the inherent contradictions of Western Liberalism. Theoretically, the tenets of democracy, human rights and freedom had been developed to liberate all human beings, but in practice they often entailed inequality and abuse. For example, the spread of liberal democracy in the West coincided with the high tide of European imperialism, with nonWestern societies being subjected to colonial domination. The liberal values of individual choice and self-determination serve to conceal the economic and political imperialism of the West in colonized parts of the world (Mishra, 2017). In the U.S., this figure emerged in the form of the "American man" millionaire in the 19th and early 20th centuries, represented as a rugged individualist who pursued capitalist success, ultimately becoming an enabler for the state and economy in Western political and economic systems. Yet, this romantic notion of the self-made man was also inseparable from the exclusion of African Americans, Native Americans and women from public power, which the U.S. justified in the name of liberal democracy. Mishra (2020) contends that the American concept of manhood was defined in tightly racialized terms, which circumscribed notions of freedom and equality to (white) heterosexual men and reimagined all others as "the other," a group that had no political agency, which Liberalism claimed to endorse.

With reference to Western Liberalism, Mishra (2020) discussed the notion of "homo economicus", which is a key idea in modern capitalism and liberal economic theory. This concept is of a narrow, rational economic agent driven by the desire to maximize profits. It has become the model of the good citizen in liberal

democracies, one whose behaviour is shaped by self-interest and whose value is assessed in terms of economic contribution. However, Mishra contends that such a utopian portrait is a dangerous one, as it subjects human beings to a one-dimensional caricature – one in which they are merely economic entities that can, and indeed should be, optimized and improved, without regard for their cultural, emotional, and social dimensions. The "homo economicus," as noted above, is a Western liberal tradition construction that imagines people as autonomously self-regulating participants in a market-based reality (Mishra, 2020). However, despite its burden and image, the global dissemination of such rhetorical strategies, particularly in postcolonial settings, has negative consequences for non-Western cultures. The postcolonial imposition of liberal capitalist structures led to the exploitation of local labor, resources, and culture as Western development and industry replaced traditional cultures and ways of life. According to Mishra, the wide acceptance of homo economicus globally is a mark of the spread of neo-liberal capitalism, which is characterized by an increasing level of inequality and disempowerment in the Global South.

The 'universal man' was an important figure in the ideologisation of colonialism. Western colonial powers have helped to disseminate the myth of there being a universal human identity based on Western reason, civilisation and morality in the 19th to early 20th centuries; and the subjugation of women under the colonial and apartheid system of old. This idea was frequently invoked to justify the subjugation of non-Western people, who were considered inferior or "uncivilized" and requiring Western intervention (Mishra 2017). The invocation of 'universal manhood' in colonial settings amplified the notion that only men in Europe were fully human, capable of reason and self-rule. This ideology justified the domination of non-Western peoples, whose cultures and ways of life were found to be less than worthy and therefore in need of Western intervention. Chatterjee (1993, 2009) argues that this "universal manhood" is an imperialist vision that imagined non-

Western peoples as subjects of Western rule. Mishra (2020) similarly condemns it as a man of empire. This version of manliness recognised no dignity in the colonised, who were no more than children, in the charge of their betters. As a result, the rhetoric of the "universal man" became a means of perpetuating colonial power by justifying the exploitation and repression of colonized people in the name of civilizing and progressing the "savage."

Mishra laments the decline of the universal manhood idea in the postcolonial era, as non-Western intellectuals and political movements increasingly challenge it. This postcolonial rejection of Liberalism's universalism is part of a wider intellectual project concerned to reassert cultural and political independence from the West. Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o are just a small number of the scholars who have criticized the legacy of colonialism and the imposition of Western ideologies, such as Liberalism, upon non-Western societies. They argue that only by rejecting the Western concept of the universal man and embracing indigenous cultural identities and systems of governance will true freedom and self-determination be possible(Fanon 1963; Cabral 1973). For colonial and postcolonial writers alike, the "universal man" no longer typifies human nature—especially not in the Southern Hemisphere, where the cultures and histories of the First Australians (for example) do not elicit a response from the "universal man." Postcolonial theorists argue for a diverse understanding of humanness of human cultures, histories, and value systems. The "universal man" must be jettisoned in order to achieve the political and cultural autonomy of non-Western people who should be allowed to find their own routes to modernity, free of the ideological shackles of Western Liberalism (Mishra 2020).

"Universal manhood" has informed Western Liberalism from its outset. Still, in non-Western territories, acceptance of this idea has often led to the exclusion, marginalization and persecution of non-Western subjects. Postcolonial critiques of this kind, including those of Pankaj Mishra, have criticized Liberalism for its internal contradictions and its inability to realize the potential of freedom

and equality for all fully. The "universal man" based on European Enlightenment thought has been deployed to justify imperialism and colonialism, while failing to acknowledge other cultures, histories, and identities of colonised regions. In posing the question of his own existence, the postcolonial man repeatedly only yields negative answers (Spivak, 1985), and, as postcolonial nations continue to grapple with the legacies of colonialism, the pursuit persist to involve the reclaiming of political and cultural agentiality through denouncing the values of the universal man as construed in the West, and embrace contrasting understandings of humanity and government.

**3. White Supremacy, Imperialism, and Liberalism: A Postcolonial Critique**

The story of Western imperialism is woven into the idea of racial superiority, an idea that is on full display in the colonial discourse of the 19th and 20th centuries. 'Inferior and primitive Others,' Pankaj Mishra teaches, European states justified imperial expansion, representing peoples colonized as 'inferior' and 'primitive' so that they provided the pretext for Western civilization and government. It was this racial hierarchy, institutionalized within political and social systems, that ensured the dominance of White European identity and culture over others. In modernday terms, these are the same racial distinctions that drive contemporary global politics, as liberal democracies paradoxically offer freedom, equality, and justice. In this section, we will address the idea of racism grounded in imperialism that lingers in Western political thought and practice, corrupting the universal principles that Liberalism is supposed to advocate.

According to Mishra (2020), the European imperial project, "primarily between the early 19th century and the First World War," was inextricably linked to the ascendancy of white supremacy. For colonial powers, the civilizing mission was one of the main moral justifications for the exploitation of people outside the Western World. As European empires expanded their influence across Africa, Asia, and South America, they helped create a

narrative that portrayed white Europeans as the carriers of civilization, rationality, and the Enlightenment. By contrast, their victims were classified as "savages", a lack of self-government was assumed of them, and they were expected to be controlled and supervised by Europeans. Not content with merely dominating economically, this doctrine of white supremacy wanted a racial hierarchy with white Europeans at the top. In this context, Mishra (2020) stresses that the racial dichotomies introduced by European colonizers were not only based on economic exploitation but also on cultural, social and psychological subjugation. It was a necessary part in constructing the image of the "other" which was required in order to justify the subjugation of coloured peoples, posited as lesser beings who needed to be managed. It was this inherent conviction of racial supremacy that permeated the cultural, political and social apparatus of Western societies and was popularised by men of thought, men of action and men with a printing press.

Between the "golden summer" of Western imperialism (a phrase Mishra borrows from previous works to describe the period before World War I, marked by rapid economic expansion and political stability, cultural self-assuredness and domination in Western countries) and today's age of Western disintegration runs a thread of dilemma and contradiction. But this prosperity was based on the exploitation of colonial subjects, particularly in Asia and Africa. Western Liberalism, in its purest form, supports doctrines such as individual freedom, equality, and democracy. However, these principles were not entirely applied to colonized individuals, as increasingly, colonized people were denied political rights and were faced with extreme economic distress. Liberalism has failed to take the reality into account for Mishra. While Western liberal philosophers, such as John Locke and JeanJacques Rousseau, theorized about equality and the rights of the individual, these values were often reserved for white Europeans and did not extend to non-Western peoples. As Mishra (2020) points out, the paradox of Liberalism is that, on the one hand, it is represented as the solution to tyranny and oppression. Yet, it is also too often used as a

weapon of imperial domination. The 'model' of liberal democracy was used, as it were, as a veneer, covering up the gruesome reality of colonial plunder.

This idea has deep roots and is more than a simple political and economic tool — it is deeply embedded in cultural and social beliefs. A number of major authors, most notably Rudyard Kipling, and a host of imperialist thinkers, helped to shape Western imperial thinking by characterizing colonised peoples as racially and culturally inferior. Such portrayals seeped out of political talk into art, literature, and popular culture, where the peoples of nonWestern civilisations were often depicted as disorderly, brutal and uncivilised. Mishra (2020) comments that such representations helped to justify the racial dimensions underlying colonial rule. Colonists thought of themselves as carriers of civilization, bringing order, law, and morality to "savage" lands; the colonized, on the other hand, were considered incapable of governing themselves. The formation of racial hierarchies was crucial to colonial empires' ability to control vast areas with relatively few colonists. Colonial powers could repress resistance, and natural resources and their labour forces could tap into exploiting as they justified violent actions by portraying non-Western peoples as inferior. This racial thinking was as much an excuse for imperial domination as it was a justification for feelings of superiority in the face of the reality of imperial conquest.

The ongoing influence of white supremacy, so deeply entangled with imperialism, continues to mould the global order today, long after colonialism ended. One of the more famous examples of this was the policies of Woodrow Wilson as U.S. President during and after World War I, where he argued for the right to self-determination of European powers. However, he notably excluded non-white populations from this right. As Mishra (2020) wrote, Wilson's view of democracy rested on maintaining a global caste system that elevated white nations and reduced non-white ones to the fringes. One such African American thinker and activist, W.E.B. Du Bois, delivered lines against racial inequality

that critically dismantled the very definition of "whiteness" as a marker of supremacy. Du Bois (1903) proposed that whiteness was crystallizing as a social and cultural construct, one that carried with it unearned advantage and conferred power on its holders to the extent that it resulted in harm to others. Du Bois's famous question, "What is whiteness that one should so desire it?" encapsulated the ultimate contradiction of white supremacy: it was not a wellspring of talent or beauty; it was an artificial racial designation that was created, and then enforced, via social and political tools. Du Bois's assessments of white supremacy are particularly relevant now, as they challenge the continued underpinnings of racial hierarchy in global politics (Du Bois, 1903).

White Supremacy in New Liberal World Orders: Decolonial Performances and Theatre of the Oppressed. Though colonialism was formally concluded and liberal democracy emerged as a global force after WWII, the white supremacist ideology still functions as a central paradigm in the politics of the West. Hannah Arendt (1951) had, for one, maintained that the legacies of imperialism remain operative in the global order — that the racial divisions established during the imperial era of history continue to influence contemporary politics. According to Arendt's formulation of the enslaver and enslaved person races, the disjunction between colonizer and colonized is inscribed into the social and political body of contemporary liberal democratic states. Even in nations that profess to be built on ideas of egalitarian equality, racial hierarchies endure, often driven by inequalities, institutionalised discrimination and cultural exclusion. Mishra adds that white supremacy acting in the global order is evident despite the consistently liberally inflected discourse of democracy. Even though liberal democracies purport to adhere to the universal values of equality and freedom, in reality, we see them being applied selectively, where non-white communities are still marginalized in social, economic and political spheres of life. Mishra (2020) argues that the "phony claims" of Liberalism are exposed when the ways in which Western nations dominate nonWestern nations through the exploitation of economic

resources, military force, and cultural prestige are taken into account.

The continuing impact of white supremacist imperialism frames the political world of the 21st century. While Western Liberalism has stood up for democracy, freedom and equality, those values have also been used to rationalize the subjugation and exploitation of those outside the West. Pankaj Mishra's attack on Liberalism also draws attention to the racialised character of imperialism, explaining on the basis of this racial principle how Europe's quest to create hierarchies among races was indispensable for it to govern immense territories and large numbers of people. Such a "reminder" is still dangerous in postcolonial societies, literally frozen in time, so that the as yet unabated forces of white supremacy underlined the ambiguities in Liberalism, which had failed to stand by its creed of universal equality and justice. Real equality and freedom will take an actual reckoning with racial and imperial legacies that still shape world politics.

**4. Idols of the Marketplace: The Politics of Race**

In modern political thought, the concept of sovereignty is continually evolving, often playing a pivotal role in the legitimacy of states. But the Western conception of sovereignty, as enshrined in liberal democratic theory, has come under postcolonial critique for its complicity in empire building, economic exploitation and marginalisation of non-Western identities. Pankaj Mishra (2017) also questions the false hope that modern politics, resting on a liberal promise, offers to the victimized classes in postcolonial societies, alongside intellectuals like Michel Foucault and Karl Marx. This segment examines how the Western notion of sovereignty and its kindred liberal tenets retarded non-Western pursuit of political and social justice. Combining postcolonial critiques and classical political theories, this reading examines the rejection of Western Liberalism and the search for alternative models of governance that better align with the complex histories and identities of postcolonial societies.

Liberalism, which developed during the Enlightenment and was refined by philosophers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, is based on the natural rights of individuals, private property, and the rule of law. Liberalism is rooted in the pursuit of guaranteed political freedom and equality for all men. These principles were not, however, universally applied historically: they served the interest mainly of white (male) Europeans, and the colonized, women, and enslaved people were often not safeguarded by liberal rights. Sovereignty, which encompasses the right to self-rule and property retention, is a cornerstone of liberal thinking and is based on the assumption of legal equality. However, as the present state of economic inequality has shown since economists and thinkers like Karl Marx noted long ago, the universality of these rights means nothing at all (Marx, 1867). For Marx, the twin claims to equality and democracy of Liberalism are closely associated with capitalism, which prevents the ruling class from losing its grip in either political or economic matters. According to Marx, capitalism, by definition, creates inequality, and the bourgeoisie benefits at the expense of the proletariat, thereby sustaining all the systems of exploitation that Liberalism also purportedly opposes (Marx, 1867). In such a framework, 'liberalism and sovereignty serve as much to deny as to facilitate' (p. 189) and uphold the status quo, serving as devices to serve the powerful at the expense of the subordination of working classes and colonized peoples. In a postcolonial world, the persistence of these structures has led many to question the applicability of liberal sovereignty in former colonized societies. Liberalism as an ideal was viewed by many as a continuation of colonial powers in forcing Western ideals on colonized regions, and by extension, ignoring traditional governance systems, social structures, and cultural identities.

In the "Age of Anger" (2017), Pankaj Mishra offers a critical assessment of the Western doctrine of Liberalism that underlines its continuous shortcomings as far as its colonial and postcolonial "others" are concerned, despite its proclaimed universality. Western

Liberalism, which promotes individual rights and freedoms, has frequently been used to justify imperial and colonial missions. The acceptance of the reality of sovereignty in many postcolonial settings reflects the fact that colonial powers imposed this doctrine by destroying their native legal and political systems and replacing them with European forms of governance under the guise of civilization. In India, British colonialism reimagined sovereignty in terms of imperial domination, even as it claimed to advance democratic values. The British also legitimised their colonial rule through liberal discourses, urging the need for democracy and local self-rule in colonies, while actually enforcing repression and authoritarianism in the colonised societies. Despite claims to the contrary, those who inherited and engaged with colonial liberal traditions were not busy extending equal rights and access to the Indian poor and indigenous people; queering the rights of the collectives; reworking the Ground upon which we stand, under colonialism, as soil rather than as utterance (Mishra, 2017). The critique of liberal sovereignty thus emerges as a core in postcolonial discourses, for it shows the ways in which Liberalism, rather than offering a universal remedy to oppression, more often than not functions as an instrument of further subjugation.

Michel Foucault's analysis of biopolitics offers a means of understanding how the contemporary state exercises power not only over individual bodies but also over entire populations. In his teaching and writing, Foucault (2003) examined how states govern life and death through institutions, laws, and norms. What is distinct about biopolitics is the regulation of human populations and the transformation of life into an object of political management. For Foucault, sovereignty is no longer a question of the right to kill or of ensuring the order; rather, "it's the taking charge of life. This passage from sovereignty over death to the control of life, itself fundamental in the exercise of modern sovereignty in liberal states, where the purpose is to govern individuals through disciplinary devices that regulate health, sex, and productivity.

In postcolonial cultures, Foucault's inquiry exposes inherent contradictions of liberal sovereignty. However, whether Liberalism is truly committed to protecting the individual as the principal target cannot be denied; these individuals can often be dominated by state power, which, in reality, involves regimes of surveillance, social control, and economic regulation. It is especially visible in the context of postcolonial states, which, after shedding their colonial ties, often find themselves imposing the same liberal democratic institutions with which they maintain relationships within the global capitalist system. The biopolitical tool for governing the population has become a means of controlling, particularly in societies characterized by inequality and division, whether economic or social. Mishra (2017) relates Foucault's ideas to the postcolonial condition, demonstrating how both colonizers and postcolonizers have deployed biopolitical tactics to rule the population of the other. Biopolitics, from land reforms to population control policies, have become key technologies of postcolonial sovereignty. In many ways, the state is not a liberator of people, but an apparatus of control and regulation — a vestige of the racial hierarchies of the colonial period.

However much Western Liberalism yammers on about universal equality, it is built on the premises of white supremacy. As Mishra (2020) and postcolonial scholars before him have argued, Liberalism was never universal in historical terms. It was carved out to serve the interests of European populations and to legitimise colonial power by representing non-European people as backward. This racialist ideology persisted as a factor in the design of political and social institutions, long after colonialism ended in name. In modern liberal democracies, white supremacy takes the structural form of enduring disparities that continue to disadvantage racialized people, especially in the U.S., UK, and France. The reality of systemic racism, and history of police brutality, as well as their ongoing legacies, along with unquestionably discriminatory travel bans and other immigration restrictions attest that, in these liberal democracies that tout values of equality, economic, social

and political inequalities persist (Mishra, 2020). Postcolonial critique stresses that the idea of universal equality in Liberalism is very often sustained through a kind of delusion, with ongoing marginalisation and subordination of non-white populations.

In Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic can be used to analyze the racialized architecture of liberal democracies. This dialectic revolves around a battle of recognition between an enslaver who seeks to dominate and an enslaved person who seeks freedom through work. Hegel's notion of recognition—the ability of individuals to realize themselves as subjects through the acceptance of others— has significant implications for understanding the workings of sovereignty, identity, and power in postcolonial contexts. In the imperial setting, the colonized subject could not be recognized and remained an object of the colonizer's domination. For Hegel, the enslaved person is not just without recognition but also without the possibility of achieving real subjectivity. In the postcolonial domains, this idea of recognition brings to the fore the role performed by Western Liberalism itself in blocking non-Western peoples' participation in modernity\'s political and cultural domains. As a result, postcolonial nations are reeling from the effects of colonialism, and seeking political independence remains a struggle as they fight for the right to be seen as members of the global society (Hegel, 1807).

In postcolonial contexts, opposition to Western Liberalism is not simply an exercise in academic criticism, but a crucial way of responding to the failure of liberal initiatives to materialize the dreams of equality and liberty. As Pankaj Mishra (2017) and many other postcolonial scholars have argued, Liberalism often functions as a weapon of imperialism and exploitation rather than an avenue to universal rights. It is in light of the formative contradictions of Liberalism and their effects on postcolonial politics that we explore the persistence of Liberalism in shaping postcolonial political fields through the optics of sovereignty, biopolitics, and the racialisation of modern politics in this section. Stated otherwise, the virtues of

liberal democracy — freedom, equality, and justice — are aspirations that few postcolonial societies have achieved, and whose identities and histories have been altered and structured by prolonged experiences of colonial rule and domination. By revisiting these historical moments, we can gain a deeper understanding of the persistent challenges that postcolonial societies face in their quest for genuine sovereignty and social justice.

**5. Ressentiment in Public Life**

The concept of ressentiment has been highly influential in political theory, particularly as applied to modern liberal democracies, postcolonial societies, and the dynamics of power relations. Based on ideas from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and modern commentators, including Pankaj Mishra, ressentiment provides a framework for understanding the reactions of marginal groups that experience forms of social, economic, and political inequality through a complex mix of envy, resentment, and frustration. And while it may feel private, it is not, as it manifests in political space, creating division, antagonism, and fostering the emergence of authoritarian forces. This part of the study examines the philosophical origins of ressentiment, its infiltration into public life, and its influence on contemporary political discourse.

Rousseau's criticism of the Enlightenment is also inherent in the concept of ressentiment, particularly in his critique of the interrelationship between religion, morality, and political power. While Rousseau was often represented as an agnostic, he recognised the powerful influence of religion on the ethical and moral lives of ordinary men and women. According to Rousseau, religion can help people, especially people experiencing poverty, understand their suffering and cope with life's trials. This view of religion as a moral base for the oppressed is fundamental in Rousseau's subsequent political analysis. Rousseau critiqued Enlightenment philosophies that guided the aristocracy, arguing that they denied the emotions of ordinary people. At the same time, those of the elite were deemed more important than matters related to the common good (Rousseau, 1762). Rousseau's framework

posits that religion serves as a fundamental moral guide for human communities. He maintained that a secular authority, lacking a religious basis, would lose its hold and be found warring against citizens on ideological rather than human welfare topics. This type of authority, based on naked force, would lead to dread, hatred, and resentment, particularly for people with low incomes, writes Rousseau (Mishra 2014). This sense of the insufficiency of secular power speaks to the complaints of modern critics of rule, which, in the world we now inhabit, is often too emotionally and existentially shallow for the needs of many citizens who find themselves marginalised by modernity's bounties.

Nietzsche's treatment of ressentiment adds complexity to our understanding of modern political life. Ressentiment is a concept introduced by Nietzsche, which describes a sense of injured and peevish anger in response to an affront or injury, accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness and the envy and coveting that it inspires. As a feeling of resentment for lack of control, the word is an integral part of the English concept of ressentiment (together with terms such as "rancour", "spite", and "spitefulness"). In section 10 of his book On the Genealogy of Morals (1887), Friedrich Nietzsche discusses ressentiment as a creative force. Those without power in society, typically the poor and oppressed, often strive for moral superiority, compensating for their lack of power by adopting inherent values that praise weakness and docility (Nietzsche, 1887). Nietzsche's "men of ressentiment" are caught in a vicious spiral of envy and self-hatred, unable to access social power and recognition, souring into bitter resentment for those who happen to embody an image of authority. Nietzsche suggested that this ressentiment manifested in "slave morality", a set of ideals that glorified humility, meekness, and passive behavior (qualities that were opposite to the "master morality" of the ruling classes, who believed in strength, power, and asserting themselves). In today's political climate, Nietzsche's critique is evident in the rise of factions in politics that, under the guise of sympathy for victims,

exacerbate rifts and hostility with the perceived elite, thereby deepening societal divisions (Nietzsche, 1887).

Arendt develops the concept of ressentiment by applying Nietzsche's teachings to the political sphere of modern liberal democracies. In Arendt (1951), she worried about the danger of resentment overwhelming political life, especially in societies that allegedly stand for equality, freedom, and justice but fail to fulfill those promises. She argued that disillusionment and resentment can become widespread among marginalised groups, leading to a broad mistrust in democratic processes that may pave the way for the growth of populist or authoritarian movements. When reference groups feel excluded, either unfairly or inappropriately, from political, economic, or social opportunity, ressentiment manifests as a profoundly destructive force that is anathema to democratic values and exacerbates political instability (Arendt, 1951).

We see increasing popularity of populist and authoritarian movements in modern society, where these movements often thrive on disaffected individuals feeling left behind by globalisation and political leaders. According to Mishra (2017), the revival of populism in Western countries, most notably following the global financial crisis of 2008, is closely linked to the politics of ressentiment. People in economically and culturally deprived areas of the Western world are becoming more likely to support political figures who claim to be able to rejuvenate national pride by cracking down on minorities and blaming their woes on a nebulous global elite. Despite their claims to embody popular will, these movements are often fueled by the animus and paranoia they claim to despise.

Ressentiment is produced not only through specific political encounters but also through discourses that circulate through the media, industry, and the broader culture. Mishra (2014) argues that business, media and industry serve to structure the conditions ripe for ressentiment in our contemporary world. These transmitters often perpetuate a narrative of individual accomplishment and wealth, portraying an unrealistic picture of class mobility and

wealth distribution. When people believe they fall short of these aspirational goals, they experience not just self-judgment but also a high level of dissatisfaction, fueled by media images that extol the virtues of wealth and success (Mishra, 2014). In the context of his analysis of modern society, René Girard (1972) addresses the issue of "mimetic rivalry," which prompts individuals and groups to mimic the desires of others, compete with them, envy them, and ultimately engage in violence against them. Girard's account sheds light on the manner in which ressentiment operates in cultures where desires are created, not from genuine needs, but from rivalries and mimetic desire. Since people are trying to be like other folks they see as better off, bit by bit their self-worth has become more and more based on the validation of others, until, at last, when others offend them by succeeding in doing something they want, they become resentful against the offended for holding it over them. Through his argument, Girard once again confirms Mishra's thesis that many discontented citizens of the global market harbor economic and cultural pretensions (Girard, 1972).

Ressentiment was originally developed as a way to account for the individual experience of negative emotions and has become central to political inquiry, particularly in its focus on global processes. Currently, ressentiment is not exclusive to citizens of Western democracies. Still, it is also echoed by Western-emblematic citizens of postcolonial countries as they try to cope with the remnants of imperialism and the problems of modernization. As Mishra (2017) explains, the success of extremist currents in postcolonial settings stems from a deepseated sense of resentment, where affected individuals feel that their lives are determined by forces beyond their control, namely, economic deprivation, political tyranny, or cultural estrangement. This global mood of ressentiment is further deepened by the breakdown of the international order, characterized by widening gaps in income, power, and access to resources. As a result, a new type of political identity emerges, characterized by individuals and groupings who perceive themselves as disempowered, not powerless, and seek

vengeance against those who have oppressed them. The ideological structures that sustained colonialism have long been woven into the fabric of the world order, creating a kind of world in which ressentiment can become a political movement, social unrest, and a rejection of liberal democratic values.

Indeed, the theory of ressentiment—introduced by intellectuals such as Rousseau, Nietzsche, Arendt, and Mishra—offers a powerful analytical tool through which we can understand the emotional and affective substrata of today's politics. Ressentiment (resentment), encompassing feelings such as envy, frustration, and the instinct for revenge, is a major force in public life: it tends to drive apart, produce conflict, and lead to autocracy. Ressentiment may be pulling as strongly at the edge of the empire as it does in the heart of empires of yore and the modern liberal democracy. Through an investigation of the sources of ressentiment and its manifestation in political behavior, we gain insight into the troubles that have long plagued modern politics, most notably in the rise of populism, as well as in the ongoing quest for equality and justice on a global level.

# Chapter 5
# Nationalist Movements and Political Anger: A Global Perspective

### 1. Nationalism as a Response to Political Anger

As an ideology, Nationalism emerges in response to political discontent and demands. At its essence, the ambitions of Nationalism are to establish a common identity for a people based on a shared culture, ancestry, regional origin, religion, or means of communication. It is its dimension, both psychical and political, that is closely linked to the ideas of self-determination, nation, and dignity. That is because political anger, arguably the most potent political emotion, is regularly fueled by alleged injustices (imagined, real, historical, economic, or cultural) and is ripe for the construction of nationalist views. This passionate emotion, fueled by political anger and its associated group identity and sense of autonomy, is having a profound impact on the development of nationalist movements worldwide. Nationalism is often viewed as a response to perceived external or internal threats; however, as political, economic, and cultural conditions evolve, nationalistic movements adapt to new challenges. Ever since the rise of Nationalism, which has been a response to foreign domination, sometimes referred to as colonialism and at other times as imperialism, but opposing colonization, nationalists have always sought ways to gain independence. In more recent times, however, Nationalism can also be seen as a response to globalization, cultural cross-pollination, and economic injustice, all of which can be powerfully rage-inducing to those who feel marginalized or menaced.

Ernest Gellner (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1983) have made the point that Nationalism is frequently a manipulated identity, artificially manufactured by political leaders to create

solidarity and reinforce their autocracy. This type of Nationalism often defines itself in opposition to others – either by naming outsiders as enemies, or by highlighting the distinctiveness of the nation's culture, identity and/or values. Political grievances serve as the emotional impetus for these formations of identity as aggrieved or disempowered groups attempt to reassert their agency and dignity within the framework of nationalist identity ideologies. The association of anger with Nationalism has strong roots in political and social theories. To understand why anger can lead to Nationalism, we need to examine the work of several important researchers.

In his 1762 treatise, "The Social Contract," Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that legitimate political power originates from the collective will of the people. Alienation and political impotence emerge when institutional arrangements and state structures fail to reflect or embody the popular will. As Marx observed, alienation is not only an economic condition but also a political one, arising when individuals no longer see themselves as active participants in shaping collective life. Similarly, Rousseau warned that when the particular interests of elites replace the general will, citizens become estranged from the very political order that claims to represent them. In such contexts, politics ceases to be a vehicle of empowerment and instead becomes a site of disillusionment, reinforcing a sense of distance between the governed and their institutions." Rousseau viewed alienation as a political negative, or an indication of the deprivation of liberty, and believed it could result in a political revolution with little or no warning and subsequently have more dire consequences. His ideas would later become the model for modern nationalist movements, which opposed monarchy and imperialism. Karl Marx later provided a somewhat more materialist explanation of the emergence of Nationalism in the 19th century. Marx argued that Nationalism is not only a response to political oppression, but also to economic exploitation. The division between the bourgeois and the proletariat is an iniquitous social structure that, by its nature, produces

dissatisfaction. According to Marx, this discontent could be harnessed to organize revolutionary movements that would dismantle the capitalist system and replace it with something new, founded on social and economic equality. While Marx had been critical of some aspects of Nationalism in general, specifically ethnic Nationalism, he recognized the potential of economic grievances to mold political movements.

According to Benedict Anderson (1983), in his book "Imagined Communities," Nationalism is an invention that creates a shared imaginary landscape of symbols, stories, and memories. Anderson argued that Nationalism constructs an 'imagined community' in which people who would never meet feel a sense of common nationality. Political anger is a key factor in this process; if people fear that their national identity is threatened from outside, through colonialism, immigration, or globalization, for example, they can become angry and attach themselves to nationalist ideologies in order to protect their collective identity. 'Nationalism' is thus used as a tool to re-establish identity and achieve political independence and self-sovereignty. More recently, Anthony D. Smith (1991) investigated ethnic Nationalism as a form of political anger based on ethnocultural identity. According to Smith, Nationalism is most powerful in ethnic cultures that are deeply rooted in ethnicity and culture. Anger occurs when there is a perceived threat to this identity, from someone or something outside or inside it. In this interpretation, Nationalism can be seen as defensive in nature—a means of maintaining ethnic homogeneity of a nation-state under foreign control and of preventing cultural erosion.

Nationalism has, historically, been a reaction to colonial domination and political humiliation. Those who came under colonial subjection generally felt a loss of sovereignty, identity, or autonomy of some kind and thus experienced considerable resentment. Such resentment is typically directed at colonial authorities, who are accused of imposing unfair and oppressive rule. For example, during the Indian Independence struggle, the desire

for freedom from British rule in India became a prominent motivating force. Leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi found a way to channel the anger of the Indian population into a feeling of national unity and collective resistance. Gandhi's non-violent campaigns of resistance, which attempted to free India from British control, were driven by moral outrage at the institutionalized oppression and exploitation that Indians suffered at the hands of their imperial overlords. Gandhi's ability to harness this rage for non-violent agitation, in the form of peaceful demonstrations and passive resistance, in turn galvanized the Indian nationalist movement and led to Indian independence in 1947.

Likewise, Algeria's National Liberation Front (FLN) productively commoditized political frustration in the pushback against French colonialism. Algerians reacted to French colonialism, which was characterized by repression, exploitation of work and culture, by engaging in an intense movement for Liberation. Nationalist leaders, including Ahmed Ben Bella, skillfully channeled this discontent against the colonizers, framing the fight for independence around claims to sovereignty, self-determination, and Algeria's unique cultural and historical characteristics.

Nationalism persisted as a response to disparities in economic development, cultural decay, and political marginalization in the postcolonial world. Nationalists from many nations are also in the grip of mobilization, as citizens feel despondent that postindependence leaders have failed to fulfill their promise of freedom and economic justice. In Latin America, for example, populist nationalist causes have frequently been driven by resentment of economic inequality and foreign predation. In Venezuela, Chávez used antimperialist discourse as a means of branding his rule as a check to U.S. hegemony in Latin America. His rhetoric tapped deeply into grievances over economic unfairness, marginalization and the lingering effects of colonialism. Chávez's type of Nationalism, centered around social justice and the redistribution of wealth, appealed to working-class and

marginalized groups who felt marginalized by the global capitalist structure.

New sources of political discontent in contemporary societies, brought about by globalization, such as economic inequality, cultural shifts, and the decline of the nation, are linked by Teune and others to this new notion of alienation. In Western Europe, right-wing populism has been motivated by frustration with immigration and the erosion of cultural homogeneity resulting from global migratory flows. Political figures in countries like France (Marine Le Pen) and the Netherlands (Geert Wilders) have capitalized on widespread anxieties over immigration and the perceived spread of Islam, using these sentiments to rally support for nationalist movements that promise to defend national sovereignty and preserve cultural identity. Another instance of Nationalism resulting from political disaffection is the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. Economic discontent, nativism, and concerns about losing sovereignty to the European Union were key factors in the rise of Brexit. Dissatisfaction with Brussels (and the sense of being ruled by unelected elites) led millions of Britons to vote for Brexit, and we shouldn't mince words — this gives you the scale of the power of dissatisfaction to shape nationalist movements.

In response to political discontent, Nationalism in history has evolved from the colonial to the postcolonial era and into the era of globalization. Whatever its target, be it colonial rulers, economic oppression or cultural subversion, anger has consistently fuelled the currents of nationalist fervor around the world. As the sections that follow will demonstrate, nationalist leaders and movements effectively utilize anger to forge political identities, oppose foreign rule, and make claims to sovereignty and self-determination. Consideration of the relationship between anger and Nationalism is necessary to check the surge of modern nationalist movements and predict how politico-anger will determine the future of global politics.

## 2. Populist Nationalism in Europe: A Response to Globalization

A notable political change in 21st-century Europe was the emergence of populist Nationalism. It's been a movement of anti-elite language, Nationalism, and populist leaders who have tapped into globalization, economic discontent, and cultural change. Central to the rise of populist nationalist movements in Europe so far is the mobilization of political discontent, including frustration at perceived economic inequalities, the decline of national identity, and fear of cultural dilution resulting from immigration. They have morphed into potent political weapons used by populist leaders to build followings, seize power, and overthrow existing political orders.

What European populist Nationalism has boiled down to is the popular rejection of the idea that the global elite, in which certain supranational institutions like the EU are its apex, is looking after the demos. They are often caricatured as being indifferent to the lives of ordinary people and more concerned with global markets and business profits than the well-being of the nation-state. Populists' focus on sovereignty, national identity, and economic fairness has allowed them to capitalize on a sense of political alienation among voters who feel most threatened by the internationalization of the economy. In this section, we highlight three large case studies in Europe: Brexit in the U.K., the nationalist populism of Budapest's strongman in Hungary, and nationalist power in Poland. These cases demonstrate how a sense of political disenchantment, particularly with globalization, immigration, and income inequality, has given rise to populist Nationalism in Europe.

The Brexit vote of 2016 was a pivotal moment in British political history — the coming together of political dissatisfaction and Nationalism. This is not a secret agenda, as the U.K.'s decision to leave the EU was largely based on dissatisfaction with immigration, economic inequality, and national sovereignty. For many in the U.K., the EU was an unaccountable body that produced rules and regulations in Brussels, sometimes seemingly in conflict

with what ordinary people wanted. The apparent loss of national borders and the U.K.'s inability to make its own laws were among the biggest factors in the Vote Leave campaign. There's a fire in a house, whose occupants are squabbling; in the middle of the night, the people trying to put out the fire get into an argument about who started it, and who would stand next to them. At the same time, they heroically fought it, and arrived at someone who is "for fighting fire" but is also for something else — fixing the lighting on the 14th floor — and like, that sounds like it could be an interesting strategy, why don't we try that, lets not throw away the 14th floor just because the lighting is broken! Led by figures such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage, the Leave campaign exploited this unhappiness by demonizing the EU as a faceless body whose mere existence was perceived as placing Britain's identity and nationhood at risk. The campaign's catchphrase, "taking back control," resonated strongly with voters on the margins of the political mainstream and those anxious about the ever-increasing number of immigrants in their midst. The migration crisis, particularly of Eastern Europeans and Middle Eastern refugees escaping conflict, was used to evoke fears of cultural disintegration and loss of a British identity.

Economic dissatisfaction, particularly in post-industrial areas of the U.K., played a crucial role in the Brexit decision (see also Goodwin and Heath, 2016). It was resentment toward economic elites who were seen as profiting from the European Union's free trade with developing countries and open borders, all while the U.K.'s working and middle classes were left behind. The so-called pearl-clutching Remoaners provoked the "Real England" patriots to rally behind Brexit. Their main weapons were economic grievances, fuelled by the stark divide between the affluent metropolitan elite in London and the struggling working classes of the industrial North, a divide that populist Nationalism powerfully exploited. Therefore, Brexit is a case in point for the way in which political discontent generated by perceived challenges to national identity, sovereignty, and economic security can propel a populist nationalist platform

forward. The result of the referendum exposed profound social fractures in Britain and underscored the potency of anger in determining political results.

And in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was a driving force behind the boom in populist Nationalism in Europe. Under Orbán, the Fidesz Party has presented itself as a defender of Hungarian sovereignty, Christianity and national identity against perceived challenges from immigration, globalisation and the EU. Orbán has shrewdly channeled public disaffection to drive turnout against immigration and against the EU as an institution that tries to impose values and policies at odds with Hungarian tradition. Orbán's strategy of indulging populism to capitalize on popular impatience has been especially effective in exploiting fears about Islamic immigration and refugee waves. His government frequently plays on the theme that the arrival of Muslim refugees in Europe is an existential threat to Hungarian culture and Christian values. This "cultural preservation" narrative hits all the right notes for those who believe that their culture and their religion are under attack by foreign immigrants. Orbán portrays himself as the Hungarian champion versus the EU, citing what he calls the EU's inability to protect European borders.

In addition to his anti-immigrant rhetoric, the populist leader of Hungary was able to capitalize on growing anger towards the Union's political elite to consolidate his own power further. He portrayed the EU as some foreign power that is here to steamroll over Hungarian sovereignty by foisting laws and rules on the Hungarian people that they don't like. The populist leader of Hungary, who emphasizes sovereignty, particularly in Hungary's disputes with EU policies on migration and the judiciary, has demonstrated a spark of national pride and self-sufficiency. By framing immigration and EU interference as existential threats to Hungarian identity, the Hungarian leader has been able to mobilize nationalist sentiments and political disaffection among the electorate. The potent blend of Nationalism and political alienation is demonstrative of much of the appeal that he holds for Europe

today, particularly in countries that feel that they are culturally and politically on the EU's periphery.

The Political Programme of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland: Leader of Terracentrism, Euroscepticism, and Economic Liberalism in Paranationalist - Nationalist Perspective. The Political Programme of the Law and Justice Parties in Poland is a strategic conceptualization of the nationalistic discourse and political demand, which is addressed against the European Union (EU), as liberal ideas, in their view, erode the essence of Polish identity. JarosławKaczyński, the leader of PiS, has cast the party's mission as a crusade to safeguard national sovereignty and uphold traditional values against the encroachment of liberal, secular, and pro-European forces. The PiS frequently stokes the grievances of Poland's voters, who believe that their national culture and values are being eroded by globalization and EU institutions. The economic malaise — and the rise, after the financial crash, of a bemedaled strutting global overclass — was ready to yield to Polish populist Nationalism. In describing itself as a representative of working-class Poles, the PiS has helped to stoke resentment against the country's economic elite and the multinationals driving such rapid change, securing its popular support.

Central to the PiS strategy is the move to identify the nationstate more closely with Catholicism, so that the Polish Catholic Church becomes a constitutive part of Polish sovereignty. The party's championing of conservative Christian values and its rejection of liberal social policies, including LGBTQ+ rights, resonate with those uncomfortable with what they see as the secularisation of Polish society. The fusion of religious identity and Nationalism has proved to be a populist winner for PiS, especially in its conservative core. The rise of populist Nationalism in Poland reveals how emotionally potent a factor resentment over economics, culture, and religion can be. PiS has harnessed anger to confront the European Union, liberalism, and globalization — demonstrating how political anger can play a significant role for at least one segment of nationalist politics in Eastern Europe. Spectacles of

populist Nationalism in Europe, which are newly applicable to the European case, are a complicated breed: they draw from a medley of dissatisfactions about globalisation, economic inequality, immigration and the perceived weakening of national identity. In instances like Brexit, Hungary and Poland, it was evident that politicians had weaponized anger, building support around nationalist causes. From discontent about economic insecurity, to concerns about cultural decay, to calls for a return to national sovereignty, political anger is the driving force behind the rise of populist Nationalism in Europe.

As the analysis continues, we must come to understand these political angers in relation to nationalist movements. Economic unhappiness, cultural concerns, anxiety over economic security and national control have created the perfect populist storm — now a major force across the continent. In the remainder, we explain what those nationalist movements have in common with global trends and political anger, and what their implications ought to be for the future direction of European and world politics.

**3. Nationalism in Asia**

Asia, the world's largest continent and home to the most diverse group of inhabitants, does not escape some of history's most intense and varied nationalist movements of the late 20th century. Such movements, invariably activated by political grievances, a sense of economic deprivation, or a desire to protect cultural traditions, have played a crucial role in shaping national identity and determining political courses. From Majoritarian Nationalism in India under Nationalism in China to Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar, it is fuelled by a feeling of bitterness over perceived foreign domination, political corruption at home and the degradation of national identity. Anger is paramount in these nationalist movements. Politicians in countries like India, China and Myanmar have also been able to steer people's broad dissatisfaction into support for nationalist agendas, which frequently play on historical wrongs and cultural anxieties. This section examines the importance of anger in the dynamics behind nationalist movements

in the three Asian nations, focusing on the connections between identity, religious dimensions, economic disillusionment, and political marginalization from the existing political order. Majoritarian Nationalism has emerged as a key political force in 21st-century India. In case that allusion was too elliptical, Majoritarian Nationalism has become the central nerve of India's body politic, shaping the dominant and governable narrative of Indian life under post-2014 leadership and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This ideology, called Majoritarian, with Hindutva ideology, holds that India is a Hindu nation and aims to promote the agenda of the Majoritarian at the expense of religious minorities, most notably Muslims and Christians.

Public dissatisfaction in India is deepened by factors such as growing income inequality and the increasing intensity of religious tensions in recent years, with perceptions that some groups receive disproportionate advantages. In contrast, others feel left behind within the broader framework of the state system. Prime Minister and the BJP have done an excellent job of tapping into this discontent by arousing Majoritarian sentiment by religious iconography, language of cultural defence and Muslim bashing. In the BJP's own narrative, Muslims represent a threat to the Indian "culture and the Majoritarian value system," with leadership assuming the role of the protector of Majoritarian culture and civilization. The economic basis of dissent was also significant. Economic inequality and unemployment have disenfranchised millions of Indians, particularly in rural and low-income communities. The government promised an economic upswing for the Majoritarian majority and expressed it in a language that associates Majoritarian Pride with economic progress. The Prime Minister introduced sweeping policy changes, including land distribution, business incentives and foreign investment. While these initiatives are making progress, they are also criticized for favoring the wealthy over the poor and the powerless.

Strong feelings of "humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers have in the past been tied to Nationalism in China. China's

population remains scarred from the two Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860), the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), and the Japanese invasion during World War II. These ancient sores have forged a shared hurt and thirst for national rebirth. Under the Presidency, Chinese Nationalism has asserted its grip as a core quality of Communist Party rule, wrapped around grievances over past humiliations and feeding into the search for a new nationalist dream. The President has cast China as a victim of foreign aggression whose emergence reflects a historical correction of past injustices. It's the "Chinese Dream," and it's all about China returning, in a broad sense, to its former glory. He has used history, or rather, offended history, to shape that sense of national identity. Under his watch, the government's focus was on asserting China's greatness and power on the world stage, particularly in territorial disputes such as those in the South China Sea and on how China should address the issue of Taiwan. He has framed these issues in terms of national sovereignty and stirred up resentment at foreign interference to stir up national sentiment.

China's Political dissent is exhibited in growing authoritarianism led by China's paramount leader. The CCP in China further cracked down on political dissent, restricted freedom of speech, and persecuted religious minorities, such as Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. His government has used popular discontent over perceived domestic and foreign threats as the basis for sweeping censorship and surveillance, saying such measures are necessary to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The President's regime uses economic Nationalism as a technique of political mobilisation. Programs like Made in China 2025 aim to reduce China's reliance on foreign technologies and markets. Western countries, especially the United States, are viewed with a certain amount of resentment by some Chinese citizens, who feel that they have exploited economic competition and trade imbalances as a means to assert their technological superiority over China. This perception has a considerable impact on Chinese nationalist thinking.

Myanmar, where Buddhist Nationalism is a force for political unrest and ethnic-based violence. The country has a mix of ethnic and religious groups. Among the Buddhist majority and Muslim minority, including the Rohingya, tensions are high with regard to identity, citizenship and religious freedom. Politicians — both supporters of Aung San SuuKyi and the generals who governed the country for decades — have exploited the turmoil to advance Buddhist Nationalism and suppress the Rohingya. There is a history of antagonism toward the Rohingya among both officials and the broader population, fed by a mix of historical enmity, local grievances, racial and religious superiority and efforts to suppress the group's political aspirations. The Rohingya, a Muslim minority, have been subjected to decades of persecution in Myanmar, which refuses to recognise them as citizens and considers them to be illegal migrants from Bangladesh. Buddhist nationalists have portrayed the Rohingya as a threat to Myanmar's Buddhist character — using that animosity to justify a brutal terror campaign against the population.

The 2017 Rohingya crisis, where thousands died and hundreds of thousands were displaced, is how the use of anger and nationalist discourse has been abused to justify ethnic cleansing. The military junta, in collaboration with Buddhist extremist groups, strategically harnessed public resentment to mobilize the majority Buddhist population by framing the Rohingya as an alien or "foreign" presence within the nation. Despite attracting international criticism and despite the fact that Myanmar's government and military pursued their nationalist strategy at least in part because they feared they would lose hold on power, anger apparently was central to their political plan.

The nationalist movements in India, China, and Burma demonstrate anger. Anger was utilized as a strategic response to political, economic, and cultural challenges in these regions through the narratives of sovereignty, identity, and spirit/religion. In these settings, politicians have effectively mobilized anger in support of nationalist causes by portraying foreign and domestic problems as

existential threats to national cohesion. From Majoritarian Nationalism in India to Chinese Nationalism under the President to Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar, anger has proven an essential weapon of political mobilisation. Passages like this underscore that Asian Nationalism transcends political sides, that it is an emotional reaction to past injustices, current wealth gaps, and religious and cultural encroachments. Understanding how anger works psychologically and politically is crucial to our comprehension of why Nationalism is on the rise in these parts of the world and what this phenomenon means for the broader context of global politics.

**4. Nationalism in Africa**

Within the complex history of colonialism, ethnic diversity, and post-independence conflicts on the continent of Africa lies an opportunity to examine the association between Nationalism and political frustration. Nationalist revolts have emerged in all parts of the continent as a direct response to colonialist repression, ethnic ostracism, and economic exploitation. Among the bitterest consequences of loss of sovereignty, cultural identity and territory for repressed populations in the colonies has proved to be a significant agency for the spread of Nationalism around Africa. Historians struggled to make sense of several African countries that had achieved some successes in reconciling after the end of European colonialism. This situation was further aggravated by entrenched ethnic divisions, compounded by the artificial and arbitrary borders imposed during the colonial era, which often disregarded cultural and demographic realities. It is therefore not surprising that ethnic Nationalism would play a powerful role in the postcolonial African political landscape, where groups were fighting to assert their identities, gain access to resources and achieve political autonomy.

This section examines the extent to which political anger has shaped ethnic Nationalism in South Africa, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. Within it, the role of anger in the founding of nationalist movements and the ways political leaders exploited the emotion as a force for sovereignty, independence, and ethnic self-determination

are explored. In South Africa, Nationalism was politically charged to breaking point, anger was the explosive charge against apartheid, a system of legalized racial oppression and exploitation by a White minority government. The African National Congress, led by figures like Nelson Mandela, seized on the outrage of the Black majority's disenfranchisement to rally support for independence and for racial equality. The rage of black South Africans during the apartheid years was about exploitative capitalism, political disenfranchisement and cultural subjugation. The blacks were dehumanised and the apartheid system took away the basic rights, such as the vote, property, and good education. It stung deep anger and desperation in black South Africa, no less so in the urban and rural working class that was shut out of economic opportunity.

The African National Congress (ANC) effectively harnessed the anger and transformed it into a powerful political force for equality and freedom. This narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle as being about another righteous people's 'right to dignity and selfdetermination', of the people who have been wronged uniquely, allowed the ANC to use anger to instantaneously motivate not just South Africans but the world against the Apartheid government. Wide feelings of outrage over the injustices of apartheid allowed the merging of different ethnic groups in South Africa – Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho – into a common nationalistic movement. However, in spite of the removal of apartheid in 1994, economic inequality remained a political grievance. Despite getting the tokenistic political freedom, an overwhelming majority of the black population in South Africa continues to experience economic discrimination. The ANC was criticised for failures to alleviate the social and economic inequalities inherited from the system of apartheid. Resistance to continued unemployment, poor living conditions, and unequal land distribution continues to shape the political landscape of South Africa.

Nigeria – Africa's most populous nation – faces significant challenges in building both ethnic harmony and national unity. The country comprises over 250 ethnic groups, each with its distinct

culture, language, and religion. Triggered in 1967, the Biafran War was the result of ethnic separatism born out of political alienation. The Igbos, one of the Nigerian Federation's largest ethnic groups, declared independence as the Republic of Biafra, largely because they felt politically oppressed as well as economically marginalized by the rest of Nigeria. The seeds of Biafran Nationalism were planted in the frustration with the political and military hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria. The Igbo felt alienated and marginalized in a political process dominated by the northern, Hausa-Fulani people. The political nature of the Biafran secession was further intensified in the years following Nigeria's independence, when the Nigerian government implemented its controversial economic policy (which is believed to be biased towards the North) and the ethnic programs that followed.

The war over Biafra had serious and negative consequences, and Biafra argued that its case was lost, with ethnic Nationalism and feelings of political dispossession still to be resolved. As of today, the Igbos and some other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria still struggle for political freedom and economic justice. The Niger Delta, home to the Ijaw, Efik, and other communities, has witnessed repeated uprisings against the government's management of oil revenues, which have largely enriched northern and southern elites while leaving the local population trapped in severe poverty. This dissatisfaction has resulted in ethnic-driven movements and calls for resource control and autonomy. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are notable examples where political discontent has been leveraged to advocate for self-determination and economic justice for their respective peoples. The movements highlight the deep-seated ethnic divides and ongoing frustration in Nigerian politics.

In Ethiopia, both ethnic Nationalism and broader currents of Nationalism have exerted a profound and lasting influence on the nation's political trajectory, especially in the years following the downfall of the Derg in 1991. The end of Mengistu Haile Mariam's

authoritarian regime in May 1991 paved the way for the rise of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition composed primarily of ethnonationalist political organisations. Under the EPRDF, Ethiopia was reorganised into a federal system explicitly structured along ethnic lines, granting its largest groups—including the Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, and Somali—control over respective regional states and corresponding political representation.

While this model was presented as a way of institutionalising ethnic autonomy and ensuring inclusion, in practice, it fostered significant tensions and grievances. Many communities, most notably the Oromo and Amhara, came to view the arrangement as a mechanism of marginalisation, accusing the regime of relegating them to the status of second-class citizens. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which constituted the most powerful faction within the EPRDF, was widely accused of monopolising the Ethiopian state apparatus and channelling its economic and political resources disproportionately to benefit the Tigray population.

This perception of imbalance and exclusion fuelled growing resentment among Ethiopia's diverse ethnic constituencies. Over time, these discontents culminated in sustained political unrest, mass protests, and ultimately open conflict. The deterioration of relations between the TPLF and the federal government under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed reached a critical breaking point in 2020, sparking the devastating Tigray War (2020–2022). This conflict, marked by extreme violence, humanitarian catastrophe, and regional destabilisation, underscored the fragility of Ethiopia's ethnically based federal system and revealed the extent to which ethnic Nationalism, rather than fostering unity, has entrenched divisions within the country's political order.

The war in Tigray was marked by ethnic killing, rights abuses and a broader collapse of political hope. The government in Ethiopia, led by Ahmed, has been widely criticized for its handling of the conflict, and the TPLF has charged that the government has used ethnic violence as a way to cling to power. The Tigray fighting

highlights the ongoing challenges Ethiopia faces in managing its large ethnic diversity and addressing political grievances that trigger conflict. In the African context, Nationalism tends to be driven by political grievances that colonial legacies, tribal animosities, and economic inequalities may have bred. The examples of South Africa, Ethiopia, and Nigeria are evidence that nationalist movements have been generated by a sense of grievances rooted in historical injustices, political alienation, and economic marginalization. Although nationalist ascendancy was instrumental to emergent independence and sovereignty, it is also frequently responsible for persistent tribal violence and political turmoil throughout the majority of Africa.

The centrality of anger in nationalisms may be crucial to understanding the dilemmas faced by African peoples. The persistent issues of inequality, ethnic tensions and political marginalisation combine to create a surge of nationalist energies and a mood of atrophy. As Africa moves forward, it will need to find ways to channel anger constructively in the service of inclusive growth, cultural empathy, and nation-building.

**5. Nationalism and Populism in Latin America**

The intersection of Nationalism and populism with political alienation, economic inequality, and the legacies of Latin America's colonial and imperial past has endured in Latin America. Anticolonial movements during the 19th-century uprisings, as well as anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles of the 20th and 21st centuries, have made political attempts to push for national sovereignty, preserve cultural identity, and achieve economic and political independence from external domination. The region's nationalist rhetoric often steers towards its history of defiance against colonialism and external influence, and its populist leaders exploited popular sentiments against economic disparities and social injustices. It is better to consider three important case studies in this vein: Chavismo in Venezuela, AMLO's populist Nationalism in Mexico and Peronism in Argentina. Every step describes how anger at foreign exploitation, economic inequality, and political

exclusion has been transformed into nationalist passion and populist leadership. These are as worthy of analysis … We aim to investigate how these cases have persisted and been influenced by the forces of Nationalism and populism in the region.

The popular emergence of Chavismo in Venezuela, under Chávez, is a good example of the relationship between disillusion with the political process and Nationalism. Chávez, elected President in 1998, described his own movement as a "socialist revolution," targeting the redistribution of the nation's wealth, lifting people out of poverty, and resisting American imperialism. Named after Latin American independence leader Simón Bolívar, the Bolivarian Revolution sought to restore Venezuela's sovereignty and economic independence from foreign powers, particularly the U.S. and multinational corporations. Chávez's political project was deeply rooted in anti-imperialist and anti-American themes, as he frequently denounced the United States for exploiting Latin America's natural resources and interfering in the region's political affairs. Chávez became enormously popular and drew widespread public trust, particularly among the country's poor, lower and working classes, who had felt neglected, if not ignored, by the state and whose living standards and working conditions had been declining rapidly amid the increasingly nationalised oil industry exploitation in the years after the fall of Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

Many Venezuelans were attracted to the Chavista model of populist Nationalism, especially those who believed that the economic elite had unfairly benefited from the country's oil wealth. At the same time, a majority of its people lived in poverty. Chávez also established various social programs, including the Misión Barrio Adentro, Misión Ribas, and Misión Vivienda, which provided Venezuelans in the poorest neighborhoods with access to healthcare, education, and housing. The goal was to distribute Venezuela's oil wealth and to end its reliance on foreign capital. However, Chavez's confrontational Nationalism also caused serious economic problems. Another factor is the government's

overwhelming dependence on oil exports, which has exposed the country to global price fluctuations and the absence of economic diversification, making Venezuela vulnerable to currency devaluation, inflation, and financial turbulence. Nonetheless, at a time of global economic malaise, Chávez's populism still succeeded in focusing the public's anger on outsiders—chiefly the United States—and in bolstering Venezuela's position as a key player in the Latin American anti-imperialist field. Chavismo continues to exert a powerful presence in Venezuela, enduring as both a political movement and an ideological framework despite the country's severe decline. Once one of Latin America's most prosperous nations, Venezuela now faces a prolonged economic collapse, hyperinflation, and widespread political instability under the leadership of Nicolás Maduro. Yet, the movement survives by reasserting the core tenets of Hugo Chávez's legacy—most notably its nationalist and anti-imperialist discourse—which are deployed strategically to sustain the loyalty of its base. Through the repetition of such rhetoric, the regime seeks to legitimise its authority, frame external actors—particularly the United States— as threats to Venezuelan sovereignty, and rally popular support in the midst of mounting domestic hardship and international isolation. The ascent of Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his populist party, MORENA, is a response to economic disparities and political disenchantment. Economic Nationalism: AMLO's political project is deeply rooted in economic Nationalism, oriented toward the redistribution of wealth, combating corruption, and profiting from internal and external rents over which he can exert control, primarily U.S. rents. His talk resonates with millions of Mexicans who feel that the benefits of globalization and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have accrued principally to national and foreign capital, while largely ignoring or excluding a significant portion of the population. AMLO has long railed against "neoliberalism" and the sell-off of Mexico's natural resources to foreign interests, claiming the policies mostly enriched transnational companies at the expense of average Mexicans.

Nationalist rhetoric by Andrés Manuel López Obrador emphasizes the need to reassert Mexico's sovereignty and economic independence vis-à-vis foreign actors, especially in the petrochemical and food agriculture sectors. For example, his government has attempted both to extend state control over the oil industry through the national oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex), and to promote more public investment in infrastructure and social programs. López Obrador's popularity stems in part from widespread frustration among Mexicans with corruption and inequality embedded in the political system. Similarly, by positioning himself as a defender of the people against the entrenched corruption of the ruling class, Sankara won broad support from peasants, urban workers, and young people who felt excluded from meaningful economic opportunities. His administration implemented a range of social programs, including universal healthcare and universal primary education, while also providing direct assistance to those experiencing poverty. In the face of considerable political resistance and a challenging economic climate, López Obrador's tactical deployment of popular discontent as the material around which to mobilize politics has had a transformative effect on Mexico's political landscape. His economic Nationalism and anti-corruption message resonated with many Mexicans who feel marginalized by the economic and political elite.

The legacy of Peronism has left a profound and enduring mark on Argentina's political identity and its trajectory of economic Nationalism. Emerging under the leadership of Juan Perón, the movement articulated a distinct populist vision that combined strong state intervention in the economy with an emphasis on labour rights, social justice, and the empowerment of the working classes. Perón's leadership not only institutionalised a powerful political party but also cultivated a mass-based ideology that redefined the relationship between the state, the economy, and society. By advocating for the protection of domestic industries, expanding welfare provisions, and positioning the state as a mediator between

capital and labour, Peronism became a foundational force in shaping Argentina's modern political culture and its ongoing debates over national sovereignty, economic independence, and social equity. The themes of national independence, workers' rights, and industrial growth would continue to constitute part of the identity and aims of the political left in Argentina even after Perón died in 1974. The association between Peronism and Nationalism is attributed to economic dissatisfaction and social disparity. At the dawn of Perónism, Argentina was deeply polarized between the elite that controlled the nation's wealth and the working poor who existed in more or less miserable poverty without influence in the political process. This growing discontent with a widening disparity, especially among the urban working class, brought Perón to the forefront as a populist leader who would make redistributing wealth, protecting jobs, and empowering workers his cause célèbre. Peronism also represents economic Nationalism due to the sector's foreign control of the country's resources, particularly in the agricultural industry. Perón sought to increase state regulation of the economy and decrease the economic power of foreign interests. It was this nationalist policy that would "isolate and integrate," foster economic autarky, and turn Argentina's wealth to the nation (not to foreign interests).

The enduring influence of Peronism in contemporary

Argentine politics is evident in the leadership of figures such as Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Alberto Fernández, both of whom have carried forward the populist and nationalist policies originally introduced by Juan Perón. The economic discontent that Perón broached only intensified, and there was continued backing of nationalist economic ideas and social welfare programs that favored the working class and opposed foreign domination of the economy. In Latin America, such a phenomenon has been nurtured by politics of discontent, based on economic injustice, foreign exploitation and cultural independence. From Chavismo in Venezuela to AMLO's economic Nationalism in Mexico, or the populist policies of Peronism in Argentina, discontent has served as

a vital fueling source for politicians who want to stand up to foreign domination, neoliberalism, or social inequality. In all of those countries, populist nationalist movements have successfully exploited the anger of the marginalized and the dispossessed to win power and institute political change. These are movements which still shape the political and economic destiny of the rest of the region, and which reflect the ongoing struggles for sovereignty, self-determination and economic justice.

**6. Nationalist Leaders and Political Rage**

Throughout the centuries, God-fearing politicians have cultivated their righteous rage to garner votes, set great movements in motion, and maintain control over the masses, with nary a whiff of sincerity among them. It has worked out just dandily for nativist leaders, who have successfully directed that anger for political advantage. And it's a method that has been honed in the era of social media, in the contemporary political landscape, leaders possess unprecedented capacity to reach mass audiences and elicit emotional responses with extraordinary speed. When such emotional appeals function as a form of quid pro quo, they can forge enduring bonds and a collective sense of purpose, destabilise established political dynasties and legal frameworks, and facilitate the emergence of authoritarian regimes. In A Nation Forged by Resistance, Michael Mann examines how nationalist leaders harness public anger to secure electoral victories, exploring the broader implications of successful nationalist movements and the isolationist rhetoric that frequently accompanies opposition to international commitments. These leaders have used scapegoating, fear-mongering, and media manipulation to stoke anger and bolster their bases for response. By examining these cases, we can gain insight into the psychological dynamics of inciting anger and begin to anticipate the potential trajectory of political discourse and the evolution of democratic norms.

Nationalist leaders often portray political anger as a response to perceived challenges to a country's identity, sovereignty, and cultural norms. This rage is usually channelled at both out-group

enemies like foreign governments, immigrants and transnational corporations and in-group enemies like political elites, minorities and liberal activists. They are a threat to national unity and purity, nationalist leaders say, a narrative of division that inculcates their base and demonizes their opponents.

In Hungary, Orbán capitalized on people's dissatisfaction with immigrants and the EU, thereby bolstering his own political base. He depicts the EU as an external force seeking to dictate liberal values that counteract Hungarian culture and Christian traditions. Antipathy to immigrants — mostly from Muslim countries — has been at the heart of his leadership, which has exploited the refugee crisis to unite Hungarians behind the idea of a racially and culturally homogeneous Christian nation. Orbán is tapping into Hungary's deep-seated insecurity about having its sovereignty usurped by outside forces as a pretext for his increasingly autocratic rule.

Anger is a public weapon wielded more and more across the nation by nationalist leaders to flout democratic conventions. They take political anger as an excuse for authoritarianism — for crushing dissent, reining in press freedom, dismantling political institutions. And to rile up their base and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the other side, these leaders have used divisive rhetoric as a threat to the integrity of the country. Turkey used similar methods to recentralize power, and even Putin himself tried to reclaim and expand the Kremlin's authority as he lay recovering in a German hospital. He hoped to cast his administration as the guardian of Turkish independence from outside interference and of its internal sovereignty, over and against the secular elite and Kurdish separatists in particular. By manipulating the media, stoking political anger, the leader made autocratic moves to silence journalists, purge opponents and distort independent courts, which became acceptable. Shrewdly, he's capitalized on frustration about economic decline and foreign threats to advance his own cause while intensifying his assault on the democratic institutions in Turkey.

Their leaders' manipulative use of anger poses a significant threat to democratic governance. By putting the emotions of anger in the service of grievances and seeking support in the name of the nationalist, higher good, they have hollowed out democratic structures even further, even as they have deepened divisions within societies and bureaucratized their autocracy. The digital age has made anger more central to political mobilisation – allowing nationalist leaders to bypass an increasingly distrusted mainstream media and speak directly to their base, without mediation. If, on the other hand, you double down on anger, as a few populist leaders have, then anger becomes an allconsuming political weapon. However, as a strategy, this could have catastrophic consequences for democracy, social cohesion, and political stability. So, the people must be very fixated on that; it's one of the things that has taken place: anger has been a manipulation of the flesh of modern politics and the disasters of using anger as a political weapon.

# Chapter 6
# The Conversion of Political in the Digital Era

### 1. Political Space in the Digital Age

The digital age has led to a dramatic mutation of political space — not simply communicative space, but also that of a politics past as well as present. Participation in politics (previously face-to-face in town halls, debating clubs or even protests) has migrated to the Internet. Here, dynamics are shaped by algorithmic anomie and user content. The migration of political life onto digital platforms, which includes the phenomenon of digital populism, constitutes a fundamental transformation of the architecture of political authority, participation and legitimacy. Digital platforms are characterized by their Decentralized nature, and this type of power relationship is shaped by a new political space, where institutional gatekeepers of media access do not bureaucratically regulate power relations, but rather by algorithms that govern visibility and participation in the online environment (Gillespie, 2018).

The metamorphosis is not merely a transformation of channels of communication — it is a transformation of the way politics is conducted. At the heart of this order lies the historical tendency to concentrate political power in the chosen organs and the state apparatus. However, the digital age has introduced a new form of power: algorithmic sovereignty, where corporate platforms wield power, the algorithms that govern them, and the data tied to them. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others are the modern town squares — albeit controlled by private companies with certain interests. Increasingly, the power to shape political discourse lies not in the worth or urgency of the first-order topic, but in the politics of engagement. This content, Zuboff (2019) elaborates on in "surveillance capitalism," is rewarded for catering to content that

sends the reader into an emotional spiral of outrage (because not only is there now higher user engagement at a profit, but more critical to establishing profit margins: racking the reader's need for an attention fix. This is where the populist rhetoric did not derive from the logic of its argument, but rather from how intensely felt and communicable its rollout was.

Jürgen Habermas (1991) has been generally considered to be the central figure in the concept of the 'public value in democratic theory'. Habermas argued that a vibrant democracy is based upon a public sphere where citizens participate in a rational-critical debate of issues that concern them all. But the digital public sphere has changed political conversation in fundamental ways. Instead of being forums for discussion, they have become data-regurgitating machines that serve advertisers and serve as platforms for the pursuit of popularity. Populist leaders — and even non-populist ones — bypass established sources of information by speaking directly to their publics over social media. In doing so, they bypass the institutional filterings and discursive mediations that once characterized non-elite participation.

In the digital public sphere, in which an unceasing scroll of content — tweets, posts, videos, memes — clamors for our attention and our reactions, we have come to believe that there is something wrong about letting it pass without comment. Contrary to the model of thoughtful dialogue, digital technologies favor speed and emotional impulse over analysis and reflective thinking. In that context, leaders are more like messengers than advocates of this policy. They are also playing to who they are, and they do it more provocatively and emotively for their public. Populist leaders, Country-builders, such as the key figures in the global resurgence of country-building strategies, including those in India, are also involved in country-building. These players represent the same thing; through how they wield the platforms, they not only transmit messages but also present themselves as real. Within such online spaces, affective rather than rational discourse prevails and 'it is the

power of emotion in the message, rather than the content of the message that arises as most important here' (Papacharissi, 2015).

Digital technologies have enabled new ways of producing and disseminating political content — and also new forms of modus operandi for algorithms. These are algorithms — tweaked to optimize user engagement — that determine not only what information we see, but also who can view that information and what may be shared with them. They are certainly not neutral, but are linked to the financial aspirations of the platform and the data it accrues from user actions. Engagement begets more engagement, and algorithms that favor increasingly engaging content not only satisfy a "natural pull" toward inflammatory content but actively reward it, enticing still more engagement and data creation. This dialectic creates an environment in which outrage, radicalizing conspiracy theories, and hyperbole can thrive (Zuboff 2019). It is not surprising because these are the kinds of things that generate the most "engagement." These algorithms had a seismic impact on political discussion. Platforms do not reward careful, nuanced conversation, but rather posts that inspire intense, knee-jerk emotions (whether outrage, fear or amusement). These are favorable conditions for populist leaders, who specialize in speaking to the heart rather than the mind. They are exploiting the dynamics of digital culture to gain attention, even screaming for it, addressing specific grievances, and telling easy and morally unambiguous stories to their audiences. It has been one of the more 'performance' based types of political participation that has to fight for what gets held up and passed around in an attention economy that privileges drama and sensational value (Tufekci, 2017).

The political and technological regulation of algorithms is fraught with significant problems in terms of democratic accountability. Within a conventional democratic framework, the public has a means to hold elected officials accountable, one that includes checks and balances, transparency, and the rule of law. However, in the digital age, it has become more challenging to realize this. Algorithms are often not transparent and are not

accountable to democratic governance, as they are controlled by private companies and their profit-driven models. The owners of these platform companies own the algorithms, and they are not as subject to regulation as public institutions, although they have control over what is seen and what is not. The algorithmic policing of political speech is an issue of who has the authority to determine what content is promoted. The algorithms tend to reward content that provokes a reaction rather than that which is true or of a deliberative quality; misinformation and disinformation can spread. In the process, conventional elites of political knowledge, such as journalists, experts, and academics (Sundaram, 2014), are bypassed in favor of privileging what captivates emotionally, rather than factually (Gillespie, 2018). The process undermines the possibility of deliberation and debate based on information, replacing the politics of persuasion with a politics of provocation and escalation.

In this discussion, the focus is on the fact that digital populism is the re-sacralisation of the political. For centuries, political theologians have emphasized the extent to which the sacred is embedded in the fabric of politics, even in the most secular contexts. As Carl Schmitt (2005) argues, the concept that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" is particularly relevant in the context of digital soothsaying. Sectarian discourse frequently appropriates religious metaphors to portray political conflict as an epic struggle between purity and corruption and redemption. Populist leaders are often portrayed as quasi-messianic figures coming to liberate the people's sovereignty and defeat the corrupt elite. In moments like these, even as populist leaders challenge establishment politicians, they also create a vision of moral and existential crisis, casting themselves as saviors of the nation from corrupt elites.

Online platforms amplify this moralized culture of politics. Highly theatrical political narratives afford the dramatic spectacle in which a populist leader can serve as the dramaturgical author, staging the political fight as a struggle of good versus evil. These

media serve as theatres of political ritual, where followers engage in communal acts of unity and ritual catharsis. Hashtags, memes and viral videos function as liturgies of digital populism, in which you can discover community and moral reassurance in a world that often feels chaotic and fragmented. The digital platform is now not only a medium of communication but also a space for what I will call populist performance on the part of the leader, who is represented as a purifier, and of the opposition, as corrupt and immoral. Seen against this backdrop, digital populism might be thought of as a sort of political theology—that is, a system of belief that may not always be cyclical, but that indeed exists outside the classical churches and religions, yet depends on most of the same symbolic and moral frameworks. Populists in power invoke the sacred in the name of nationalism, purity, and redemption, and digital platforms amplify them through spectacles and virality. This re-sacralisation of the political is not a return to the premodern political, so much as a reconstitution of politics onto the technical architecture of digitalism.

The emergence of algorithmic populism is closely intertwined with the rise of the algorithmic state, where sovereignty is exercised not by political agents but through code. Sovereignty, in this algorithmic condition, is no longer the preserve of the state or the population; it is re-dispersed in digital platforms — and in the algorithms they use. As Schmitt (2005) famously puts it, "the sovereign is he who decides on the exception. In our digital age, the sovereign is not a person or persons that we ourselves can choose to speak and act on our behalf – it's the algorithm that decides what we see, who gets included and who gets excluded, and who is legitimate and who is not.

Political Theology and the Mutation of Sovereignty. The mutation of sovereignty has fateful consequences for political theology. Agamben (1998) suggests that the state of exception (the suspension of laws as a way to preserve sovereignty) has taken on a permanent character in the digital era. The platform society, exemplified by Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, now exercises a

sovereign power without any form of censure — determining who can say what and who gets amplified, who gets strangled. That's how the algorithmic state works, fundamentally not according to legal architecture or constitutional principles but through the alchemist's contributions of the opaqueness of fudge premised on profit and engagement. Power without accountability, without contestability, without moral responsibility, such as we associate with the exercise of political authority. Consequently, it would be the algorithmic state in the nature of sovereignty being transformed. Historically, sovereignty has been defined by the power to rule over a territory and its people, as well as the establishment of laws and institutions of government that respond to the needs of the people. In the era of algorithms, sovereignty is enacted in data, in who speaks and is unheard, who is rendered visible and whose political will is magnified. This represents a striking departure from the classical models of democratic governance, where citizens can influence the character and depth of political discourse and the direction of society.

Digital populism and the algorithmic state are two significant developments in politics. It is not the old institutions through which we channel our politics, but new virtual spaces where populist messages and political power are spread through algorithms. Once upon a time, all music was live; all news was face-to-face; and all power was local. This has given rise to a novel form of power — distributed, algorithmically mediated, and performative. In such a world, there is only room for political conversation as theatrics — it adapts (however distortedly) to formal democratic institutions, but not mediated or even cushioned by them, capable, for example, of providing decisions by militants thanks to digital network effects. This metamorphosis compels us to reevaluate our understanding of sovereignty, legitimacy, and political authority. The extent to and however) Agents are replaced by algorithms that make decisions at the sovereign level; considerations of accountability, transparency, and moral responsibility take on a whole new urgency. Political theology has much to say about power, the sacred and the people in

digital times. By diagnosing these convergences of populism, digital platforms, and algorithmic government, this passage reflects on what is at stake for this power, what kind of political power it represents, and the theological questions it raises about authority, community, and justice.

**2. Algorithmic Governance and Democracy's Erosion**

The concept of governance has undergone a profound transformation with the rise of the digital: from the logic of the centralized state apparatus to a new matrix that extends across digital platforms, corporations, and algorithmic systems. Indeed, the standard democratic structures we depend on (legislators, courts, and executives) were developed to create accountability and transparency — the core, tangible remedies by which an electorate expresses its political agency. In an age of algorithmic governance, where algorithms rather than humans make decisions, the new politics of authority is a distinctly different politics.

Algorithmic governance refers to the increasing use of algorithms to make decisions of political, social, and/or economic significance. This shift has profound implications for democracy, as much of which relies on the public scrutiny of all decision-making, because algorithms are often inscrutable and operated at the behest of private interests, without the democratic accountability that is the accepted cost of state power. Now, companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon are increasingly controlling everything from the information we receive and the people we can ask questions to, how we express ourselves and participate in politics. The concept of "surveillance capitalism", introduced by Zuboff (2019), suggests this is how these platforms acquired unprecedented power over knowledge production and public opinion formation. For all their acclaimed power and objectivity, concerns also exist about transparency, fairness, and the consolidation of power in a few major technology companies.

In politics, the governance that is increasingly overlaying the human element of governance in our time is "algorithmic," and it is becoming increasingly dangerous in our institutions. They take their

role in composing stereo-interacting images seriously. Vital tasks include decisions about what content to show on social media or policies in government or industry. For instance, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter employ algorithms to select news stories, advertising, or content to "feed" to users, which in turn affects their interpretations of political events and can influence voting behavior (Gillespie, 2018). Outside of the compass, algorithms are integral to the criminal justice system for risk assessment and sentencing, in healthcare for treatment decision-making, and in the hiring sector for screening job candidates.

There are quite serious concerns when using automated decision-making, especially in operational deployments (e.g., when used in politically sensitive contexts). Algorithms aren't neutral; they're made by people who are full of biases, assumptions and opinions that get baked into the machinery. By political, we mean that algorithms can reinforce power and domination relations. For instance, algorithms that prioritize clickbaiting sensationalism over contextualized reporting can contribute to the spread of misinformation and undermine the quality of informed political debate (Tufekci, 2017). A consequence of relying on such algorithms in governing a democracy can also be that citizens have little understanding of how the decision is made and what the basis for the decision is. This closet's secretiveness violates democratic principles of accountability, consent and participation.

Additionally, there is the small issue of how decisions about algorithms are made in the first place, as well as the ongoing commercial pressures — especially when it comes to maximizing user engagement and revenue. These algorithms prioritize content that stimulates emotions and, if anything, amplify material that is sensational, divisive, and provocative. Thus, political speech shifts from liberal rational agreement to manipulative emotions, which is precisely the condition that undermines democracy (Zuboff, 2019).

The most pernicious threat of algorithmic governance is its subversion of democratic values and the erosion of public confidence in such political systems. The latter's remit is becoming

muddied, as control over life and death is relinquished to algorithms. People used to be able to check their representatives through overt methods, such as elections, debates, and legislative hearings. Instead, politics are decided that shape people's lives largely behind closed corporate doors and also through cryptic formulas. The issue of non-responsibility in algorithmic governance is also a facet of a broader, pervasive tale of democratic distrust. The decisions of algorithms themselves are often opaque; private citizens generally can't contest them if they don't agree. This can lead to people feeling more disconnected from the political decision-making processes, as well as disengaged and even disillusioned with democratic institutions (Fuchs, 2017). This growing skepticism of democratic institutions is reinforced by algorithms that are programmed to promote one kind of content — such as dramatic news or partisan discourse — at the expense of more balanced or reasoned alternatives. This, in turn, warps the political reality and poisons the climate.

The erosion of trust in the public sphere is often accompanied by the rise of populist leaders who utilize digital platforms and algorithmic governmentality to consolidate their power. They paint themselves as the "voice of the people" versus a corrupt political elite, using digital media's word-of-mouth reach to bypass the traditional political establishment and address their supporters directly. And through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, populists bypass the traditional media outlets, enabling them to speak directly and unvarnished to their audience. This primary access to the public allows them to recycle and propagate their messages, to engage in politics in a manner that works as a force multiplier to their legitimacy, and often in a way that is impatient with the checks and balances of democratic institutions (Mudde, 2019). The emergence of digital populism (political power wielded via digital media rather than through democratic institutions) poses a grave danger to the functioning of democratic systems.

While digital media expands the space for political participation and individual involvement in politics, it also empowers populist leaders in new ways to mislead public opinion, foster divisiveness, and undermine democratic values. The power to control the flow of information, in conjunction with the sweeping authority of algorithms, is consolidating the ability to protect democratic institutions and values that are being attacked in an unending frenzy of misinformation and disinformation.

The primary concern with algorithmic governance is that it may exacerbate existing social inequalities. Algorithms are generally presented as clean, unbiased, and neutral tools to remove human bias from critical processes, such as hiring and loan decisions — yet they unwittingly perpetuate and, at times, even intensify existing biases and inequalities. The data that algorithms rely on can also be biased, reflecting the history of injustices and prejudicial practices that the tech industry is now committed to reforming. In criminal justice, some predictive algorithms have been found to have divergent effects on Black and Hispanic people, and they further compound racial bias in police and sentencing outcomes (O'Neil, 2016).

And the hiring algorithms and the recruitment algorithms could encapsulate and amplify gender and racial biases. Studies have found that algorithms like these can also be biased, favouring male candidates over female ones, especially in male-dominated fields, reflecting the prejudices of the people who build and train these systems. In political discussions, attention focus algorithms can help marginalize the voices of underrepresented groups (e.g., those with opposing views) farther from the center of the stage. This overemphasis on political poles and the resistance to the "middle" or less sexy arguments exacerbates societal polarization; the democratic notion of inclusive, sensible politics is weakened (Tufekci, 2017). Algorithmic biases are especially problematic for democracies, as they undercut the fairness and equity of decisionmaking. With algorithms increasingly underpinning the political, social, and economic impacts of government decisions, the

requirements that they be transparent, accountable, and free from discriminatory biases are paramount. Unrestricted and unregulated, algorithmic governance can deepen the worst of the digital divide.

The central distinction of algorithmic governance is the extent to which empires of firms have become the new sovereign. Thanks to digital technologies, private firms in general, and tech giants such as Facebook, Google, and Amazon in particular, are emerging as powerful actors that shape the political debate and public opinion. These corporations that control the algorithms behind digital platforms have disproportionate power in determining what and who citizens encounter and engage with — who gets seen and heard, however, through the content they access and the political discussions they participate in. These designs undoubtedly raise troubling questions about the democratic implications of algorithmic governance when the power to govern in this way is centralized in a small number of private firms.

Tech companies have power that extends beyond the control of digital platforms. They have become increasingly involved in policy-making, lobbying politicians and shaping legislation. As Zuboff (2019) pointed out, in recent years, due to their monopoly over digital platforms, tech giants have been able to control the political agenda, enabling them, as platform controllers, to manipulate public opinion and alter political outcomes. These same corporations can use their platforms to shape the flow of information and to amplify or suppress certain political stories, to the advantage of their own bottom lines, not to mention at the expense of democratic norms and the public interest. The lack of oversight and regulation of digital platforms further amplifies the corporate capture of political power. Whereas other political institutions are subject to regulation and public scrutiny, the digital platforms remain largely unregulated, allowing technology capitalists to steer politics in the direction of their economic interests. The absence of political legitimacy on digital platforms as democratic spaces raises difficult questions about corporate power in the governance of our political age.

The ascendancy of algorithmic bureaucracy reflects a profound change in the nature of political authority. With algorithms increasingly seeping into political decision-making, these algorithms replace our democratic mechanisms with the opaqueness of corporate-led, engagement-driven, and profitminded systems, rather than accountability- and transparencydriven ones. This erosion of democratic legitimacy and the perpetuation of further injustices pose a significant threat to the continuation of democratic work. Suppose we want the algorithmic governance to be consistent with [democratic] values, and not run in the opposite direction. In that case, democratic societies must enforce regulatory and visible oversight mechanisms that also constrain technology companies. This entails establishing the regulatory balance that would require bias in algorithms to be regulated at a level where they are more geared towards fairness, impartiality and the public good than in the service of corporations. We are moving the public discussion away from a democratic society; citizens urgently need to regain democratic control over technology and assert that technology should be employed in the service of democracy, in favour of democratic scrutiny, equality, and justice.

**3. Digital Populism and the Silencing of Critics**

Populism has been transformed by digital technology, which has helped it become a potent political force worldwide in recent years. Populism has traditionally been understood as a political approach that pits society into two rival groups — "the people" and "the elite." In the digital age, this discourse thrives, with information so readily available and social media the dominant mode of political interaction. In this new media landscape, populist leaders can bypass mainstream media gatekeepers, speak directly to their followers, and shape public debates and political narratives more effectively than ever before.

It is not that analogue populism has been brought to digital media, but rather that we can speak of digital populism because information in digital media is more likely to be distributed, spread, manipulated, and grow faster, and there is more of it. Twitter,

Facebook and YouTube have become indispensable. Let us be clear that most people are in favor of public figures and campaigns engaging with their audience. Such digital spaces enable direct, personalized interaction between populist leaders and their base, as well as the circulation of viral content (such as memes, hashtags, and videos) that turn politics into an emotional event rather than a rational exchange of information and opinions (Tufekci, 2017). This characteristic of controlling the political debate, despite traditional media, has altered the workings of the relationship between leadership, the masses, and politics. Populist leaders have redrawn the lines of political power as never before. The old routes of influence — through political parties, media organisations, or institutions — are regarded as less important compared with direct, immediate, and unmediated contact. In this section, we examine the extent to which digital environments have facilitated the dissemination of populism, reframed power relations, and posed significant challenges to democratic governance.

Digital populism is the transformative capability to translate complex politics into emotionally captivating political stories that people can relate to. Populist leaders capitalize on the viral nature of digital platforms to convey their messages and then typically simplify these into straightforward dualisms: the people versus the elite and the pure versus the corrupt. Because if you frame questions as if they will be solved one way or the other in a binary fashion, then that is what happens. It allows them the opportunity to mobilize their voters and be seen as people who are standing up for the downtrodden or the oppressed. Digital populism is effective in terms of the performativity of social media. While this traditional form of political communication assumes an organized form of debate, speeches, and an organized political arena to emerge slowly and reflectively, with digital populism, it is the spontaneity, affective force, and the possibility of directly and personally connecting with the audience that are placed at the center. Political elites are exploiting social media to construct “authentic” personae, engaging in direct and unmediated conversations with their

followers. This direct interaction creates loyalty and trust, which is essential for the success of populist leaders (Mudde, 2019).

Populists know how to exploit feedback loops in social media. Twitter and Facebook reward content that drives high user engagement — likes, shares, and comments. Populist messages are emotional and divisive and will echo far and wide in viral form. It is precisely this virality that gives digital populism its potency: its ability to propel extremely sensationalized content to go viral and further amplify the power and influence of new leaders in the process of establishing their political dominance, while simultaneously eroding the authority of the old political guard (Zuboff, 2019). Digital populism can be so easily roused; it is especially potent in moments of crisis or other political instability. In the midst of a crisis and tumultuous situation, populists may be able to easily ride the wave of public anger and rally their supporters by framing it as an "us versus them" battle. If it isn't, and it plays to the public's fear and anger, then digital populism can advance rapidly and actually challenge established political regimes, more or less head-to-head. It is due to these capabilities to quickly respond to political crises without relying on traditional intermediaries that digital populism has become a powerful force in today's politics (Tufekci, 2017).

Digital populism is an expression of power and politics that is increasingly difficult to censor, facilitated by memes and viral content. Memes, or the little photo or video that could, are short (need to go on, we all understand the humour in the way words are strung together or used in context that caused it to be co-opted for the book "The Little Sister" visual sound bites, designed for easy pass along, intended to have a point that gets made in a comedic, kind of touching or funny, sort of way. They've turned into potent weapons for political campaigns, as they can capture the public's imagination in an instant, distill more complex thoughts and provoke widespread discussion. Sure, for their part, the mememakers of the populist movements all have taken to memes the way bugs make it to Mars, broadcasting their political message

in a fun, cool and intellectual funny ha, ha, we like to believe — kind of way. MEMES, in this new age of digital technology, have moved from a mere mode of information exchange to a force that can fuel political contests. Populist politicians, political provocateurs, and ordinary people all utilize memes as a tactic, typically in an effort to sensationalize or recast a political issue in a manner that resonates with their audience. The potency of digital populism often lies in its capacity to generate memes that trigger and exploit public anxiety, fear, and desire, insinuating the political "play of ideas" into a storm of viral memes that captivate the imagination of a people as they proliferate populist worldviews.

The effects of membership on political propaganda are central to understanding political engagement and discussion. Memetics prioritizes emotional resonance over intellectual analysis, which can foster groupthink. And while they help forge political movements, memes can also spread disinformation and conspiracy theories. Their viral nature ensures that these tales travel fast, but their coarse and lurid nature allows them to pervert political reality. This leads political debates to be emotional in nature, rather than objective, which diminishes the possibility of viewing political debate from an engaged and rational perspective (Gillespie, 2018).

Digital populism has led to the fragmentation of political discourse. Political Parties and Institutions have played a significant role in this history as intermediaries between citizens and the state, providing an organized way to address issues and make decisions. But today, thanks to the Internet, political conversation is splintering into two separate, often conflicting echo chambers. Social networks, still primarily guided by algorithms that aim to categorize you as a consumer, encourage you to jump to conclusions that people agree with, and thus to like. This leads us to "filter bubbles", where people are selectively filtered out for not being exposed to their disagreed opinions.

This division is deepening polarisation in the digital populist age. Populist leaders thrive on divisiveness, while at the same time hating on a common enemy — whether it be the political

establishment, the media, or the ethnic or religious group. The "us and them" theme behind populist discourse thrives at the level of fragmented political communication, in which populists can construct a very coherent "us" and label everyone else as "them". This fissuring also compounds the failure to build constructive dialogues among contentious political groups, making it harder for societies to converge on key issues of concern (Zuboff, 2019). The consequences of this collapse are breathtaking. As political rhetoric becomes increasingly polarizing, it becomes more challenging to engage in an informed conversation about politics. "Digital populism" has metamorphosed political communication from rational discussion into an arena dominated by emotional eruption and identity politics. Politicos who once relied on reason and rhetoric have shifted their focus to emotion and image, at the expense of democratic institutions and norms.

To put it another way, symbolic populism is the lobotomized version of the original, as it is on full display every day. Digital populism undermines the very principles of democracy as a pluralist reality. Traditional democratic institutions are based on the idea that competing ideologies, interest groups, and political actors must come together through compromises and deliberation. Populist movements, on the other hand, feed on that division and discord, casting themselves as the voice of the "silent majority" against the "corrupt elite." It is exactly the opposite of the pluralism that is essential to democratic politics. The threat to pluralism is evident in how digital populism alters the nature of political discussions. Populist leaders generally frame politics in binary terms — "good versus evil and us against them" — effectively simplifying political discourse and erasing the pluralism of perspectives that is intrinsic to democratic debate. This technique of emptying the political space of the labyrinthine force relations of politics is characteristic of the politics of victimology, where the world is reduced to a simple black-and-white dichotomy and the enemy is invariably in the political elite, the establishment, or the out-group.

The loss of pluralism is a big problem for democracy. At the core of democracy is the freedom of citizens to converse, agree to disagree, and come to mutual understanding. However, digital populism, which focuses on political friction and simplification, undermines these democratic ideals. Presenting political debate as a battle fueled by resentment, populism thus endangers the core of democracy (Mudde, 2019).

Digital populism is at work, subverting traditional political power structures. At last, mass curation of political content has truly become democratic - in that populist leaders can use social media services and the crowd curation algorithms that underpin them to speak directly to whomever they like, based on contactbased algorithmic assumptions rather than broadcast media gatekeeping. This performative dimension of digital populism and the meme guerrilla's emotional load have opened a new space for political activity that goes beyond the classical dimensions of democratic discourse. However, this shift poses a significant problem for democracies. Digital populism is not consensual, antipluralist and hostile to rational deliberation in political discussion. Now that algorithmic governance has become a part and parcel of political life, it would be good for us to try to come up with frameworks to regulate the digital space, strategies to encourage more transparency, and identify ways to curb the participation of the political process based on misinformation and the inclusion of all in shutting down debates in the public sphere. However, the truth of this will depend on our ability to grasp how digital populism operates and establish a political space where thoughtful argumentation, mutual comprehension, and collective political engagement can occur.

**4. Capitalizing on Political Talk**

Traditional democratic participation involves a discussion of politics, a political discourse that stems from public debate, political deliberation, and a collective understanding of the issues. People engaged in dialogues about policy, governance, and justice that sought to bring about consensus through democratic means. But in

the modern media age, political speech has been commoditized. Social media companies, media outlets, and politicians no longer stand on the sidelines of political engagement; they now treat participation in politics as yet another commodity that is driven by market forces that dictate supply and demand, and whether something is profitable.

When politics becomes a particular category of content for counterparts and dealers, then it is indeed (there's no other way to put this) commodified. Social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, depend partly on user interaction that they can monitor in terms of likes, shares, comments, and time spent consuming content. That engagement drives additional revenue, providing platforms with an incentive to amplify sensationalist, polarizing, and emotionally charged political content. Politics is built on algorithms that are increasingly optimized for what gets people engaged — not for what is true, not for reasoned discourse, not for mutual understanding (Tufekci, 2017). The metamorphosis of politics as a public service into a spectacle in which you can purchase a stake has a profound impact on democracy. The basic principles of transparency, accountability, debate, and other concerns of traditional democratic theory now lie discarded by the roadside, as we hurtle forward under the forces of profit maximisation and emotive power. In this section, we examine how the commercialization of politics in the digital age is transforming the political domain, reshaping democracy, and exposing us to the dangers posed by the commercialization of political power itself.

The commodification of political communication is the consequence of the rise of engagement politics. Algorithms in digital spaces promote content that can be shared. It is the state of things, and so it will generate headlines, some sensation-grabbing or controversy-mongering, while others are more grounded in gut feelings and emotions. However, political content — specifically memes, videos, and viral content — is designed to be catchy, evoke an emotional response, and elicit an immediate reaction. In this way, political action is transformed into a computational calculus,

harnessing human life in technical space to make it scalable — whether or not the information is accurate, the data is now solidified (Zuboff, 2019). One such emphasis, on engagement, has important consequences for political speech. Rather than it being used to promote sane conversation and a degree of Service and Response to Feet of Clay, today, the purpose of political material is to bring out irrational aggravation, confirm existing political temperature-readings and to split the Chattering Classes from the rest of us. The problem with a world that is suddenly open to anything, call it post-politics or the end of grand narratives or what you will, is that populist leaders are usually quite successful hopping around in it, because their communication is often based on simple, emotive storylines, the easiest kind to spread through digital media. By being able to speak directly to their followers, such leaders can bypass the mainstream media filter and mediate performative communication. That turns into a "down the rabbit hole" feedback loop whereby lonely people, marginalized or feel left out of the mainstream, are more likely to be sucked into progressively more radicalizing and polarizing content, which in turn generates other people's attention and gets bumped out further and further (Tufekci, 2017).

In today's digital public sphere, political discourse has taken on an entirely different character. The language of politics no longer leans toward conversation or consensus but toward spectacle. What passes as civic politics—party platforms, civic engagement, or traditional left-right debate—has steadily lost ground to a politics defined by disruption and display. This new mode thrives not on dialogue but on interruption; it is less like the gentle ripple of a pebble in water and more like the sudden splash of a stone thrown into a pond. It resembles not a carefully written script but a shocking stunt that jolts attention through fear-mongering and trivial narratives—and it succeeds. Such politics privileges the sound bite over substance, the headline over reasoned argument, and outrage over complexity. In doing so, it drains the vitality from public life, suffocating the reflective space necessary for genuine

thought before it has the chance to grow—thought capable of helping us grapple with the crises and predicaments that repeatedly confront us.

In today's digital age, media with social media components have become the primary sources of political content. Those are platforms designed to benefit the content of users who keep us on the website and convert political content into a for-profit product. "Companies like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram use algorithms to sort and rank information based on prior use and behavior." This privileges material that attracts attention, with great participation to the extent that it is provocative or polarizing, and in turn is more likely to be consumed, relayed, or endorsed (Gillespie, 2018). This commodified type of political information is highly problematic for democracy. Historically, the media have served as the watchdog of democracy, adversarial to the elite, and have provided citizens with the means to engage with and respond to the diversity of opinions. However, in the age of algorithmic governance, social media agencies, data invasions, and exploitation, the media is no longer a neutral conveyor belt for information; it is actively involved in the commodification of political speech. Sites like Facobook and Twitter are not only a platform. They decide on signals on an ad hoc basis about what content a user should see in what order or at what time.

Social media platforms, as the primary curators of political information, exert significant influence over the political agenda. They not only determine what we can see, but also whose political messages get amplified. Once sensational, polarizing, and even outright false narratives are overrepresented, shaping how people perceive the world around them in politics. As a result, manipulation and cash are the main currencies in the media universe, rather than reasoned exchange and honesty. Political narcissism in this sense evolves, as Ito and Colistra (2010) explain, from a "truth-finding" culture to one in which the release of information is "algorithmically based" (Zuboff, 2019). Advertising the promotion of political fare also contributes to the propagation of

misinformation. And given that platforms are now incentivized to promote material that gets likes and shares, false information, especially when it is alarmist or angry, tends to spread. As a consequence, politicians make decisions through emotive and misleading narratives rather than through reasoneddiscussion and evidence-based arguments. The spread of fake news and the rise of conspiracy theories are exacerbated in such a system, and this, in turn, impinges on the quality of political discussion and citizens' trust in democratic institutions (Gillespie, 2018).

The commodification of political discourse has profound consequences for citizen engagement and the role of citizens in a democratic system. Political participation consists of voting, engaging in civil discourse, and working for a political party or movement. This type of participation had long been regarded as exerting influence over policy, keeping leaders in line and working for the public good. But today, political involvement is shallow and commoditized. Thanks to this man, people are now also engaging in politics by other means; the engagement can be quite accurately measured not in votes, but in likes, shares, retweets, and comments. Political involvement in an era of digital access had become a "performance" where the worth of a political act was its capacity to generate attention online, rather than the impact it had on policy or society. This emphasis on engagement has created a form of "clicktivism" – people who believe it's okay to get involved by sharing or responding to a political post. This type of engagement can create a simulation of participation in political life, which does not involve genuine engagement with the democratic and civic processes required by traditional forms of participation (Tufekci, 2017).

Furthermore, the commercialization of the political world is part of the division of political participation. Social media helps build personalised, robust political networks, and this creates echo chambers that only push content that complements your existing thinking. This echo-chamber effect increases the polarisation of political debate as people become progressively more sheltered

from dissident voices. Once political activism is aligned with "likes" and "shares," genuine and meaningful crosspartisan dialogue collapses, substituting democratic participation with "look-at-me" politics, all about self-disclosure and brand consciousness, rather than dialogue and policy formation.

As political speech becomes a commercial transaction in the digital age, a potent threat arises to the survival of democratic forms. The rise of digital algorithms and platforms as the mediated and mediating force shaping political influence now endangers the fundamental liberal democratic norms of accountability, transparency and informed public discourse. Cherry-pickers, self-radicalizing echo chambers, and engagement, rather than genuine discussion, work to undermine democratic norms and institutions. The rise of authoritarian populism is one such ugly child of this desecrated political land. These digital platforms circulate virally and provide a new way for populist leaders to circumvent traditional political intermediaries, gaining unprecedented access to the public and establishing the terms on which politics is discussed. These leaders allege that they defend the people against a corrupt elite, but this is a Big Lie. "They exaggerate a general will: the will to deport foreigners, to recover a lost golden age, to spend at home rather than abroad." In this sense, digital platforms are instrumental in the authoritarian dominance of the crowd's discourse and in ensuring that power is consolidated in those who are able to wield the most rhetorical capital in the political marketplace.

A commercialization of political conversation helps to corrode faith in democratic institutions further. As such, as flourishes of political activity give way to shallow connections and disinformation proliferates, people are expected to become increasingly disillusioned with the form of traditional political systems. This breeds a sense of, at worst, apathy, but, at best, scepticism, as people feel their opinions don't matter and the political system does not seem to represent their interests (Mudde, 2019). This sort of disillusionment sets the stage for populist leaders

who claim to give power back to the people, but in reality end up dismantling democratic institutions and norms.

The commodification of political speech in the age of technology is a great threat to democracy as we know it. Now that digital spaces play such a central role in politics, politics itself is increasingly mediated by algorithms, market forces, and the commodification of attention. The ascendant form of attention politics, the rise of disinformation and the erosion of traditional norms of political involvement are the signs that we remain in that condition where politics is not so much an activity through which people organize to do things together or to care for one another, but something they consume, even spectacle before which they marvel, or upon which they place bets. If we hope that democracy will thrive in the digital age, we should reclaim political discourse from its commodifying influences. That will require reimagining the role of digital platforms in our political lives, valuing transparency, accountability, and conversation over the mindless sharing that spreads chaos and misinformation. By supporting high-quality political content instead of click-driven content, prioritizing quality over quantity, embracing broader and more diverse modes of political participation, and fostering more vigilant accountability on platforms' role in shaping political discourse, they can counteract the downsides of commodification and erosion of democratic institutions.

**5. The digital divide and political engagement**

Today, as we navigate a twenty-first-century digital world, technology has become a critical instrument for our political engagement, communication, and participation. The emergence of platforms such as social media, blogs, and online news sources has transformed the way people seek information, engage with political leaders, and participate in social movements. On the other hand, the potential for inclusivity and democratization is countered by the predominance of digital technologies, which has resulted in a considerable digital divide. "This rift showcases the gap between those who have access to digital tools -like the internet and

smartphones- and those who do not." It is not just the existence of technology, but also the capacity to utilize it to facilitate effective political engagement.

Political engagement is significantly influenced by the digital divide, which widens the gap between political representation and access to information. In political terms, participation is crucial for the functioning of democracy because it enables people to articulate their views, hold political leaders accountable, and contribute to the decision-making process. However, in circumstances where some people lack access to digital platforms, their voices are often overshadowed in political conversations – creating an environment in which certain individuals and communities are rendered politically invisible. This section examines the implications of the digital divide for political participation, which exacerbates and deepens existing inequalities, as well as its impact on democratic governance.

The digital divide is a complex phenomenon that involves not only access to technology but also digital literacy and the ability to engage with technology's use for political purposes. At its heart lies a reflection on how much we can consider that people have access to the Internet and/or digital devices, depending indeed on where they live, how much they earn, how old they are, how many years of education or training they have, and whether or not they have a disability. Billions of people worldwide, mostly residing in rural and developing areas, lack internet access, according to the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In the vast majority of the global South, Internet costs and access to digital technology remain limited, hindering the ability of such communities to engage in digital political action (ITU, 2020). As a result, socioeconomic status, level of education, and age contribute to these discrepancies, which also exist in highly internet accessible developed countries. However, low-income individuals often lack the necessary tools or internet connection to participate in online politics, and older adults struggle to navigate the Internet. These digital divides in access and competencies are substantial and serve as essential barriers, as

millions of people who lack access to reliable Internet and/or do not possess the required skills are effectively excluded from crucial political discussions, online mobilization, and access to political news (Van Dijk, 2020).

Marginalized communities often encounter barriers to accessing digital technologies and therefore have a limited ability to take advantage of the political opportunities available at digital sites. The issue is particularly important for young people, minorities and low-income people, who risk political disenfranchisement if they are unable to participate in digital spaces where political debate takes place. The exclusion leads to a vicious circle, in which the already politically underprivileged become even more estranged from the politico-bureaucratic machinery. As digital technologies become increasingly integral to political life, closing the digital divide is crucial for ensuring the inclusivity and representativeness of democracy (Graham and Austin, 2019).

The digital divide has significant political consequences. If digital is necessary to politics, then who we exclude online has implications for our democracy. Political debate, particularly during election times or significant policy debates, is increasingly conducted online, with social media playing a crucial role in enabling citizens to hold politicians accountable, discuss policy, and mobilize activists for protests. These avenues to engagement are not available to people with low incomes online. They are not going to engage in politics, delve into deep matters of state, or campaign for a cause.

Additionally, the digital divide exacerbates inequality in political representation. Politicians are consuming data created during our online activities. Digital platforms accumulate vast stores of data on users, including their political preferences and social network connections, and utilize this information to tailor content and advertisements to specific groups. This is the politics of micro-detail, of the kind that has led to a new sort of precision-targeted political message, which identifies and reaches out to specific groups based on their online behavior. Citizens' political

preferences are not registered without access to the digital markets that distribute public opinion (Agre, 1994); thus, these citizens are invisible in political terms (Eubanks, 2018).

The "digital divide" presents tremendous obstacles to civic engagement and social movements. There have even been suggestions that the Internet may play a key role in future uprisings by enabling collective action and political mobilisation. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #FridaysForFuture have successfully utilized social media to broadcast their messages, connect with a global audience, and exert pressure on political leaders to effect change. In turn, these movements, as a rule but not always, are to a large extent organised or composed of younger, wealthier individuals who are well-versed in digital technology. Without the Internet and tech-savvy skills, that involvement will prove ever more challenging. As a consequence, the digital divide contributes to an environment in which political engagement is shaped not by conventional social inequalities alone but also by the ability to access digital technology (Graham & Austin, 2019). Access to technology is one vital material condition of the digital divide; however, for effective political participation, so too is digital literacy —the ability to use digital platforms effectively. Beyond just technical skills in operating devices and accessing the Internet, digital literacy involves critical thinking for assessing the quality and veracity of the information found online. Less and less politics is visible in digital spaces. Politicking is becoming increasingly common, and you see more and more citizens who cannot distinguish between legitimate information and disinformation, making it difficult for them to be informed and participate in the political sphere. This digital illiteracy is particularly characteristic of older demographics that didn't grow up with computers the way digital natives have. In a country where digital literacy is not a universal skill taught in schools or if school systems are underfunded, large numbers of citizens may struggle to engage in online political movements, such as this one. Those who are least efficient at separating the wheat from the chaff in online content

may not only be most vulnerable to mistaken beliefs and echo chambers, but also to targeted campaigns. Indeed, the digitally ignorant (those uninformed about bias or fakery) are increasingly out of fashion and out of touch with the rapidly personalized political information that is being shaped by AI technologies, thus further exacerbating the digital divide (Van Dijk, 2020).

On the other hand, some also want their students to be digitally literate. They have the resources to participate in digital or online political discourse, utilize a variety of sources as information resources, and engage in online activism. In this sense, the digital divide is not just about access to ICT, but also about being able to utilize technology in a politically meaningful way. In a democratic space, a person's access to and digital literacy are essential for engaging in a political debate and for being informed and understanding the decision-making choices made in the leadership process. Without them, the political divide only deepens, disadvantaging some particular groups (Eubanks, 2018).

The digital divide thus becomes a serious issue in both individual countries and globally, especially in terms of political participation within the political systems of the Global South. Although access to the Internet has been growing in the Global North, many countries of the Global South lack adequate Internet coverage, which restricts their citizens' ability to participate in digital politics. In high-income countries, around 90% of people have Internet access, compared to about 45% in low-income countries (ITU, 2020). This digital divide prevents people in the Global South from participating in digital politics and accessing political information.

In many of these countries, which are highly fragmented by political instability, corruption, and inequality, digital technology has the potential to provide significant empowerment to citizens and strengthen government accountability. However, the technological divide prevents many people from reaping the benefits of these opportunities. Moreover, this North-South divide in the Global South compounds the problems faced by such marginalised groups,

including women, rural and ethnic minorities, whose access to education and technology tends to be limited. The North-South digital engagement gap has the effect of "an imbalance in global political power whereby the few who have the technology and the necessary skills to use it are influencing the many that do not" (ITU, 2020).

To bridge the digital divide and achieve full participation in the digital political sphere, we must focus on policies that enhance access to technology and promote digital literacy. Cooperative efforts across international, regional, and national governments – including international organizations, governments, NGOs, the private sector, and multilateral and regional development and financial institutions — are necessary to close the digital divide in access to the Internet, particularly in rural and remote communities. And that's something that can be addressed through infrastructure spending, affordable Internet, and programs that help put digital devices into the hands of people who currently cannot afford them. It is equally important to build digital literacy at the same time. Plus a curriculum at every school level, from primary to adult, that equips citizens with the tools for engaging in the online world. We need to teach students to think critically, to be media literate, so that they can determine whether the information they encounter online is trustworthy and engage in vetted political discussions. At the international level, there is a need for greater attention to be paid to digital inclusion as an element of sustainable development. The imperative to bridge the digital divide also needs to be understood in the context of broader efforts to close gaps in development as set forth in the global development agenda, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for "build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation". Equal access to digital technologies is crucial for a more inclusive and democratic world (United Nations 2015).

The digital divide becomes a more urgent challenge for the future of our democracy, as it limits the extent of political

participation for individuals and communities. Access to technology and digital literacy skills is important for political participation due to the increasing importance of digital platforms in how constituents present themselves online to political officials (and vice versa), how they access data, and how social movements are formed. There's an effort to close the digital divide. But what that means, it seems to me, is not just making certain that everyone has access to technology. It also means we must ensure that they have access to digital literacy. So they are not on the outside looking in on the national conversation. To be a democracy in the digital age, it needs to be a democracy of inclusion, where every citizen — regardless of their wealth, circumstances, or geography — has a voice and a role within this political process. And the technology infrastructure gap, through which a more fair, equal, and informed political system with power in the hands of the people can be built to implement democratic political participation, can be bridged.

**6. Rethinking Public Service in the Digital Era**

With the arrival of the digital, came vast changes in the distributional power dynamics of political power through algorithmic governance. Even as digital technology and social media have transformed the way news is disseminated and political engagement is carried out in ways previously unimaginable, they have also become immense threats to the health of democracies. Algorithms weighted to maximize user engagement decide what information is and is not shared, whose politics are and are not salient, and which opinions are and are not legitimate — typically in opaque and hard-to-contest ways.

The transition from democratic collective decision-making to algorithmic governance raises several questions for the future of digital democracy. Where is the protection of democratic values, such as fairness, representation, and transparency, when their society is increasingly shaped by algorithms and technology companies? What kind of rule set do we need to develop so that digital platforms remain accountable to the public, and we don't have private organizations effectively acting like minigovernments

with outsized political power? This tension forms the focus of this section, which addresses how algorithms are restructuring digital governance and provides recommendations for preserving fairness and accountability in digital democracies. The Internet has broadened access to knowledge and information, enabling larger sections of the population and communities to engage in political debate, contact politicians, and establish social movements in ways previously impossible. While the Internet has enabled anti-politics in the mediascape of social media, blogs, and alternative news, it facilitates a kind of politics in which the 'average citizen' can challenge established political power, reveal central issues, and influence political discourse. This change signals the rise of a "digital democracy" that will see barriers to political engagement fall away, and that will also give rise to more direct citizen engagement with politics. But this democratisation of information is not without its own danger. Today, indeed, information and the amplification of voices are shaped by algorithms at least as much as by regulation or censorship, in platforms that have become the infrastructure for political life. These algorithms of private companies often elevate content that amplifies engagement at the expense of accuracy, thoughtfulness, and fairness. Digital political communication, therefore, comes to be shaped by the midst of attention-engendering algorithms that support bombastic, polarizing, and emotionally laden political communication.

In this new operating environment, algorithmic sovereignty — the power of algorithms to decide what information we can access, who can speak on our behalf, what should be shared about us, and with whom — has become a key question for the emerging digital democracy. While the early vision of the Internet was of a space that would flood and democratize the dissemination of information and engagement in politics, the potential for algorithmic control has made this seem like wishful thinking, and fears about mega-platform power have been well justified. Organizations like Facebook, Google, and Twitter have come to dominate the digital

public sphere, raising questions about how to assess the impact on the marketplace of ideas and who gets heard (Zuboff, 2019).

One of the great challenges of the algorithmic age is that algorithmic bias can exacerbate political inequality. Algorithms may be perceived by many as impartial and neutral, but humans develop them, and the biases of their developers may be embedded within them. These biases are not just racial, gender, or ethnic biases, by the way, but also political biases — when the media tends to favor certain types of political ideas or present issues in ways that are convenient for one subset of the electorate over others. Algorithmic bias, political participation, and democratic engagement: The effects of algorithmic bias might also be relevant at the level of democratic political participation. For example, political content with more extreme or popular views may be amplified by the algorithm, while moderate and balanced opinion is buried. There's also a sense in which certain political perspectives are getting more exposure than they deserve, skewering the political debate and deepening the divide (Tufekci, 2017). This bias is then compounded by the fact that digital spaces are not inherently politically neutral. Rather, they are commercial entities whose purpose is to make money by capturing and retaining a user's attention, and therefore have an economic interest in promoting content that attracts the most user attention, even if that content is false, sensational, or polarizing.

Algorithmic bias is also salient in the spread of fake news and political polarisation. Algorithms often favor sensationalist content that can provoke strong emotions, including anger, fear, or outrage, thereby making it easier for fake news and sensationalist stories to spread. This creates a political atmosphere where people are susceptible to misinformation, unable to engage in reasonable discussions, and cannot see what is really happening. The political propensity becomes increasingly territorial, with factions moving into bubbles, thereby hindering the sense of reaching a consensus (Gillespie, 2018).

Yet, the lack of accountability and transparency of digital platforms' decision-making processes is one of the most pressing challenges in algorithmic governance. Unlike their analog forebears, which resembled a system of checks and balances, digital platforms conduct most of their business in a regulationfree zone. These platforms' algorithms are proprietary in the sense that they have been written and controlled by private companies with very few public or democratic checks. This obscurity deserves to be read in a situation in which the majority, in fact, has only an approximate idea about how decisions are made, to whom, and to what criteria information is channeled. The nonresponsibility of algorithms in governance is the primary enemy of democracy. Algorithms are increasingly determining which information is visible, which political messages are amplified, and who gets a voice in political discussions. There is another danger: a few private monopolies that possess these powers might not use them in the public interest, but instead, under the principle to which they would be subject — competition in business. As pointed out in Zuboff's (2019) critique of surveillance capitalism, the accumulation of power in tech companies is inconsistent with democratic values of equality, fairness and accountability.

Addressing these challenges requires the establishment of regulatory frameworks that enhance transparency and accountability in algorithmic decision-making. Such regulations require digital platforms to disclose the mechanisms of their algorithms, criteria for content prioritisation, and strategies for managing political information. Furthermore, platforms must be held accountable for the dissemination of misinformation and hate speech on their websites. Regulating algorithmic governance is essential to ensure that digital platforms remain accountable to the public and prioritise democratic interests over the profitdriven objectives of technology companies (Gillespie, 2018).

Beyond regulation, what is critical to maintain an informed and level political playing field in the digital era is digital literacy. Digital literacy includes the ability to access, analyze, create, and

act upon information using digital tools. This encompasses not only IT skills in browsing websites and social media, but also critical thinking, skepticism about online content, discerning misinformation, and engaging in respectful political discussion. As algorithms increasingly mediate political content, the importance of digital literacy has never been more urgent. Individuals who lack the necessary digital literacy to navigate a complex digital ecosystem can find themselves deceived, propagandized, and disenfranchised. The advent of "fake news" and the explosion of misinformation have made voters' ability to make informed political decisions even more complicated. Promoting a digitally literate society is crucial so that political participation is grounded in considered reflection rather than emotional entanglement or disinformation (Van Dijk, 2020).

Institutions such as schools, governments, and civil society have a crucial role to play in advancing digital literacy. Schools and colleges should incorporate digital literacy into their courses, teaching students not only how to use digital tools but also the skills to assess what they read on the Internet critically. Governments should invest in public education campaigns that raise awareness about the perils of misinformation and the value of media literacy. To protect democracy from the threats of algorithmic governance and misinformation (Eubanks, 2018), the author also argues that by equipping citizens with the necessary skills to navigate digital spaces, they become resisters of algorithmic governance.

The future of digital democracy will depend on creating more equal opportunities on digital platforms and developing skills for effective participation in political debates for all citizens. The digital divide — inequalities in access to technology, Internet connectivity and digital literacy — continues to be a significant impediment to building an inclusive and just digital democracy. As the digital sphere becomes increasingly central to the practice of politics, there is a need to ensure that marginalized members of society are not excluded from the digital political sphere. "Eliminating the digital divide, so that there is high-speed,

affordable broadband for every American, is an Obama-Biden priority," the Obama-Biden website reads. In addition, Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that we must take the issue of access to skills and information seriously, ensuring that all Americans have the necessary tools to succeed in the 21st century. This effort should be especially targeted at underserved communities, such as low-income families, rural populations, and older people, who may face difficulties engaging digitally. Through increased investment in digital inclusion, governments can ensure that all citizens have access to the opportunity to engage in democratic life, regardless of their income or location (ITU, 2020).

With digital democracy, we aim to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background or financial resources, have equitable access to digital platforms that enable them to participate in the political process. Digital inclusion can support accountability and transparency, as contributors such as Van Dijk (2020) argue, as these are the conditions for a truly democratic political system in which power is dispersed. Citizens are enabled to participate in decisions that concern their lives.

The introduction of algorithmic governance is both a boon and a bane for democracies. Tech has enabled more access to participate in politics. Digital platforms have been a boon for more politically informed individuals than ever before. Yet, these platforms have also created new types of political influence that are typically less transparent, unaccountable, and profit-driven. In this complex environment, proper regulatory frameworks are needed to remove opacity in the construction of algorithms, which is vital for sustaining a digital fair and accountable democracy, digital literacy programs are required to assist citizens in the labyrinth of technology and ultimately the divide transpiring from digital exclusiveness should be eliminated to make sure that everyone has well-enough-worn shoes for getting involved in political life. The sustainability of a digital democracy is contingent upon our capacity to reconcile the virtues of digital participation with the tenets of democratic governance. Suppose we have digital platforms that

serve the public, enabling everyone to participate fully and effectively in politics. In that case, we can build a digital democracy that benefits all the people, not just the powerful few.

# Chapter 7
# Anger, Political Theology, and Politics in Northeast India

### 1. The Age of Anger and Its Political Implications

This chapter examines the rise of the Age of Anger in Northeast India, where political dissatisfaction, ethnic identifications, and historical resentments fueled the flames of several political movements marked by anger. In the past, anger has played a pivotal role in revolutions, uprisings, and movements for justice. This anger has been amplified in the modern age, commonly known as the Age of Anger, by the forces of Globalization, digital media, and the twenty-four-hour news cycle, which have not only spread anger but also mobilized the masses. Another source of political anger in Northeast India is the problem connected to ethnicity, cultural survival, and economic marginalisation. The area has a record of constant conflict with the Indian government, potentially in a primeval struggle where many groups feel politically isolated, economically disadvantaged, and culturally threatened.

The origin of political dissatisfaction in the Northeast of India can be traced back to the colonial era, when the British Empire drew ambitious borders that cut across ethnic Communities. As these groups achieved independence, they were part of newly created nations that didn't recognize their identity and therefore failed to be represented at the national level of politics. People groups like the Naga, Mizo, Kuki and Assamese haven't always found a secure footing when it came to laying claim to political sovereignty and cultural identity. The region developed insurgent movements, ethnonationalist political parties and demands for greater autonomy and secession following independence. The case of the Naga uprising, initiated in the 1940s, illustrates that

grievances related to cultural subjugation and demands for self-rule often escalate into prolonged violent confrontations.

Similarly, the Mizo underground of the 1960s and the agitations by the Assamese during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate how violence can become a consequence of the adverse fallout of political marginalization and economic deprivation.

Economic marginalisation in Northeast India is one major manifestation of its sad ground reality. Despite the region's abundance of natural resources, it has consistently remained underdeveloped, with limited infrastructure, high poverty levels, and restricted services. Critics blame the Indian government for not investing heavily in the region and for not adequately addressing the needs of its people. Most communities often feel marginalised and let down by national economic plans that they claim favour other parts of the country. This anger has been monetized and turned into a source of evil inspiration in the past, which has been manipulated through politics to tell the story of neglect and its consequences. In fact, it has even become a resonant theme of those movements, for we are told of promises of greater autonomy, control over one's resources, and economic justice. Leaders in the region have often tapped into the frustration of the people over economic disparities to build political coalitions and consolidate their electoral base.

Political dissatisfaction in Northeast India is highly marred by religious identity, in addition to economic and ethnic discontent. This area is home to a diverse range of religious groups, representing various faiths, including Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Indigenous traditions. Religious leaders have become increasingly active in the political sphere by employing political theology to influence the masses and encourage them to follow a specific political course, thereby building a mass following for their political causes. The Christian community, particularly in Nagaland, became a part of the political quest for autonomy. Political leaders have utilised Christian theology, which emphasises justice, peace, and human dignity, to frame the Naga people's quest

for self-determination as a struggle for religious freedom. On the contrary, in Assam, Hindu nationalism has worsened political grievances by continuously feeling threatened by the emerging Muslim population of the region. This religiously skewed anger has been the target of political groups to do what they have done well for all religions, that is, mobilise Hindu voters around the idea that their political fight is to protect their Hindu culture and identity.

The digital age ushered in the complete re-imagination of the expression and organisation of political indignation. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, enable political leaders, activists, and rebel organizations to convey messages of frustration and dissatisfaction to a large number of people. These platforms have proven to be influential media for attracting young people in Northeast India, and youths are at the forefront of political movements. They include a platform where political actors can voice their complaints, organise demonstrations, and promote nationalistic ideas. The result, however, has been the emergence of digital nationalism, where online outbursts of anger towards political and economic matters affect political ideologies within virtual circles. The role of digital platforms in the region's political landscape is substantial, as they provide an immediate and global stage for political movements in the area.

Matters were not helped by the Age of Anger that had gripped the region, where identity politics, the religious worldview, and economic anger met at the crossroads of the North-east in the making of the political alphabet. Political anger in this respect can become a means of redressing such historical injustices, and it is also often used as a political mechanism by which political leaders, religious establishments, and agitators can manipulate political claims to mobilize people around a movement. The region remains in a messy phase of politics, which, as long as it continues, anger will remain a key tool used by both the secession and autonomy agitation. The relationship between political theology, anger, and identity politics, which have had a lasting influence on a region's politics, makes them an area of study where the dynamics of

political anger are explained in modern times. Political theology must be expanded beyond Eurocentric frameworks to accommodate the theologies of hill tribes, syncretic borderland communities, and subaltern cosmologies. William T. Cavanaugh (2004) has written about the "myth of religious violence" to critique how the modern state displaces religion while claiming its sacred authority.

**2. Political Theology and Its Influence on Political Movements**

Political theology refers to the field of theology that studies the interaction of religion and politics. Precisely, it is a form of theology in which religious ideas, theologies, and beliefs influence culture and political order. This can be used to explain different forms of nationalism and separatism in various parts of the country, particularly where cultural and religious affiliations foster a sense of shared identity. Political theology is a perspective that helps understand how religious leadership, ideologies, and symbols can impact the discourse and legitimize the politics of an act. Some fundamental concepts that political theology can help understand the context of Northeast India include the mobilization of religious identity and its connotation with the nation-state or nationalism. At different levels, political theology operates within the contexts of Christianity, Hinduism, and other indigenous religions, influencing political identity and the assertion of subnationalism. Religious leaders have played a significant role in representing the grievances of ethnic and minority cultures while also acting as an energizing agent and a mask of political agitation. For example, the Christian church in Nagaland has played a significant role in advocating for Naga autonomy through the use of Christian theology, extending the Naga struggle as a fight for freedom of religion and self-determination (Chakvavorty, 2005).

Christianity has played a significant role in the politics of Nagaland. The Naga Christian movement, which emerged in the 19th century as a result of missionary works, was strongly associated with the pursuit of political power and autonomy in the 20th century. Christian theology offered a moral and spiritual

framework for the Naga people's quest for self-determination. The theological basis of the Naga nationalist movement also emphasized themes of justice, equality, and the right to selfgovernance, aligning with Christian principles. Also, the Naga insurgency that was waged by the Naga seeking independence from India was partly driven by religious sentiments that were run by some religious leaders who portrayed the Indian state as repressive. The religious discourse in Nagaland characterised the Naga people's political struggle as a righteous pursuit of selfrule and freedom guided by divine will. Christianity was another significant component of the Naga independence struggle, as religious leaders made substantial contributions to the concept of Naga self-determination (Chakravorty, 2005). Religious scriptures were frequently invoked to legitimise their opposition to Indian rule, portraying the Indian government's control over Naga territories as a violation of divine will and natural law.

**3. Hindu Nationalism in Assam: Politics of Religious Identity**

Although Christian nationalism is prevalent in Nagaland, Hindu nationalism has assumed an increasingly prominent role in Assam's political landscape. Assam, where there is a large Muslim minority, has become the center stage of heated religious and political politics. Hindu nationalists in the state view Assam as a citadel of Hindu culture, which is threatened by immigrant Muslims and the rise of Islam (Chakravoty, 2005; Datta, 2021). This religion-political antipathy is highly intertwined with demographic trends in the region, and immigration between Bangladesh and the area is creating further trouble.

Political theology can be viewed as a key factor in the introduction of the Hindu nationalist movement in Assam, as religious beliefs can influence a political movement to defend the cultural and religious identity of the people in Assam (Baurah, 2020). The proponents of Assamese Hindu nationalism have described their politics as the protection of cultural heritage, especially in reaction to perceived demographic changes because of

Muslim immigration. The concept of political theology has been used to justify the policies of marginalising the other community as well as advocating the anti-immigration policies like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which has been ridiculed for being on the side of the Hindu community rather than in the application of giving refugees fleeing neighbouring countries a citizenship status. Holding a pivotal position in such controversies, the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claim that the spread of Hindu nationalism plays a vital role in conserving Assamese culture and preserving their Hindu identity due to external pressures (Sarmah, 2022; Baruah, 2020). The Hindu nationalist political theology of Assam is used to inspire a sense of religious necessity that presents the Hindu defense of the Assamese people.

Smaller than Christianity and Hinduism, Indigenous religions are also major factors that determine political struggles by ethnic groups in North East India. Another example of a deep-rooted indigenous belief system that greatly influences the political and cultural identity of an indigenous group is that of the Khasi people of Meghalaya, who live in contemporary India. In Khasi society, the concept of political theology is closely tied to their spirituality and their rights as descendants, particularly in relation to achieving cultural independence and the right to self-government. Its members have long supported the right to autonomy and the maintenance of their indigenous style of life, often couching these efforts in the language of religion. Their belief in the "spirit of the land" provides a theological foundation for their political sovereignty, underscoring the sacred bond between their people and their land. It is commonly believed that Khasi political theology affirms the fact that their people have a God-given right to rule their land and preserve their cultural identity.

In Northeast India, political theology exerts a significant influence on the region's political landscape. Whether from the perspective of Christian nationalism in Nagaland, Hindu political theology in Assam, or the indigenous beliefs of the Khasis, religion has been a central aspect in defining political identity, the politics of

nationalism, and the demands for self-rule. As long as the region struggles with ethnic violence, religious conflicts, and calls for independence, political theology will still play an important role in the politics of Northeast India.

**4. Ethnic Identity and Political Movements**

Northeast India is characterised by a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures, each exerting a significant influence on the region's political movements. All these communities regard their identities through ethnic lines, and hence, they identify that their entitlement to such identities is part of their right to selfdetermination. In this regard, ethnic identity has also emerged as a significant political tool for promoting regional autonomy, preserving culture, and safeguarding territorial interests. The politics of ethnic identity are often entangled with religious politics because religion, cultural identity, and community affiliation are deeply connected. This mix of ethnic identity and religion has largely influenced the politics of Northeast India (Baruah, 2020). The region's history, marked by colonial rule, ethnic conflict, and displacement, has been characterised by a persistent struggle for regional autonomy. Ethnic identity and the desire to preserve one's cultural heritage have been the driving forces behind political movements, particularly separatist movements, over the years. Examples of the Naga insurgency, Mizo insurgency, and the autonomy movement of the Bodos have been seen as having implications for ethnic identity in political discourse.

Ethnicity in Northeast India has been a major determinant of the political movement, exerting a significant influence on the social organization and political ambitions of the diverse indigenous peoples in the region. An example is the Naga people, who possess a distinct ethnic and cultural identity and have long sought political autonomy. The Naga insurgency, which began in the mid-20th century, represents one of India's most persistent ethnic conflicts. The Naga nationalist movement formulates the idea that the Naga people, whose language, religion, and culture are distinct in their own way, have the right to govern themselves (Chakravorty, 2005).

In the years immediately following India's independence, the Naga National Council (NNC), under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo, advocated for an independent Naga state, arguing that the Nagas' ethnic distinctiveness warranted their independence from India. Such ethno-nationalist expression strengthened the feeling that the policies of the Indian government were pushing Naga culture to the periphery. This frustration with ethnic identity later materialized in the development of armed resistance groups seeking to achieve Naga sovereignty, as represented by organizations such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) (Chakravorty, 2005; Pimomo, 2002).

On the same lines, the Mizo National Front (MNF) throughout the Mizo insurgency of the 1960s demanded self-governance by the Mizo people, which was to be asserted as having a separate ethnic identity from the Nagas. The leaders of the MNF framed their struggle as one for ethnic preservation and cultural safeguarding, drawing upon people's pride in their Mizo heritage and customs. It was an insurgency characterised by violent action against the Indian government, which culminated in the Mizo agreement of 1986, which placed Mizoram on the same pedestal as the rest of the Indian states (Nunthara, 1989). However, regional politics are still affected by attempts to gain political independence based on ethnic origins.

In contrast to Hindu nationalism in Assam, the role of indigenous religious movements in the independence movements of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and other Northeast Indian states has been instrumental. In Meghalaya, the Khasi and Jaintia tribes practice a form of Indigenous Christianity, a Christian faith that is explicitly intertwined with their culture. This Christian group has leveraged its religious affiliation to advocate for enhanced political independence, as it seeks to preserve its heritage against external interference (Nongkynrih, 2002; Nongsiej, 2002).

The MNF movement in Mizoram was also deeply influenced by Christian theology, where the concept of self-determination was shaped within the context of religious discourse on justice, freedom,

and human dignity. In structuring their political fight as the emancipation movement against the Indian government, MNF leaders based the appeal for self-rule on Christian ideology. They used biblical texts to bolster their argument. To some extent, the Mizo insurgency was driven by religious and political theology, whereby seeking autonomy was viewed as a God-ordained project to safeguard the Mizo's way of life and Western Christian faith (Nunthara, 1989). In Meghalaya, religious leaders remain central figures in politics, and they have a significant influence on shaping opinions and on the need for increased political control. The religious beliefs of the Khasi people are integral to their identity politics, which is also used to promote the idea of political independence and as a means of gaining popularity on the path to increased autonomy (Nongkynrih, 2002; Nongsiej, 2002). Religion and political ideology often intersect in these regions, and more frequently, religious leaders are involved in political pursuits to achieve regional autonomy, utilizing religious and cultural rationales.

This flux of ethnicity, theological politics, and political movements has all been paramount in shaping the politics of Northeast India. Identity provides a crucial source of political mobilisation, and several communities are fighting for autonomy and self-determination in order to protect their way of life and their relationship with gods. Christian nationalism has been theologically justified for self-determination in Nagaland, and Hindu nationalism has gained prominence as a political mobilisation force in Assam. The indigenous religious resurgence in Meghalaya, Mizoram, and other regions has also had an impact on the region's politics, with religion serving as an ethical foundation in the movement for political autonomy. Religious politics and ethnicity still play a significant role in the narrative of political activities in North East India, as the response to cultural marginalization and economic exploitation by the other communities is still a cohesive force behind the autonomous movement. The Epic of ethnic identity and religious sects will also play a significant factor, one way or

another, in the way the region chooses to chart its future, as it is still wrestling with its corrupt political abnormality (Baruah, 2020).

**5. Autonomy and the Politics of Separation**

The area that covers various states has always been facing the dilemma of maintaining the balance between its ethnic identity and the centralised rule of the Indian state. This quest for independence is not limited to political aspects. Still, it is also coupled with the cultural survival of other indigenous ecologies whose historico-economic conditions conflict with national policies. The desire to preserve cultural integrity, control of natural resources, and the capacity to make decisions that affect the areas where local populations reside have driven the autonomy movements in Northeast India. The political history of the region has been marked by radicalism, violence, and secessionist tendencies, which stem from the perception that the Indian government has failed to address the region's unique needs and aspirations adequately. Here, the movement of autonomy (in Northeast India) will be examined through its underlying cause and to what extent political dissatisfaction, ethnicity, and faith contributed to the movements. It is also a critical examination of the relations between movements of autonomy and the Indian state, both in terms of negotiation and violence.

The Bodo movement in Assam is a model of ethnic identity politics and political marginalisation as a strategy for pursuing autonomy. The Bodos, whose primary language is the Bodo language, are a people who have consistently claimed that, as a marginalised people, they have been dominated in all respects by Assamese-speaking as well as Assamese-dominated culture and political state elite. In the initial phase, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) led the demand for a separate state, named Bodoland, to be carved out for the Bodo people. This tendency was particularly pronounced from the late 20$^{th}$ century onwards, in response to the social and economic marginalization faced by the Bodos following the alienation of their communities in Assam. The reaction was a result of disillusionment and anger with what appeared to be

economic and social indifference towards the people from the region (Baruah, 2020). However, the Bodo movement has grown over time, and the ethnic autonomy they sought has evolved from separation to a higher level of political identity in Assam. Officially, this was established as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) following the signing of a peace deal between the Government of India and the Government of Assam on January 27, 2020, between the government of Assam and several Bodo organisations. This is done to grant the Bodos greater self-determination in administrative and developmental matters. However, this structure has not satisfied the aspirations of the Bodo people for self-rule, and they have been demanding more autonomy in land, resources, and cultural protection (Misra, 2000; Baruah, 2020).

The role of religion played a crucial role in autonomy movements in the Northeast, where a complex interplay exists between ethnicity, state, and religion. The idea of Christianity among the Naga and Mizo movements played a significant role in shaping ideas concerning political ideology and legitimacy in self-rule. In both Nagaland and Mizoram, Christian leaders used religious teachings to "infer the pursuit of self-determination as a moral and spiritual struggle". They argued that the Indian government's policies of cultural assimilation and economic neglect, designed to integrate the regions socially and economically into the Indian nation-state, undercut both their religious and cultural integrity (Kikon, 2019; Dasgupta, 2007).

Measures taken by the Indian government in dealing with autonomy movements in Northeast India have generally consisted of some combination of overt repression, negotiation, and conflict resolution. State politics and military suppression have often characterized the pacification of insurgency activity, and hence, there have been various instances of military confrontation between security agencies and insurgents. Not that the Indian government has fallen behind the pace, since talks and peace were even seen in Nagaland and Mizoram as a path. One of the central pieces of

negotiations to resolve an insurgency is the Naga peace process, which began in 1997 between India and the NSCN (IM). Despite multiple rounds of talks, no amicable solution could materialize, and the Nagas' demand for sovereignty stubbornly remained the main hurdle in the talks. In another such case, the Mizo Accord of 1986 and the subsequent establishment of a state (Mizoram) are examples of how a resolution can be found through negotiation. Still, it hasn't exhausted all groups in the region, all of whom are generally ethnically distinct.

The demand for self-determination in the case of Northeast India is seen as a response to concerns regarding ethnic identity, religious disputes, and economic deprivation. The ethnic and religious diversity in the area has made it a hotbed for political struggle, with calls for self-governance and cultural conservation taking center stage in politics. Some of these movements have been resolved through negotiation, such as the Mizo Accord, while others remain unresolved and contribute to political instability in the region. "There are overlapping claims and overlapping nations being articulated, and a very great problem for the Indian state to come to terms, or even accompany the shift towards ethnic selfdetermination on conditions that the nation cannot be broken," said Dr. Goldsmith. Addressing these tensions will depend on the extent to which the government is prepared to consult local populations, acknowledge their cultural identities and provide meaningful political solutions. The destiny of the Northeast will hinge on the successful integration of autonomy and ethnicity into the national framework, without sacrificing the region's diversity and its rich cultural traditions.

**6. Political Leadership and Religious Institutions**

Religious institutions in the Northeast region of India, where the significance of ethnic diversity and religious plurality is a key factor, play a significant role in influencing political ideologies and shaping the political behaviors of local people. In this part of the world, religious leaders not only play a role in spirituality but also in politics, where they tend to frame political revolutions in a

religious perspective, thereby attracting followers of a certain movement that may demand autonomy, ethnic rights, and selfdetermination.

Political leadership, alongside religious influence, has been a long-standing phenomenon in Nagaland. Christian theory has strongly defined the goal of the Naga nationalist movement as secession from India to form a nation. The integration of the Christian church into Naga society in the 19th century has been significant in influencing the political theology that underlies the Naga quest for self-determination. The Naga autonomy struggle has been framed as a religious responsibility, and Christian leaders, on several occasions, have used religious terminology to promote the Naga demand for freedom. The Christian Church in Nagaland has acted in both political and religious capacities. Figures such as Dr. Imkongliba Ao and other church leaders have utilized their church roles to advocate for the Naga people's autonomy, emphasizing that their religious freedom and identity are intrinsically linked to their right to self-governance. As Chakravarty (2005) notes, the Naga nationalist movement often characterized the Indian state's control over Naga lands as a violation of divine will. The beliefs related to justice and selfdetermination have provided Christian theology with moral and spiritual support in the political struggle of the Nagas. It is based on these beliefs that the stance is taken, arguing that the Naga people are equally entitled to govern themselves and deserve their own identity.

In the case of Northeast India, the influence of religious leaders in politics is quite prominent, as the discourse of religion often intersects with political ideologies, leading to nationalist movements driven by both ethnic and religious concerns. As far as Nagaland and Mizoram are Christian, and Assam is Hindu nationalist, religious bodies still manage to have a huge influence on the political direction of the region. Given the complex ethnic and religious dynamics in Northeast India, the issue of religious leadership has become crucial in maintaining a healthy balance for the future of political autonomy.

The discourse of political economy marginalization is crucial in the Northeast Indian context. Given the richness of its natural resources, including oil, coal, and timber, the region remains economically underdeveloped, characterized by poor infrastructure, high poverty rates, and low Human Development Index levels (Sarmah, 2022). This sense of economic disenfranchisement has resulted in widespread political stigma; a large number of indigenous people feel that the Indian state has ignored their economic needs and political wishes. This part is devoted to the economic or security origins of political disaffection in the Northeast. It will address the mechanisms through which economic strategies, such as state-led development, neoliberal restructuring, and resource extraction, have fueled processes of marginalization and social dislocation among the population in the region. Related to this linkage between economic discontents and political discontents, we will also need to examine the ethnic autonomy movements — particularly the economic factor in political mobilization in the region. To be sure, the section provides a serious critique of developmentalism insofar as it is rooted in the Indian state's approach to Northeast India, and describes how the national-level Indian state's development narrative often fails to address the region's particular concerns.

Economic exclusion is a concept that is central to the political dynamics in Northeast India. Many indigenous groups in this area have long felt that they are sidelined in the national development agenda. Although Northeast India has abundant natural resources, it remains one of the least economically developed regions in the country (Baruah, 2020). The inconsistent consideration of the special features of Northeast India in the development strategies adopted by the Indian government, especially post-independence ones, has led to a preference for a centralized system of economic planning, which favors other regions and their development. The state's failure to integrate the region into the national economic framework, coupled with the imposition of centralised control over local resources, has engendered resentment and dissatisfaction

among indigenous populations. There have been engagements in activities such as mining, timber extraction, and hydroelectric projects, with little consideration given to the environmental impact or the benefits generated for the local populace in terms of economic growth. Although such development schemes are beneficial to the Indian state and multinational corporations, they have resulted in the disadvantaged securing of local economies, yet culturally displaced.

A classic example of economic marginalization is the Naga demand for self-determination. The Indian government has always exploited the Naga — they were in the land that has everything — natural resources, etc. The Naga should be one of the richest tribes in terms of earnings from the exploitation of their land by the government. Yet, they have made no headway in any field of their habitat, leaving much dissatisfaction and political frustration. The Naga insurgency is at least partly a consequence of perceived economic injustices resulting from Indian government development policies (Chakravorty, 2020). They're not just asking for more autonomy in terms of politics; they are also asking for economic justice and control over local resources. Similarly, the Bodo demand for autonomy in Assam has been significantly influenced by economic marginalization within the larger Assamese political economy. The Bodo movement continues to desire economic autonomy, particularly with respect to land rights and resource management. One of the key focuses of the Bodo struggle for self-rule has been economic exploitation, particularly in the mining and forestry sectors (Baruah, 2020).

The Indian government has consistently pursued a trickledown model of development, one driven by large-scale industrial projects and resource extraction as the engine of growth. Such an approach has been widely condemned as being top-down and has overlooked the needs and aspirations of people in the communities of Northeast India. For most indigenous communities, the development policies of the state have continued to result in economic exclusion as well as displacement of local populations, environmental destruction and

the decline of cultural identities. The debate over developmentalism in Northeast India largely hinges on the clash between economic and cultural interests. Government-led projects, such as hydroelectric dams, mining, and oil exploration, are often conducted without the consent of the affected and relevant local community, as well as a full understanding of the cultural and environmental issues in the area. This has given rise to a general perception that the Indian government's economic policies prioritize the Indian nation over the people living in these areas. The Brahmaputra River is crucial for the lives of Assamese. Still, it is also the site of hydroelectric power stations, which have led to ecological damage and the displacement of local inhabitants, for example (Baruah, 2020). It is primarily this conflict between development and local selfgovernance that has led to the emergence of regional autonomy movements as a significant factor in the region. A corresponding political movement, driven by economic discontent associated with such projects, has been the desire for greater control over local resources and options. The demand for self-determination in the northeastern part of India, like that for the constituent states in all other regions of India, is very often interpreted as a demand for economic justice. Political leaders of particular movements insist that regional autonomy ensures that the people of the concerned area have control over their land, resources, and economic fate.

The discontent with the economy in Northeast India is closely tied to identity politics, particularly in the media, where ethnic and religious beliefs heavily influence political ideologies. Economic marginalisation among most people in this region is linked to cultural and religious oppression, which in turn leads to disgruntlement and political uprisings. The region's ethnic and religious diversity has rendered it a focal point for identitydriven politics, in which economic issues are frequently perceived through the prism of ethnic survival and cultural preservation. For example, in Nagaland, the pursuit of self-determination encompasses not only economic aspects but also cultural and religious dimensions. The

Naga independence movement has long been portrayed as an effort to preserve Naga culture and Christian values (Chara, 2018). Economic problems of the Naga people are explained as efforts of the Indian government to destroy Naga culture and impose its rule on the Naga people. On the same note, Hindu nationalism has also been adopted in Assam, which has been used as a means of economic and political gain, especially in groups of Assamese, who feel threatened by the influx of the Muslim immigrant population in the religious and cultural identity (Chakravorty, 2005; Baruah, 2020).

The economic changes introduced by the Indian government, primarily in response to the neoliberal economic model, have had a quantifiable impact on Northeast India. As in some parts of India, economic liberalisation has boosted investment and growth; however, these benefits have not been evenly distributed throughout the country. By referring to the Northeast India region, neoliberal reforms can be assumed to be tied to privatization, a market-oriented approach to development, and a decline in state assistance to indigenous people (Baruah, 2020). Such changes have triggered economic destabilisation in Northeast India, with an overwhelming number of native communities facing growing inequality, unemployment, and the disintegration of traditional economic activities. The rise of corporate-led development has resulted in the exploitation of the region's natural resources without providing commensurate benefits to local inhabitants. With oil, gas, and timber, among other resources, being exploited in both national and international environments, local communities are often left out, as their locations are often associated with the economic activities of these resources. This has led to frustration and disappointment among the local population regarding the decision-making process surrounding the economic processes centered on the Indian government.

In summary, development politics and economic discontent must be viewed as integral aspects of discussions on the politics of Northeast India. Economic marginalisation of the region and the

Indian government's neglect of the indigenous populations' demands for autonomy have led to the emergence of armed separatist movements. Self-determination in Northeast India: In a situation like the above, when different peoples desire greater power over their own territory and economy in order to achieve a measure of economic equality and cultural sustainability. The political turbulence currently evolving, along with the enhancement of demand for autonomy and self-determination in the region, Is Still Marked by Progressive and centralized economic policies by the government of India and a centric notion of development.

**7. Regionalism and Globalization**

The exchange of goods, ideas, capital and people has led to the dramatic transformation of Northeast India in the era of Globalisation. This has had profound effects on the area's economy and culture. Indeed, Globalization has brought economic development to the world. Still, in the case of Northeast India, it is as if the Current of cultural erosion is carrying off economic development in the region itself. The ethnicity, local identity, and religious traditions are among the richest in the global diaspora, which makes Globalization perceived as an apparent threat to the protection of local culture and regional autonomy (Baruah, 2020).

Regionalism, in turn, has become an answer to the processes noted in Northeast India. Globalization is usually viewed not as a means of progress for ethnic groups in the region, but as a menace to their local autonomy, culture, and social cohesion. The ideology behind movements of autonomy, especially those with an emphasis on ethnic identity and control over resources, is that Globalization favors central political powers and transnational corporations more, marginalizing the domestic population. In the following section, we shall reflect on the clash of identities: the local/regional and Globalisation in Northeast India. We shall discuss the effect of Globalisation on politico-social practices, economic prosperity, and cultural conservation within the areas. Moreover, we shall compare the reactions of regional leaders and activists towards Globalisation by pushing towards regional selfrule and economic fairness.

Globalisation has brought opportunities for economic growth, offering better access to international markets, increased foreign investment, and technological development. In Northeast India, however, this economic shift has been spotty and destructive to the lives of local people. Despite the region's abundant natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, timber, and water, the benefits of Globalisation have largely bypassed the local populace (Sarmah, 2022). Rather, multinational companies, state-owned industries, and global market forces have often tapped into the region and extracted its resources to the advantage of the Indian government and outside investors, at the expense of local citizens, who have suffered economic hardship. In places like Nagaland and Assam, for example, oil and gas exploration has been a major economic source, but the local inhabitants have benefited very little from it. Communities not only in Nagaland and Assam but also in many parts of the Northeast continue to face challenges such as poverty, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure, while corporate entities persist in exploiting the region's resources. The economic disparity between the Northeast and the rest of the country has increased due to Globalization, thereby creating a narrative that the locals are not benefiting economically from development (Baruah, 2020).

Globalisation has also affected the economy of NE; privatisation, market-driven growth, and minimal state intervention are instances of neoliberal policies. This developmental transformation has led to the exacerbation of inequality and the isolation of the indigenous peoples. Similarly, in Assam, the hosts of hydroelectric projects are often perceived by local people as being supported by the Union Government, which prioritizes external economic interests over local economic development and self-governance (Baruah, 2020). The upshot is that poverty is intensified through another aspect of globalized markets, which appear to benefit only the forces of extraction, rather than the local population.

Globalisation has not only changed the economic structure but has also deeply impacted the cultural life of Northeast India. The media, consumer goods, and the infiltration of foreign culture into local ways of life have become a cause of the downfall of many traditional ways of life and regional cultures. In most societies, the inculcation of global cultural standards, such as wearing Western clothing, consuming international media, and using global consumer products, among others, has led to a sense of identity loss and alienation.

The hegemony of the Hindi and English languages as media and teaching languages in Northeast India has led to the suppression of the native languages and cultures. Cultural homogenisation posed by Globalisation has elicited an outburst of cultural nationalism, where ethnic groups in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam protest that they need to retain their unique identities through language, religion, and cultural heritage. The political movements in this region are closely associated with the idea of preserving and enhancing local cultures against the impact of global standardisation (Baruah, 2020). In Nagaland, we can take the example of the Naga nationalist struggle, which has positioned the quest for self-determination as a battle towards achieving political independence and preserving the Naga culture. The movement aims to preserve the traditional ways of life of the Nagas, including their unique perspectives on the world, local language styles, and social network patterns, against the perceived encroachment of Indian nationalism and universal cultural ideals. In Assam, Hindu nationalism is also viewed as a reaction to the so-called cultural dilution occasioned by Muslim migration and the proliferation of Islam in the state (Baruah, 2020).

The connection between Globalisation and movements that support regional autonomy is manifold. Globalisation has drawn Northeast India into global market forces, exposing it to various economic opportunities. Globalisation, however, is being opposed by regional leaders and activists, as it poses a threat to local autonomy, serving the interests of national and international elites

rather than local communities. Movements for regional self-determination often portray Globalization as a mechanism of economic exploitation that undermines a region's cultural independence and economic equity. In Nagaland, the drive for autonomy and self-governance is partly motivated by the Naga people's dissatisfaction with the Indian government's integration strategies, which are perceived as neoliberal and exploitative. Leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) contend that Globalisation undermines the Naga people's autonomy by prioritising national and international economic interests over their needs. Similarly, in Assam and Mizoram, the rise of autonomous movements is perceived as a response to the Indian state's inability to address local demands amid global pressure (Baruah, 2020).

The ongoing regional movements in Northeast India that promote self-determination and autonomy are therefore expected as long as the influence of Globalisation on both the economy and culture of the region remains high. Such movements are fuelled by the need to safeguard local identities and indigenous cultures, and the wish is to exercise ownership over regional resources. Regionalism in Northeast India is a political stance accompanied by a cultural response to the threats that Globalization represents. The future of this region is closely tied to how effectively its political movements strike a balance between economic advancement and the preservation of local autonomy and cultural identity. Although it poses challenges, Globalization does have the potential to develop the economy and foster cultural exchanges. However, the key to sustainable development in Northeast India is to ensure that local populations reap the benefits of these changes and that their cultural identities are not lost in the process of economic integration with the rest of the world (Baruah, 2020).

The "twin sets" of problems associated with regionalism and Globalization in Northeast India are inextricably related, and it is because of them that politicians have found themselves pushed to the wall and have become ardent advocates for a political

movement. On the one hand, Globalization does give rise to economic opportunities; on the other, it erodes local autonomy and cultural integrity in the region. The demand for ethnic autonomy/separatism in Northeast India, depending on the regional movement, is constituted through their life-worlds and interests, such as the imperative to consolidate control over resource allocation and to protect their cultural identities from external influences. As long as Northeast India remains uneasy with the ramifications of Globalization, the movements for autonomy will serve the cause of demand for greater selfdetermination and economic fairness. The political future of the region will hinge on its capacity to achieve a balance between the power of globalisation and local relevance, and to ensure that the enhanced economic fortunes accruing from Globalisation are equitably distributed to all citizens, and that cultures can have a chance to preserve their identities.

**8. Conflict Resolution and the Role of Anger in Negotiations**

Anger, as an empirical entity and a political tool, is a significant element of the political landscape in Northeast India. In the past, political anger has served as a source of autonomous movement, as well as an obstruction to peace talks. Sentiments of historical injustice, economic marginalization, and cultural oppression are among the driving factors behind the autonomous movements, including the Naga insurgency, the Mizo struggle, and the Bodo movement, in the Northeastern Indian States. This frustration has not only defined the language and agenda of these movements but has also made the peaceful resolution of conflicts more difficult (Baruah, 2020). Although anger has been a major cause of violent opposition and armed warfare, it has taken centre stage during peace processes, where political authorities in both factions of the conflict fight to manage the hurdles that fuel anger. The current section will address the role of anger as both a hindrance to and a beneficial resource in peace negotiations and conflict resolution in Northeast India, using selected case studies to

examine the approaches involved in translating this anger into productive dialogue.

The aspect of anger in political movements within Northeast India is quite significant. Anger acts as a force of mobilisation for different ethnic and religious groups in this part of the world due to constant political, economic, and cultural suppression. For instance, the Naga people's anger over the Indian state's refusal to recognise Naga sovereignty, the Mizo people's dissatisfaction with economic exploitation, and the Bodo community's resentment towards the perceived marginalisation of their identity exemplify how anger has been a pivotal emotional and political force driving demands for autonomy (Burah, 2003). In Nagaland, insurgent factions such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) have leveraged the resentment of cultural marginalization and exploitation of their people by the Indian state to bolster their rhetoric of independence (Baruah, 2003). As Chakravorty (2005) observes, the political struggle for Naga sovereignty is intricately linked to anger over the Indian state's neglect of Naga identity and the imposition of central policies perceived as culturally alien by the Naga people. Political leaders have strategically employed this anger to legitimise violence and rebellion, particularly through insurgent activities that contest the Indian state's authority over Naga territories.

Similarly, the Bodo movement in Assam was fuelled by economic deprivation and cultural oppression by the Assamese majority. Although the Bodo Territorial Region (BTR) was declared a significant milestone, this still did not satisfy the discontent among the Bodo community, as the appreciation for that satisfaction was not met. Numerous members of the Bodo Territorial Council continue to advocate for enhanced political autonomy and control over local resources, motivated by dissatisfaction with the economic exclusion of the Bodo people and the Indian state's insufficient response to their concerns (Baruah, 2003).

Although anger has been used in the past as a driver of political movements aimed at recognising the need for political

action, it has also been effectively used to promote peacebuilding in the Northeast region of India. Successful negotiation of peace comes with proper management and deflection of anger. Whenever anger is directed at genuine grievances, it should be addressed, and peace can never be achieved without doing so. Nevertheless, the level of anger and the need for revenge on both members of the conflict are also major obstacles to the peace deal. A large initiative towards the peaceful resolution of the Naga insurgency was initiated by the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Indian government and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1997, marking the beginning of the so-called Naga peace process. This process involved a series of talks, where the Indian government had to respond to the rage of Naga nationalists on issues of political domination, economic marginalisation, and cultural subjugation. Anger was acknowledged in these negotiations and raised as a demand for autonomy, development, and the preservation of culture (Goswami, 2007).

The 2015 framework agreement between the Indian government and the NSCN (IM), chaired by Thuingaleng Muivah, had brought hope that the Naga conflict would be resolved peacefully. Although the details of the agreement have largely been kept confidential, it is apparent that addressing the Naga people's concerns regarding sovereignty and self-determination was a pivotal component of the discussion. The government's recognition of Naga grievances and its willingness to engage in open dialogue facilitated the initiation of negotiations between the parties. However, the Naga political problem remains unsolved, as issues related to territorial boundaries and the integration of Naga areas continue to perpetuate it. The insurgency of the 1960s and 1970s by the Mizos in Mizoram came to an end with the Mizo Accord of 1986, which granted the state of Mizoram statehood and increased autonomy. Discontentment over economic exploitation, marginalisation, and cultural suppression were the factors behind the peace process in Mizoram. Acknowledging the legitimacy of Mizo's grievances, the Indian government engaged in negotiations

with the Mizo National Front (MNF), culminating in the Mizo Accord. The Mizo peace process has demonstrated that grievances, when effectively utilized as a political tool, can be successfully negotiated by providing both sides with tangible outcomes (Chakravorty, 2005; Nag, 2006).

Although anger is a powerful force that can facilitate the process of establishing peace negotiations, it is also a significant challenge in conflict resolution. One of the major hindrances is the inclination towards vengeance or retribution, which often accompanies political anger. Many of these insurgent groups that survived the ills perpetrated upon them by the state or rival tendencies within the ethnic group are in pursuit of not only autonomy or self-determination, but also compensation for past wrongs. Such an understanding of historical wrongs and justice makes peace talks challenging, as both parties strive to establish their own terms of experience (Longkumer, 2018). To illustrate, the Indian government has been accused severally by the Nagas of employing violence, cultural suppression, and militarisation in Nagaland. The militarisation of the region, especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, brought out a lot of resentment and anger among the Naga community. This historical anger has so far dominated the dialogue at the cost of the currently organised peace talks, as the Naga demands that the recognition of their sovereignty still lies on the table (Chakravorty, 2005).

Moreover, there are instances in which political leaders are able to use anger, which usually intensifies by forcing them to realise the required agendas. Anger can also be utilized as a political tool by leaders of insurgent movements seeking to recruit their followers and remain relevant in the political landscape. Such a tendency is especially pronounced in situations where foreign governments or third parties inherently have an interest in sponsoring one of the conflict parties, thereby complicating the peace process (Chakravorty, 2005).

When conflict is exacerbated by anger, it becomes a challenging task to resolve, and the mediation and inclusion of third

parties are necessary to constructively address the situation. Religious leaders, global organisations, and agents operating in the region have been central in mediating conflicts and supporting peace processes in Northeast India. The presence of third parties would help to curb the rage of warring parties, and hence, the process of bringing peace to the table should be more harmonious and just. An example is in the state of Nagaland, where the Christian church has played a mediator between the Indian government and the Naga rebels. Christian leadership played a momentous role in building bridges and reconciliation between the Naga nationalists and the Indian state. Their involvement has also led to the incorporation of religious and cultural aspects into the peace process, providing a moral basis for resolving conflicts (Chakravorty, 2005; Baruah, 2020). Similarly, in Mizoram, the church's involvement in the peace process culminated in the signing of the Mizo Accord, which brought an end to the Mizo insurgency. The unity and cohesion between church leaders and unbiased mediators made them trustworthy leaders to fill the gap between the MNF and the Indian government by appealing to the religious and moral authority to influence participants.

To summarize, anger has played a crucial role in both political activism and peace negotiations in Northeast India. Although it is capable of driving autonomy and self-rule movements, it also infuses intricacy into peace processes. Nevertheless, anger can be directed positively and used to facilitate effective mediation and community participation, which can help resolve significant conflicts. As seen in the cases of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam, solutions can be achieved through amicable means when grievances are addressed promptly, dialogue is encouraged, and compromises are reached. As Northeast India continues to navigate its complex political landscape, the role of anger in conflict resolution remains essential in shaping the region's political future.

# Chapter 8
# Recognition as a Political Theological Imperative

## 1. The Intersection of Identity and Political Theology

Recognition theory currently occupies a central place in contemporary discussions of politics and social relations, particularly in debates surrounding identity politics. The sociological 'problem' of visibility has evolved into a critical political and theological counterclaim from this point forward. It's considered not just a matter of legal recognition, but an affirmation, existential and moral, of a person's humanity. This shift is evident in the work of philosophers such as Charles Taylor (1994) and Axel Honneth (1996), who argue that recognition is a prerequisite for identity, autonomy, and social freedom. Taylor, for example, defines recognition as a process that is interpersonal and recognizes people's identities in a social context. Identity, he proposed, is something that is bound up with the other; it needs to be recognized in order to be itself. According to Honneth (1996), recognition is a precondition for autonomy, and its absence constitutes a moral harm, albeit not one of exclusion (i.e., the likelihood of being seen by other people), but rather an injury to the personal self-being that prevents individuals from being a self. Recognition is not merely a particular form of distributive justice, but is conceived in these philosophers as an ethical obligation embedded in human nature and social coexistence.

Recognition here means a great deal more; it rises above ordinary political and social recognition, becoming an act of the holy. It extends beyond the mere formal act of conferring rights on someone or acknowledging his existence; it is, in origin, a metaphysical or perhaps existential declaration on the worth of an individual. According to Butler, "the idea of recognising each other

and being there for each other is sacred", he adds, bringing up the religious aspects of this concept. For instance, Butler (2004) reveals how the public mourning of the non-normative serves as a means of re-politicizing the embodied practice of mourning, transforming a private death into a public, moral, and theological event, with the potential to render a symbolic institution of the individual's life and death. The ritual genealogy of recognition in Butler's analysis, in other words, understands political movements themselves as liturgical acts, replete with their own not merely social, but moral and, at times, sacramental claims. Recognition has an appeal in identity politics, both politically and theologically. This is a demand for moral standing and for the reality of being beyond mere political recognisability. In postcolonial and religious contexts where memories of dispossession and exclusion, as well as the obedience of the divine, continue to reverberate, demands for recognition can take on a theological register. Achille Mbembe (2001) and Saba Mahmood (2005) argue that in a postcolonial society, recognition remains bound up with histories of cultural and religious negation, and in such a context, demanding recognition for them is not only a political imperative, but it is also a profound moral and sacred call for recognition of human dignity. This dignity is deemed as God-given.

Liberal defenses of neutrality and procedural justice do not reveal everything about what recognition entails, nor what it seeks to convey. In liberal political theory, as seen in the works of John Rawls (1971) and Robert Nozick (1974), it is commonly posited that another ground exists on which individuals can demand rights and justice, regardless of their physical and historical circumstances. A generic, universal understanding does not directly confront the sometimes sloppy, yet incredibly important, manner in which recognition can be experienced in the lived body. In liberal thought, recognition has often been reductively framed as a question of right and visibility, which misses the deeper moral and existential significance of recognition claims.

Whilst identification means recognition of nothing more than visibility, the principle of identity politics is that recognition is not sufficient. As Taylor (1994: 57) argues, the very notion of "self-expression" is central to the concept of authenticity: "Modern identity takes this form of authenticity; each person has an identity in virtue of being recognised in a certain way which is important to that identity." In this way, recognition is a positive answer, outside the rights-based claims of liberalism. It is the shared understanding that one's personhood is inherently valuable and deserving of respect, cultivation and protection. It is this sacred aspect of recognition that becomes critical in religious and postcolonial contexts, as it intersects with the history of the struggle to regain lost honour and humanity. Mahmood (2005) argues that for Muslim women actively engaged in political and social struggle, recognition is, in this sense, also a moral and spiritual task. The demand for recognition is folded into religiously constituted notions of duty, submission, and ethics. Mbembe (2001) has also pointed out that, in the context of the postcolonial space, recognition relates to the restoration of human dignity and spiritual will that was crushed by colonial and imperial conquest. In that case, the questions of recognition are as much political as they are deeply theological, for it remains a question of a human's moral worth asserted amidst the degradation of history and the distant echo of the divine.

One of the more pertinent questions is that of recognition in the context of movement protests for justice. Butler (2004) also argues that the mourning of the lives of racial minorities, queers, or refugees reintroduces these lives as part of a symbolic social order. This mourning is not simply an affect, but a moral imperative for acknowledging the very humanity and dignity of lives cast outside the public sphere. Mourning thus becomes a political and theological action, in which grief is not just an affect but also an incentive: a longing, that is, for recognition, though not on Quebec's adjudicatory terms, rather in its moral and sacred ledger.

Here, identity politics works like liturgical rites, raising moral claims to a level beyond political requirement. Recognition is the

sacred act of acknowledging that people who are marginalized exist and are deserving of human dignity. This is more than a right or legal matter; rather, it is a collective recognition of the personhood of the dehumanized. As Saba Mahmood (2005) writes, the demand for recognition in such situations involves an appeal to the sacred: it is an appeal that human dignity be acknowledged in contexts of dispossession and dehumanization. This means that recognition cannot be adequately understood in the secular and procedural terms of liberal political theories. It operates within a deeply moral and theological space, where the very call for recognition is inextricably linked to the sanctity of the human being. To acknowledge the dignity of human beings is not just a political or social gesture; it is a theological practice that affirms the value of individual human beings and is grounded in the sacred structures of meaning by which human life is ordered. The demand for recognition is paradoxically related to affirmation of the individual, of the separate self, as one exists within a moral context that is not merely a matter of public expression of one's interest. Recognition involves a search for individual affirmation, as well as a demand for acceptance by a broader, usually prestigious, moral community. In the landscape of identity politics, visibility is about more than simply wanting to be seen in terms of personal identity; the desire to "be a place" (in public) is not the primary focus. It is an appeal to moral significance, and a demand for acknowledgment as something sacred, dignified, and worthy of existential regard. This paradox is perhaps most brutally transparent in the way political movements articulate their demands. As Taylor (1994) has put it, moderns are torn between authenticity and recognition. Let people who demand to be recognized as exceptional do so: it appears that recognition is located within larger, shared (moral) horizons. The tension between who I am and who you say I am is the lifeblood of much of American identity politics, for someone's demand to be seen is also a demand to be included in a larger moral and sacred narrative. This "demand for recognition" appeals to theological patterns that shape a society's moral fabric. In postcolonial and

religious contexts, recognition is woven symbiotically with the divine, so that the demand for recognition is not only political but also sacred. And so, recognition is about more than a social transaction; it is a theological one — God saying that there is something about that person that fundamentally should be recognized and included as part of a vision of themselves as part of the world's moral architecture.

In the politics of identity, recognition is not just a political demand for visibility; it is a demand for moral and religious recognition of the dignity and worth of human beings. Not only the liberal understanding of recognition as something procedural or juridical, but all the way down to the existential legitimization. As Taylor (1994), Honneth (1996), and Butler (2004) clearly indicate, recognition is political not because of its responsorial character, but above all because it is a moral action, a requirement for respecting human dignity and worth.

In postcolonial and religious discourses, the concern with recognition also assumes the mantle of the sacred and its intricate connections to stories about dispossession and spiritual reparation. On the contrary, the fight for acknowledgement is a moral and spiritual payback battle for human dignity that has been trampled on throughout history. Political theology provides an invaluable perspective through which to examine how identity politics operates not only in secular politics but within a broader theological context, where recognition serves as a quasi-sacred ritualization of an individual's value and humanity. Even as political demands are negotiated, on the grand stage of our moment, what is also essential here are theological and moral demands, as well as the vision they animate. Recognition does not refer to the mere infringement of legal rights or procedural justice but to the solemn acceptance of a person's moral and existential value. From this perspective, identity politics is not only a political project but also a professional theological scream for recognition and dignity.

## 2. Political Theology and the Sacred in Politics

From its early days, when it explored the connection between religious institutions and political rule during the Middle Ages, to its current status as an indispensable means of understanding political reality in the early 21st century, political theology provides an invaluable basis for interpreting a range of political issues in the modern world. The work examines the role of religious symbols, concepts, and narratives in political thought, models of governance, and social structures. Over recent decades, Political Theology has been central to understanding how the idea of sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy has intersected with religious/ sacred dynamics in both secular and religious articulations. The interest in political theology today primarily concerns the sacred, specifically in relation to political power, including the state in the modern era. From Carl Schmitt's (2005) meditation on sovereign powers to determine wars, to Giorgio Agamben's (1998) arch inquiry into the state of exception as clandestine, subtle, and quotidian, political theology has refined our understanding of the state's powers, particularly in times of crisis. 'In each political decision, ' he maintained, 'the (non-)existence of sovereign power... partake[s] of a theological paradigm in such a way that the rights of the sovereign are never purely political but at the same time always metaphysical rights'. According to Schmitt (2005), all modern political concepts are theological concepts that have undergone secularization in their development.

Political theology is contrasted in the digital age. Political theology has been reshaped under the scrutiny of an examination of how new modes of sovereignty — performative, algorithmic governance — are able to assume political power through the alleged reactivation of the sacred. The Supreme Being is no longer a concern for traditional religious elites, and it has also become a matter of control and manipulation of information in the digital world. Digital technologies, deeply intertwined with contemporary political life, have become a new home for sacred power, with sui generis selves — the algorithms that govern everything from

political speech to social conduct (Zuboff, 2019). As an analytical framework, this section examines how political theology contributes to illuminating the sacred relationship between Christian power and political power—particularly in the digital era.

Sovereignty in political theology is not simply governmentality, to which here it is coterminous, but rather it is a metaphysical or divine act. The proximity of sovereignty and the sacred is an inheritance from political theology. The work of Carl Schmitt is particularly helpful in this regard, given its theorization of the state of exception, which serves as a strong reminder of how sovereign power has been rooted in theological signifiers. Regarding the exception, the sovereign is the one who can decide whether to set aside a law provisionally in a time of emergency in order to preserve order (Schmitt 2005). But this is more than a legal exemption; it also contains a theological dimension which invokes divine authority in order to justify the state's extraordinary transgressions.

What exactly is at stake in the sovereign's exercise of the power to decide in/over the exception is, in Schmitt's view, sovereign power at its most sacred, corresponding to the premodern doctrine of the divine right of kings. The king is also more than a mere political officer, but a metaphysical figure whose decisions are supported by divine revelation. From which it follows that sovereignty is not simply who holds a political position of power: that gives the responsibility over ethical or existential reasons for the existence of the state. The sovereign's sacred dimension was once based on the religious so that "the exercise of the sacred dimension of the sovereign's power could lead to the practice of sacrifice, when the common good required it" (Agamben, 1998: 55), yet after the secularization process this sacred place has moved to the political realm and all secular order founds its legitimacy on the capacity to decide over the exception (Schmitt, 2005). While Schmitt is concerned with the modern state, the influence of the sacred endures in recent politics. Today, the state of exception is invoked not only by political leaders in times of crisis but also by

extra-state actors, populists, and digital platforms. Populist leaders in particular often use moral and sacred rhetoric, positioning themselves as the same as the people fighting evil, corrupt elites. They comment on political forms of religious directions within the right-wing political opposition. They are not only political in their claim to sovereignty; religion and morality are invoked to portray their cause as one for divine (in)justice (Mudde, 2019). This re-sacralisation of politics, in which the sacred is employed as a means of mobilizing politically, illustrates the lasting relevance of theological concepts to modern politics.

The difference in the digital era is that the state of exception is no longer the frame for political and religious figures to claim sovereignty. But it's the frame for digital sovereignty. As we have already said, digital platforms have effectively become new sovereigns through their algorithms. The Facebooks, Googles, and Twitters of the world are not just town squares, but dominant information gatekeepers and consensus shapers. These companies are governed by algorithms, which, similar to the power of socalled sovereign decision-making over exceptions, determine what becomes visible and who is able to participate in political conversations. As the sovereign, algorithms suggest that they have the power to suspend the norms of public speech. These platforms can amplify or suppress various messages during periods of political unrest, helping to shape the political dialogue as they see fit. What algorithmic sovereignty of digital platforms stands for is a reconfiguration of the (exercise of) power: where it's no longer the state or traditional political formations, but corporate clouds that command legitimate authority over the digital terrain? This new sovereignty, in turn, poses urgent questions about the legitimacy of algorithmic decision-making and the ethics of handing over control to private corporations over who gets to speak and who gets to be heard in a political discussion.

We observe algorithmic governance in practice as these digital platforms shape political discourse. They determine access to information and shape the public visibility of who can speak and

whose voices are muted. The censorship of certain views or the heavy emphasis on specific messages during a political crisis could then become a form of political state of exception—a process whereby the regular rules of the game are temporarily set aside for political reasons. Such is a new power, distant from the one of the political rulers, since the rule is dictated not so much by the decision of the human hand or of the human brain, but by algorithm, a lash to an extent unprecedented in the history of humankind and with the transposition of the classical elements of the sovereignty in the digital sphere (Zuboff, 2019).

The relationship between political theology and populism is evident in the rhetoric of populist leaders, who often employ religious symbols, metaphors, and language to legitimize their political objectives. These leaders often depict their campaigns as crusades, presenting themselves as defenders of the people against the corrupt elite. The language is drenched in the purity and sin, the salvation and redemption, in which the faithful are called to support and make meaning together. According to Mudde (2019), populism thrives on the divide between the good people and corrupt elites, a divide that is articulated in a sacred manner, where justice is called down from above and redemption is promised.

Populism frequently resembles the discourses of religious sects, which define leaders as messianic figures who have been sent to restore moral order and alleviate the people's pain. This is a semi- (and, in many cases, fully) divine rule that is simultaneously juxtaposed with appeals to specific religious identities, as seen in leaders like America's leader, known for a nationalist agenda, Brazil's populist leader who governed in the late 2010s, or India's post-2014 leadership. Individuals in these latter types of states routinely fashion their images as if they are divinely chosen to reign over their states by employing religious symbols and terminology to associate them with superior moral authority and establish a more intimate spiritual relationship with their subjects. This dimension of populism as sacral, and of political leaders as moral saviours, reminds us that religious ideas continue to shape political authority.

And the political leader is then hurled out of the role of the being who merely represents the people, compelled to become by the force that demands all in all to be with the nation, the actual God, the savior, who alone is able to save the people from disaster. It is thus only a small step from there to the realization that political struggles are not a war between policies or governance styles, but moral or existential struggles; therefore, they also require divine authorization and intervention (Schmitt, 2005).

Political theology emerges in this constellation of the political today as a challenge to the secular foundation of modern rule. This was the origin of secularism, the effort to maintain a separation between religion, politics, and government that is the foundation of modern democracies. However, the return of political theology—in particular, in the idioms of populism and digital governance—has challenged the clear distinction between the sacred and the political. The divine authority and religious metaphors of technology in the political use of religious language obscure a much more complex relationship between politics and religion than secular discourses would prefer. Political theology has emerged as a significant approach to the intersection of religion and politics in our post-secular world. When political leaders and tech platforms reach for sacred images to maintain their own power, it becomes clear that those who hold political authority are no longer secular. Instead, it is embedded in religious and moral systems that direct how power is used and justified. Populism and algorithmic governmentality inaugurate a further phase of secularization in politics, though one in which the sacred has returned to the political, now in the form of speech — specifically, the management of digital platforms.

The Revival of Political Theology and the Digital Horizon: Avenues and Hazards for Contemporary Democratic Theory. While the vast playing field these digital platforms allow in the game of political enunciation and knotting together mobilization has also given rise to emergent modalities of sovereignty, which, in no small part, are heavily associated with the sacred. Like Schmitt's sovereign, algorithms craft political debate and public engagement,

and the process is often opaque and unaccountable. Populist movements divinize political power and invest it with a sort of holy charge, framing political fights as sacred wars and moral crusades. In the midst of contemporary society's struggle with political theology and digital governance, we must ask: How does the sacred continue to shape the politics of authority and the acquisition of power? And to be sure, the collision of the sacred and political is equally a matter for secular democracies and a phenomenon that shapes religious cultures throughout world history. We can better navigate the labyrinth of digital governance, populism, and political authority in the 21st century by understanding the role of political theology in contemporary politics.

**3. Politics of Memory and Digital Sovereignty**

The use of memory in the project of constructing collective identity is at the heart of contemporary political work. They manufacture memories, and these memories are also managed by political actors, states, social forces, and others, in order to lend legitimacy to their positions, their stories, and to consolidate their power. Memory is not merely a passive re-emplacement from the past, but an active and contested instrument for social identity formation and collective mobilization. At its simplest, memory is political — in the sense that it is bound up with what is recalled, who has the power of decision on what is to be remembered, and how recollection of the past is used to constitute the present.

Memory also plays a significant role in political theology. It is far more than a mere political expedient; it is a religious act, a sacrosanct expression of faith and a moral statement. The way people, organizations, and countries make demands on memory rarely concerns the "facts" of history; they stake a claim to a divine or moral right to present the past in a certain light that speaks to them, and to do so in order to lay down a claim in the years to come. This memory interpreting – when historical narratives take on the sacred, thereby politicizing religious legitimation – is not only a remarkable resonance with traditional religious orders, in which the sacred is traditionally (and to itself) associated with

mnemotechnics. In this section, we examine how digital memory has become central to political and theological discussions, with implications for the state of sovereignty and democratic governance.

In the digital age, how we remember and (re)construct history is largely mediated through new media technologies. These days, however, social media, search engines, and digital archives are the chief sites of what we might call the making and unmaking of memory today. They are not neutral platforms but algorithmic gatekeepers of whose memories get amplified, which stories get thrust forward and who gets to speak in the ongoing conversation of history. Digital media, then, have effectively also become the new "governors" of memory, determining who can access what, and how, on the new landscapes of political mediation. The authority to act, afforded through digital sovereignty, extends from assigning agency between digital platforms and algorithms to the governance of information distribution and the salience of political narratives. State sovereignty over unwritten memory in the digital age is fully delegated to memory platforms, and as such, they are the sovereigns of access and governance. We identify the sites where memory is produced and disseminated, namely Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These are the platforms that determine whose history is remembered, whose politicians are seen, and whose voices are silenced or left out. Digital sovereignty here refers to having control not only over memory but also, more generally, over collective identity and political legitimacy (Gillespie 2018).

The Internet is only getting more combative. Populist movements, autocratic governments and extremist groups are exploiting — and running roughshod over — digital tools to rewrite history in their own image. The "memory wars" fought on these platforms are not just those over historical truth, but also over the reins of political narrative. As politics is increasingly played out on social media, the contest for digital sovereignty is intertwined with the contest over who claims the power to define the past and prophesy politics (Zuboff, 2019). The politics of memory has

always been about control, after all; specifically, who gets to decide which events receive the afterlife of memory, and to what extent can those events be used to serve contemporary political claims. In this digital context, such a hold on memory takes on new dimensions and is enacted in singular 'new ways' as' memory wars' on digital social platforms and digital media. These memory wars are a clash of narratives of history in the service of competing political claims or counterclaims.

Confrontations over memories have often been infused with power politics and religion. Populist movements, for example, usually present their programs as a pursuit of some lost sense of national or cultural memory. The "elite" in this story is an unregenerated traitor to the nation's beginnings, and the populist leader or movement is the legitimate heir to the people's holy memory. This story gets told in a moral or divine language that sanctifies the nation's past and the movement's moral purpose. In this light, memory itself moves beyond its political instrumentality. It operates theologically as a morality play, in which the remembrance of the past legitimizes a return to a divine or moral order (Mudde, 2019). Populist leaders, such as the author of First-style nationalism in the United States, who employ descriptive or symbolic references in Brazil, and a populist strategist cloaked in constitutionalism in Hungary, have all made memory conflicts a cornerstone of their political narratives. Through the essentialisation of a mythical past (that they jockey to resuscitate), they act out memory as a means to rationalise their position. The past in these stories is depicted as morally pure, whereas the present is a moral cesspool. Once you transfer the moral authority of Christianity to the past, the past cannot be a source of any moral or spiritual pollution. This politics of memory is based mainly on theological symbols, where the political leader appears as a messianic redeemer of the nation.

The dynamics of demand for recognition and claim to moral authority are closely related to the theology of these movements. Controversy over the past becomes controversy over who has the

moral authority to govern. It's an essentially religious process that utilizes religious stories of redemption, purity, and salvation to legitimize political power. In accordance with Agamben (1998), the power of a sovereign to decide on exceptions is closely tied to the language of the sacred. In the populist memory wars, the sovereign is more than a subject; rather, the sovereign personifies a moral or divine presence and their legitimacy hinges on their capacity to revive the Ordered and Divine Time that expired ages ago.

Another important element of digital sovereignty is the influence of algorithms on political memory. Traditionally, memory has been the domain of politicians, historians, and the state. However, algorithms continue to perform the same function in the virtual age, deciding who or what should be remembered and esteemed, and how, thus making the final judgment of what, in fact, has occurred in the world and what has not. Indeed, algorithms are used by social media platforms to promote and amplify content and editors (people) do not act as a retarding factor that actually amplifies content, which in the case of political narratives are usually those favourable to powerful companies, populist leaders or authoritarian states, and stepping content that represents alternative views (Tufekci, 2017). Algorithms, as Zuboff (2019) recently noted, are designed to maximize 'user engagement,' and frequently do so, inter alia, by promoting emotive, sensationalist, or polarizing content. This strategy is quite powerful in regard to memory politics. In an age of digitization, memory is about more than history's truths; it's about who sees and who spreads what information. The memory algorithms were always selective, shining a light and prioritising certain narratives, and as such, were also part of an algorithmic shaping of political discourse, not always matching the nuance of history.

The selective expansion of political memory may be one way to resacralize politics. When the logic of attention tends toward scandal or moralism, technology can make political memory into a sacred past that reinforces the interests of the powerful. Whoever holds such a narrative in a monopoly grip can claim for themselves

the role of guardian of the holy memory of the nation, and deny any opponents the right to take "faith" in an alternative way that they deem deviant, profane or diabolical. Algorithmic memory governance is thus not only a political issue; it also has a theological dimension, as it reconfigures the relationship between an authorized elder and a ruler. In this regard, the sacralised character of memory is further reinforced through the strategic use of digital technologies for memory politics, in which politicians and movements lobby for ownership over public memory to further their cause. This process of resacralisation of the past does not stop at history but informs our moral compass, validates our political leaders and denounces their challengers. In the era of new media, memory has been constructed as a means to wield political power and build a collective identity, thereby justifying political oppression.

The stakes for ethics and politics of remembrance in the digital era are high. As political memory comes under increasing algorithmic sway, fears over manipulation and the rewriting of history also grow. The power over public memory that can be manufactured online gives those who control these platforms enormous influence. This power is of great importance for democracy – who is entitled to decide on the historical consciousness of the public and whose voices prevail in political discourse? Digital memory politics also pose unique ethical dilemmas, especially in authoritarian contexts. If they can control digital platforms, governments can wield memory as a tool to retroactively justify oppression, erase inconvenient histories and shape public opinion. In a few countries around the world, including China, Russia, and Turkey, governments have employed government-controlled digital platforms to rewrite history, influence political decisions, and silence critics. Memory warp: This is a distortion of memory that is corrosive to democratic values, such as transparency, accountability, and the availability of information, and is used to tailor the past to meet the current regime's needs (Tufekci 2017).

Memory was also under siege, with digital memory play preventing mechanisms of reconciliation and social healing in post-conflict societies, which faced historical wrongs, hindering their ability to move forward on the revered and bloody path. Memory is often contested and conflictual, especially in societies emerging out of conflict, and serves as a key site for how legacies are accounted for and a shared national identity is shaped. They, however, sabotage any opportunities for peace and help societies remain divided when they manipulate digital platforms to rewrite and forget memories. We should write our digital platform history as representation or memory Work (Gray, 2003) in the form on memory politics as it should be, rather than as it is, i.e. as a duty and obligation rather than as a privilege and a 'right from God to rule the world' as a few Bourgeois elites once argued in the French Estates General Assembly.

There is an urgent demand for governments in the algorithmic age to tackle the ethics of algorithmic governance and digital sovereignty in the whirlwind of the digital era. Memory is political not just in international boundaries, but also on moral and theological levels, since the establishment of common identity, as well as political legitimacy, is intimately connected to sacred narratives. To make digital memory akin to a democratic tradition, mechanisms of accountability, transparency, and governance ought to be integrated into digital information systems. This is a question of what it means for the algorithms that amplify political discussion today to be those that do not entrench harmful biases and rewrite history. It also requires active citizens to graft onto memory, the recognition of diverse perspectives, the remembering, respect and recognition of the histories of marginalised communities. Memory politics in a digital world is not just a political zeal, but a force for justice — more a moral responsibility to remember the past truthfully and to forge a future by embracing the virtues of inclusion and democracy. 4. Memory Politics and the Ethics of Digital Censorship

Memory and political expression are being computerized in the digital age of censorship. The idea that states, companies, and platforms can moderate and control the flow of information, however, has significant implications for the politics of memory. But censorship is not just what is left unsaid. Censorship is also about what is forgotten, and can never be. Memory, then, might be thought of in its particularised/manifested sense as a site of contestation of what constitutes the 'legitimate' representation — in this case, a struggle between 'competing' narratives. Internet censorship has also sparked debate among free speech advocates, public security experts and democratic values campaigners. However, on the one hand, digital media provide new opportunities for political participation and the circulation of information, but on the other hand, they involve new practices of censorship, which can be more subtle, extensive, clandestine, and difficult to overcome than before. The impact of digital censorship onreshaping public memory is especially worrying, as it holds the power to rewrite the past, suppress alternative narratives, and produce a climate in which some people are never heard or their voices are never taken seriously. This section addresses the issue of digital censorship as a matter with ethical implications and its role in memory politics, recognizing that the politics of memory are often not significantly different from politics proper.

The control it exerts is digital policing, carried out through algorithms, content moderation strategies, and state intervention. As stated earlier, they play a critical role in digital memory management. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms use algorithms to determine which content is fed to their users. Some of this algorithmic decision-making is based on how engaged a person is with their audience, while some is based on removing posts that violate the platform's rules. They were designed to increase user engagement, but have big implications for political speech. If algorithms prioritise sensational and divisive emotional content, they can shape public memory and influence political action.

Content moderation is a fundamental aspect of digital censorship. Social media companies have established rules to police content that violates their terms of service, such as hate speech, falsehoods, and graphic violence. While content moderation aims for an internet that's more democratic and safer for all its users, it has generated much debate about the ethics of free speech, political bias and how, exactly, content moderation is decided on and executed. And those moderation decisions are made in the dark — not only out of public view, but also without public accountability or transparency. This has led to criticisms of platforms for silencing particular voices, most notably dissenting ones, or those who are critical of incumbent norms and politically powerful blocs (Gillespie, 2018). There are actually other governments that engage in online censorship by strong-arming technology companies to remove material or even passing laws and regulations that limit speech on the Internet. Also, a contrast has been cited, explained, for example, that China, Russia and Turkey have enacted draconian censorship laws to erase politically sensitive and threatening information by their governments. In such a context, digital censorship serves as a tool for maintaining hegemony and suppressing dissent. The ethical issues associated with state-sponsored censorship are chilling and signal broader conflicts around the role of the government, individual liberties, and democratic values (Tufekci 2017).

One of the key ethical challenges regarding digital censorship is who determines the authority to regulate content preservation or deletion. At its essence, memory politics is about control — specifically, control over who gets to choose which events, people, and groups are remembered and which are not. In today's digitally connected society, the power to decide who we remember or forget, as Yuki must decide, is increasingly in the hands of private companies and public bodies with the ability to select what stories are told and which are not. Memory politics have always been a battleground, where everyone strives to control the narrative of history. However, the digital age has also intensified this

competition through the sheer reach and influence of digital platforms. Facebook and Twitter are now widely regarded as crucial forums for political discussion, news sharing, and collective memory-making. They thus have considerable power to shape collective memories, determining which events are honored with a place in history and which are left to be forgotten by the darkness. It is "their influence that resides in the algorithms of access and algorithms of content moderation with their yardsticks for what counts as leniency" (Zuboff, 2019).

These are biased choices — biased because only one set of values, interests, and prejudices has access to the platform, which then determines what remains in memory and what is forgotten. When digital platforms mute and slow down certain stories — particularly those that undercut official political narratives, i.e., expose injustice and counter dominant political talking points — they are able to exert a measure of control over the collective memory. This selective structure of remembering and forgetting is central to political mobilization and the pursuit of social justice. Movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have used social media to draw attention to racial oppression, sexual violence, and systemic inequity, for example. Nevertheless, they have also encountered a wave of resistance with their messages undermined and censored by platforms reluctant to amplify controversial and politically volatile content (Tufekci, 2017).

Digital censorship is about more than silencing: It is about erasure. Digital platforms can conceal certain information from the public by utilizing their algorithms and content moderation strategies. This has led to a form of "digital forgetting" with some profound ethical consequences, particularly when it comes to past movements and struggles for social justice. The morals of erasure invoke these and other pressing questions of historical memory. And now that more of the collective memory of the past is being stored online, the menace of disappearing looms larger. Digital platforms can erase resonance from the record with ease, simply wiping away the remnants of events, figures, and movements from

the public eye. This erasure has catastrophic consequences for what we know about history, identity and political struggle. It's that ethical contention of the digital 'forget' that jangles the nerves when the perpetrators of historical wrongs are discussed or human-culturally deleted. Digital media often serve as a site for amnesia related to political repression, human rights abuses, and state violence in authoritarian environments. So, for example, the Chinese government has done quite a lot of digital censorship, and it's been able to scrub nearly all mentions of the Tiananmen Square massacre from the face of the Internet, with forced forgetting by the Chinese population. This shaping of memory through digital forgetting has serious ethical implications: not only does it discourage society from coming to terms with the past, but it also deters the pursuit of justice by groups at the margins (Gillespie, 2018).

The new online crisis is censorship, and open discourse is under threat in cyberspace. With private companies and the government targeting the content of the Internet, which drives most political debate and for which there is no level playing field, discussion and dissent would be stifled, and an already largely silenced public voice would be silenced even further. It will be necessary to moderate harmful content — including hate speech and misinformation — to keep a shared online space safe and inclusive. The moral challenge now is finding a balance between upholding free expression and reducing harm. And losing free speech to digital censorship, of course, is an incredibly fetid shock to the system in the first place. Still, when it is also used to quell nonconformist political speech or dissent, that's a terrific blow. Digital platforms have also come under scrutiny for removing content that criticizes political powers, highlights systemic injustices, or seeks social change. Such selective censorship undermines the practice of democratic dialogue, with the possible result of creating an environment where political debates are narrowed. Dissent is suppressed, and citizens are denied the opportunity to engage in reflection about politics (Tufekci, 2017). This censorship is

exacerbated by murky and unaccountable content moderation, which accelerates the erosion of free speech. The algorithms and even the rules of the road for digital platforms can be closely held, and the decisions on when content is and is not allowed on the Internet are often made behind closed doors. This source of opacity raises serious concerns about bias and manipulation, as well as the concentration of power in a small number of businesses that control access to the public sphere. In its most pernicious form, digital censorship can be transformed into a potent instrument of political hegemony, enabling ruling elites to harness and monetize information and collective memory, thereby monopolizing the realm of politics for personal gain (Gillespie, 2018).

Theoretical implications of the intersection of memory politics and digital censorship: For Western democracies, the intersection of memory politics and digital censorship poses a significant ethical question. In an era when digital platforms have a greater influence than ever on shaping political speech and collective memory, memory management is a crucial aspect of power. The external expressions of censorship, which expel from the realm of the mind the perception or comprehension of what is observed, heard, or read, include the repression of dissenting opinions and the construction of political narratives that override democratic freedom of expression, transparency, and accountability. Suppose all faces are to be shown in the hypothetical world. In that case, the only way to navigate these trade-offs is to develop norms of digital censorship that are biased in favor of free speech and the liberties it underpins, yet protect against the most grievous harms. This involves a challenge to digital platforms to become more transparent in their content removal processes, as well as ensuring that oral memory is archived in an inclusive, truthful, and respectful manner, despite diverse perspectives. Suppose we consider digital censorship in ethical terms. In that case, it can serve as an incentive for digital platforms to create new forms of value and foster a new kind of public that promotes open dialogue and political engagement.

**5. Memory, Justice, and the Politics of Truth-Telling**

In contemporary digitalized society, political communication has become characterized by memory, justice and truth-telling. The battle over memory is not just about which version of history to remember but also about what justice is and what truth is. In the digital media, the struggle for memory is closely related to political authority, accountability, and legitimacy. Memory is also important for recalling past injustices from which current political contests derive and are framed.

Practicing "truth-telling" is fundamental to the pursuit of justice, particularly in post-conflict, repressive or dictatorial societies. "Truth-telling — including public testimonies, archives and commissions — is also necessary for reconciliation and healing." However, in the present digital condition, the telling of truth and the processes of remembering the past are no longer simple expressions; even the alphabet now seems outmodedsuch a cacophony of information, algorithmed or your news feed, a twilight language still used murky shuttling through the digital networks as the latter engage in a great mediation with political memory being brokered at the extremes where it can contribute to amplify, affirm, undermine, delegitimize, repress, relax or otherwise distort memory (Ryfe, 2006) — thus making the politics of truth telling an issue of a great urgency for democratic societies (Tufekci, 2017). This part of the book goes on to discuss the ethical and political aspects of digital memory, using an ethics of justice and truth-telling. It also examines how the battle over memory in the digital age is connected to broader questions about political legitimacy, group identity, and moral responsibility. As our politics increasingly go digital, which affects how we police memory and truth in digital space, it will have profound implications for the fight for justice in our time.

Memory is a centrepiece in the questions of justice in postconflict, post-authoritarian, postcolonial societies. Truth-telling forms the cornerstone of a unique form of justice, often referred to as transitional justice, that enables societies to address historical

human rights abuses and political injustices. Under the heading of transitional justice, victim institutions have been established for victims to activate recognition mechanisms and trauma narration platforms (truth commissions, public apologies, reparations, and, in some cases, legal trials). And these are not merely symbolic truth commissions; instead, they are necessary for the recovery and healing of a polity after wrong (Teitel, 2000). The importance of speaking the truth/ "en face du visage" in justice is emphasized in the South African post-apartheid context, as the TRC has been identified as the pivotal spectacle in apprehending the crimes of the apartheid era. The TRC provided victims with the opportunity to share their stories and those responsible with the possibility of amnesty if they confessed to their crimes. It was believed that open truth-telling was a crucial element in the development of a democratic society based on justice, recognition, and remembering (Gibson, 2004). "But the digital age brings new challenges in truth-telling in post-conflict societies. It has become increasingly challenging to share and preserve stories, memories, and history as the growing popularity and widespread use of digital platforms make it more difficult.

Yet, in an age where we can share information with near democratic ease, so too can old 'marginal' voices and narratives reach a new audience. The Internet (including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) is also a significant space for truth-telling, as people and movements have been able to share their truths and tell stories of oppression and resistance. However, the democratisation of memory comes with its own challenges. The algorithms that determine content exposure on digital media platforms, which are notorious for the attention economy, favour sensational and emotive content over complex and reflective historical accounts. The most pressing work of truth-telling, therefore, is not to sustain memory, but to convey promptly to others (without the effects of misinformation and disinformation, for example) the truth of what has occurred.

Memory politics is not just about the storage and transport of historical data but also about questioning the dominant narratives that control the public space for representation. In today's digital society, the lever to fashion memory is increasingly held by companies that deal in technology and operate online platforms. These corporations have significant power over what we can access and what is removed, and they have thus made digital memory a contested domain. Their algorithms are expressly designed to capture ever more of our attention – before redirecting it, by creating and perpetually strengthening what has been called a filter bubble – an encapsulated universe of beliefs, a closed system of truths that are never phrased in a way that threatens to burst our prejudices. Political memory, of course, is not like any other: it has to fashion not only the background against which political reality is played out, but it must be forged in line with certain ends and objectives. One particularly troubling aspect of digital memory politics is its potential for historical amnesia. Internet companies have the power to delete or obscure particular pieces of content, and by doing so, these companies determine which memories we, as a society, collectively hold on to. This power in autocratic systems is frequently deployed to expunge inconvenient truths or critical voices. For example, in China, the government has used censorship in cyberspace to ban any reference to the Tiananmen Square massacre, effectively removing that tragic event from the memory of a large portion of the Chinese people. In this respect, memory manipulation is not just about influencing political discourse; it's also about altering the public's sense of what history is.

The manufacture of historical untruth by digital media is not confined to authoritarian states in democratic societies. Selective memories online can also distort historical narratives. Sensational or controversial content, often placed at the forefront by algorithms, risks overshadowing important aspects of history, current affairs, or other perspectives. In the process, the very memory of the past is being distorted, not so much in the service of commercial interests and the desires of their users, as in the service of the facts. This type

of digital manipulation has grave repercussions for ethical reasons, as it curtails the ability of citizens to participate in informed and rational dialogues about politics and hinders the accountability of previous political leaders' behavior for the present (Tufekci, 2017).

Social media has now become a fast lane tool for political recognition and justice, particularly in areas where historic injustices are treated as the elephant in the room. Organizations and loose associations of people, such as the #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #FridaysForFuture movements, have been able to utilize social media as a platform for calling for recognition, sharing personal stories, and challenging established historical narratives. These other forms of sites allow the subaltern to reclaim their stories and to collaborate on our ruminations about political struggle. These mobilizations have demonstrated the potential of digital media to intervene in and create more inclusive histories of remembrance.

Memory politics and truth-seeking face significant challenges in the era of social media. Fake News Misinformation Detox: As fake news becomes more sophisticated, so do the efforts to stop it – and that comes with its own set of problems. "Algorithms that reward high-pressure content" are specifically what help spread fake or misleading stories, and drive the public's perception of important political events in the wrong direction. Misinformation that circulates in the digital sphere does more than muddy the waters of truth-telling; it erodes the ground of democracy. When a political memory emerges from a false or partially false narrative, it erodes the foundation of democratic politics.

Additionally, it makes it more difficult for citizens to engage in evidence-informed conversations (Gillespie, 2018). Memory politics' reliance on social media also raises several fundamental ethical concerns regarding the responsibilities of digital platforms in content regulation. None of these companies can play the role of a neutral conduit of free expression that the Constitution assigns to them; all of them have editorial power over public memory, based on their decisions about what to remove and how to prioritize some

content over others on services with as many as 1 billion active users. Who determines what kinds of content are acceptable on these platforms? 'It's a betrayal of the public trust': How social media fuels a crisis of politics. But as these companies have increasingly become the gatekeepers of public discourse and memory, the ethical stakes have gotten increasingly clear. Should these companies be free to promote historical veracity, or should they remain neutral in the face of competing historical accounts? This is once again a vital issue regarding digital memory politics and the impact of social media on democratic societies (Zuboff, 2019).

As we navigate the digital era, the very pursuit of justice is on the line as our participation in preserving history – and countering the distortions created by digital censors and algorithmic moulders – is crucial. To prevent history from being erased or rewritten, it's critical to devise systems of digital accountability, just as we have for print and broadcast journalism and other media and entertainment that came before the Internet. This includes the transparency of the process by which content is moderated, promoting diverse voices, and ensuring freedom of expression on digital platforms. Governments and international institutions also need to hold digital platforms accountable for erasing political memory and curating truthful information. The re-enactment of justice in these practices of digital memory politics is as much about acknowledging past injustice as it is about documenting that these marginalized community stories are recorded and can circulate. Truth-telling, as part of the process of building a collective memory, is an essential step in healing and reconciling society. In such societies, the words' truth' and 'reconciliation' continue to be projected into public places. Hence, through the sharing of the truth, victims find a voice to exhibit their personal suffering. In the digital age, these projects must also extend to digital spaces, where the collective memory of past events is increasingly taking shape. By rendering digital memory more inclusive, transparent, and accurate,

societies can take a reparative step toward justice and reconciliation (Teitel, 2000).

We reside in a volatile and ambivalently contested zone of memory politics, in the era of digital truth-telling, justice, and political authority. Digital media and Internet highways have served as significant avenues in which us and them, crushed, oppressed, and suppressed people are reconfiguring their collective pasts and are demanding recognition. However, digital platforms also pose significant risks, including the spread of misinformation, digital censorship, and the erosion of historical truth. To ensure that memory politics compatible with democracy emerge, we must foster transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness on our digital platforms. At a time when digital platforms increasingly intervene in the formation of political memory, the question of the ethics of digital memory politics has become more pressing. But the big question is not just how to preserve history in our wireless memory, but also how to represent it respectfully, communicate it ethically, and protect it from distortion. Unresolved debates about digital memory present opportunities for societies to accurately remember the past and rely on shared democratic values that are truly inclusive as they envision their future.

**6. Digital Memory and the Future of Political Legitimacy**

Now, in an increasingly digital age, the nexus of memory and political legitimacy is more important than ever. Memory, once merely the spoken history of a people, has in fact become a political resource, a source of political support. Governments, parties, and groups are therefore quite consciously aware of the power that digital platforms have as a tool to influence collective memory, which, in fact, directly impacts political legitimacy. Memory has stopped being a mere echo of the past, but a contested one. In cyberspace, memory is actively produced and shared as a reservoir that can serve both as a weapon and a curse for political leaders and regimes.

The political legitimacy, i.e., the right of a regime or a political movement to govern, tends to be built up more and more on the

telling of stories that dominate public memory through advertising. As new media producers become the primary source of information in the latest monetary environment, debates about memory and politics have largely shifted from traditional media to blogs. This transfer has placed the management of memory at the heart of political power. What the politics of remembering have meant for political legitimacy, and what that means, in turn, for the fate of justice and democracy when it becomes a matter of memorizing in future-oriented, networked, digital spaces, is the interest of this book.

Memory has always been the legitimization of the political. Historical tales, cultural symbolism and collective memories are important in constructing political authority. It used to be much more centrally controlled by government organisations (libraries, museums and the media, for example). It was these institutions that were entrusted with the task of storing memory, cherishing what had happened, who was involved, and which stories were to be remembered and which were to be forgotten. Political legitimacy is often suspended in these carefully crafted memories, which evoke a deep sense of continuity and rootedness. However, in today's digital age, the force of shape memory has waned. It's on social media, search engines and forums that political history is manufactured and transmitted. These platforms, with their algorithms, are today's new gatekeepers of public memory, deciding which stories receive attention and which become buried. This change has deep significances for the legitimacy of politics, because it allows (political) movements and governments to become involved in a new form of memory politics, in which control over public memory is understood to have direct repercussions on the legitimacy to govern, in particular to continue to govern (Gillespie, 2018).

The political importance of digital memory is also evident in the way that political movements turn to social media as a channel for propagandizing their account of the past. Now, political leaders and movements no longer need the control and means of traditional media to reach the public with their stories.

In this context, the memory signifies much more than historical truth, but also the discourse erected to justify and perpetuate the power structure. Populist leaders, however, have leveraged this new form of digital memory to disseminate and institutionalize a moral framework that justifies their behavior and politics. By such political conflicts that are built on the axis "we, the 'pure citizens' versus a 'corrupt elite'", leaders can legitimate their hold on power by claiming to be the authentic guardians of the nation's glorious history (Mudde, 2019).

At the core of digital memory politics and the algorithmic regulation of what's sayable and showable on the network. It is in these algorithms — the lines of code designed to help people on social networks and decide what priority a seemingly endless stream of content should take — that part of the story of what narratives of the political in society are brought to the centre, and which stories get sidelined. Most algorithms are designed to benefit viewers who find user interaction enjoyable by showing them dramatic or emotional content. In other words, calls for opinions tend to promote extreme, harmful and unsophisticated political content rather than nuanced content or content that occupies a middle ground (Tufekci 2017). The algorithms of the digital platforms are not neutral — they are controlled by the economic interests of the companies that own them. Facebook, Google, Twitter and other sites generally favor content that promotes engagement or revenue, which can also be content that reflects political narratives that evoke strong emotions. This creates a feedback loop in which content that receives a lot of engagement is bumped up even further and thrust into users' limelight. In such a system, there will be an escalating propagation of communications that advance fear, anger, or outrage, and a marginalization of communications that promote thoughtful discussion and inclusivity (see Zuboff, 2019).

The promotion of a politically biased narrative is related to emphasizing the importance of political legitimacy. When algorithms reward division or sensationalism, they weaken society's

ability to engage in an informed and rational conversation. For, of course, this debasement of public language undermines citizens' capacities to think reasonably about their political leaders and about policies. In this sense, political consent is not established through rational discussions or democratic involvement. Still, it is the result of the mobilization of the emotional and cognitive devices that shape voter preferences.

In light of the emergence of digital memory politics, there are enormous ethical challenges concerning the use and impact of digital networks and platforms in politically charged communication and mnemonic communities. An ethical concern is obviously the specter of digital censorship, which might entail the targeted suppression or annihilation of political narratives. Most digital platforms have content moderation policies in place to moderate harmful or offensive content; however, these policies can be misused by the powerful to stifle disagreement and dissent. This normative question demands how such policies can become visible and justified without appearing to scapegoat marginal or dissenting voices (Gillespie, 2018). Another ethical aspect of deception, therefore, is not so much the breach of privacy, but rather the editing of memory with digital technology. Algorithms that determine whether and how much political content you see are largely programmed to enhance engagement, and often that means boosting narratives of accounts that spread misleading or false information. It is said that sound, phonation, is setting off gushers of mostly ridiculous content on the Internet, which (bigly) corrupts memory and pollutes politics. More dishearteningly, misinformation or disinformation can undermine people's confidence in democracy during election season. The ethical responsibility lies in holding digital platforms accountable and implementing mechanisms to control the spread of misinformation and disinformation (Tufekci, 2017).

Digital alteration of memory can exacerbate political polarization and fragmentation. Algorithms that amplify sensational or divisive material create echo chambers, where people see only

what they want to see. This will only deepen the political chasm and prevent ordinary citizens from gathering for constructive conversation that bridges party divides. The ethical issue is how to maintain an inclusive and democratic digital public sphere that acknowledges differences and knowledge, and provides access to past and historical memory, rather than serving the interests of powerful companies (Zuboff, 2019).

Nowhere is this more significant than in authoritarian settings, where state manipulation of collective memory is especially substantial. Here, governments often utilize digital media to shape public memory, thereby legitimizing political power and silencing dissenting accounts. Censorship, digital — it is as integral to this strategy as the medium through which authoritarian societies determine what we can be allowed to remember and forget. Such governments are deploying digital platforms as they aim to rewrite history, repress criticism and restrict access to competing visions of reality. Or as in China, where the regime imposed strictly disciplined digital censorship and successfully eliminated any references to the massacre, reflected in the Chinese idea of forgetting or erasing it from the collective memory of the Chinese. In Russia, too, trolls have been employed by the state to disrupt opposition and manipulate online political discussion. In this case, control of the past is not simply an issue of changing public perceptions. However, that is also important, as it serves to maintain political control and contain potential counter-political forces. The capacity of digital memory to be controlled by authoritarian regimes can both maintain their legitimacy by creating a ‘sterile’ version of history and repress political opposition through the selective erasure of the past (Gillespie 2018).

The political economy of digital memory in authoritarian circumstances is concerning ethically precisely because it subverts democratic participation and communication. The sifting of history and the silencing of dissenting voices undermine that foundation of political legitimacy. In this context, the search for political legitimacy is not only a quest for power, but also a quest to

manipulate the national memory of the nation-state. Here, memory is deployed not as a vector for justice, truth, and democratic participation, but as a tool with which to reinforce authoritarian power relations (Kates and Shaw, 2014; Zuboff, 2019).

The connection between memory politics and digital sovereignty is essential in maintaining political legitimacy in the digital age. Given the increasing prevalence of digital platforms as central spaces for political debate and the construction of collective memory, the shaping of public memory has become an even more significant dimension of establishing authority in the political field. You can stand by us to help us safeguard the future of community access media by upholding these ethical challenges of digital memory politics against digital censorship, disinformation, and distorted historical narratives, and ensuring that digital platforms are the tools for the common good and democratic virtue they ought to be. Whether society navigates the minefield of digital memory politics will be the political legitimacy of the future. That is to say, while digital platforms further enable the expression and inclusion of diverse voices, they should also recognize the historical memory and strengthen accountability. In an age of digital media, one would think that political legitimacy would be premised on the claim of political power, as well as the defense of truth, justice, and democratic participation. Societies are able to maintain the legitimacy of power — which is based on justice, fairness, and inclusion — through reliable preservation and dissemination of memory.

# Chapter 9
# Memory Industry as Political Currency

## 1. Weaponizing Political Memory

Political resentments do not originate spontaneously; instead, they are often rooted in and recycled through long-standing historical narratives, myths, symbols, and collective memories that have been transmitted across generations. Whether true or invented, these stories serve to establish a sense of group identity, foster shared attachment, and convey a common mission. The emotional and political value of memory in political processes is essential. Utilizing the above concept as a framework, this chapter examines how collective memory is transformed into political capital, with a particular focus on how real or imagined serious historical grievances are leveraged to mobilize, influence policymaking, and validate exclusionary politics.

Memory, as viewed as a social construction, is by its very nature biased. Maurice Halbwachs, a key figure in the study of memory, emphasizes the social context of memory (Halbwachs, 1992). In general, groups remember what they want to remember—what corresponds to their present needs—and forget about the rest, a memorable instance of which we are given in Deuteronomy's treatment of Israel's desert wanderings. As a result, memory becomes a tool for identity, and its importance is based on its function as a supportive instrument of political, social and economic purposes. For example, memories of past injustices (colonial rule, racial prejudice, territorial disputes, etc.) often become potent images for mobilising communities against imagined enemies.

Memory is utilized as a political tool by both governmental and non-governmental agents, as the latter incorporate the telling of

history into the construction of collective memory. Pierre Nora's (1989) notion of superficies du texte (the surface of the text) provides a theoretical framework for exploring how historical narratives become manifest in material form, in sites of memory like monuments, statues, museums, and national holidays. As such, these websites serve as collective memory prostheses, representing important touchpoints in an institution's history with salient emotional significance. However, in the digital era, memory politics were no longer confined to brick-and-mortar institutions. The emergence of "memetic memory" – where historical events and grievances are condensed into easily shared and readily consumed images, hashtags and viral messages – has been made possible by the internet and social media. This memetic memory is frequently invoked to arouse political anger and garner support for movements based on historical injustices (Daniels, 2018).

The selective approach to historical memory for political ends has been especially salient in the postcolonial and authoritarian settings, where historical grievances are utilized to process political macrochanges. The surge in "Majoritarian Nationalism" in India corresponds closely with the politicization of historical memory. "Majoritarian Nationalism" rhetoric often cites medieval rulers' destruction of temples as well as the injustices of British colonization. These histories are then used to justify present political acts — such as the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid and the 2024 construction of the Ram Mandir at the same location. They are presented like layers of history, evoking a collective memory of loss and indignity that is channelled toward political transformation (Jaffrelot, 2021). In this context, memory is not just a backwardlooking image; it is also a forward-looking perspective. Still, it is also an active force that shapes the trajectory of future politics by offering a moral foundation for political behavior.

In a similar vein, the Turkish President has succeeded in using the Ottoman Empire's history and the grievances of Muslim communities as tools to undermine the secularist Kemalist ideology in the country for many years. Reconverting Hagia Sophia into a

mosque in 2020 was not a religious gesture, although it was something more; it was a symbolic act that reinstated the grandeur of the Ottoman period while rejecting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Turkish modernist project as "Westernisation" (Tuğal, 2009). For him and his supporters, the conversion of Hagia Sophia symbolized the revival of national pride and Islamic identity, embodying a vision of Turkey that looks back to its Ottoman past rather than its secular present

In Russia, the post-Soviet statesman similarly invoked the nation's imperial history and Soviet victory in World War II to legitimise his political actions. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 were depicted as acts of historical correction aimed at restoring Russia's rightful position on the global stage. By referencing World War II, post-Soviet statesman draws upon Russia's role as the vanquisher of Nazi Germany, utilising this triumph as the basis for their current territorial aspirations (Snyder, 2022). These narratives, grounded in historical memory, are employed to justify aggressive policies and incite nationalistic fervours, even as they alienate international allies and exacerbate global tensions.

The utilisation of memory as a tool extends beyond intellectual engagement; it is deeply intertwined with emotional experiences. Sara Ahmed (2004) articulates this concept through her notion of the "affective economy," wherein emotions transcend individual confines and circulate within societies, becoming associated with symbols, events, and narratives. In political contexts, the invocation of memory frequently elicits potent emotions, particularly anger, which can be directed toward perceived adversaries or injustices. Emotional connections to historical grievances can justify actions such as protests, violence, or political support. A salient example of memory's affective economy is observable in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the United States. Names such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Emmett Till have become symbols of racial injustice, often referenced in protests, speeches, and public demonstrations. These names represent a broader

narrative of systemic racism and possess the emotional significance that fuels ongoing activism (Taylor, 2016). In this context, the past is not merely a component of historical records; it is actively present and influential in the actions of those who persist in challenging past injuries. Nonetheless, the politics of memory encompass divergent emotional narratives. For example, the Confederate flag and monuments commemorating slaveholders remain contentious symbols in the United States. Some factions support their protection on the grounds that they are historical artefacts, while other group views them as symbols of repression and racial brutality. These diverging memories create an emotional split, as the controversy surrounding these symbols extends beyond history, encompassing emotional commitments to different readings of the past.

Populist leaders are adept at manipulating historical memories to serve their political objectives. They often portray the nation as having suffered from historical betrayals, oppression, or cultural decline and promise to restore the country to its former greatness. For example, Donald Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" evokes a vague yet emotionally resonant image of an idealised past, suggesting a revival of American economic dominance, cultural homogeneity, and political power. This selective nostalgia is characteristic of populist rhetoric, frequently recalling a time when the nation was perceived as more united, more powerful, and more "authentically" itself (Brown, 2019). Similarly, Vladimir Putin utilised the memory of Russia's imperial history to legitimise his aggressive foreign policies, particularly regarding Ukraine. By invoking the unity of the Russian people and their shared history, Putin positioned himself as the protector of Russian identity and enforcer of historical justice. This narrative depicts the West as an external force attempting to undermine Russia's rightful global standing (Snyder, 2022). In both instances, memory is employed as a rationale for exclusionary policies, whether targeting immigrants in the United States or Ukraine in Russia.

Can memory continue, untampered by politics? Can collective memory be employed to advance justice without also provoking anger or exclusion? Such questions are at the core of the science of memory. The task now is to harness the reparative rather than retributive nature of memory. Such an alternative could draw on the example of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa and Chile as initiatives that utilize memory to heal, rather than to divide (Ricoeur, 2004). These commissions were designed to promote awareness about past wrongs without opening a new cycle of violence. However, the frailty of these endeavors is exposed, as political leaders continue to exploit memory for their own political ends. Hence, memory politics needs to be made simple. It must acknowledge the messy factors influencing historical narratives and the varied experiences that comprise collective memory. In this sense, memory politics demand not only truth, but also dialogue. It is always a matter of finding a fitting equilibrium between respecting the truth and being willing to engage in a meaningful conversation that fosters healing, as Paul Ricoeur (2004) proposes in his reflections on the ethics of memory.

Imperial colonial emulation endures profoundly as an offshoot of colonial rule, cultural domination and the disjunctive effects of modernity. Not only in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, but the people of these regions are not only victims of colonialism, but it is part of their day-to-day existence in institutions, inequalities and perceptions. It is embedded in language, in infrastructure, in both legal institutions and economic models; there is a constant reinforcement of a shared worldview shaped by feelings of grievance, marginalisation, and betrayal. Postcolonial scars, however, are not just elements of the past — they are feelings strong enough to create vast resentment. That anger, after centuries of exploitation, is fertile ground for nationalism, populism and political extremism, whether it occurs under a democratic or an oppressive regime.

Understanding political enmity in these postcolonial situations means examining the source memories upon which it is based.

Frantz Fanon, in his classic "The Wretched of the Earth" (1963), describes colonialism not as a purely oppressive economic system, but as a psychological state in which the colonizer treats the colonized as less than human. "Through colonial education, laws and religion, we devalued our own and elevated the culture of the colonisers," he said. This epistemic violence led not only to economic exploitation but also to a deprivation of meaning, memory, and dignity. Colonialism, according to Fanon, produced a severe psychological division that fractured the colonized individuals' sense of historical agency and self-worth (Fanon, 1963).

Postcolonial anger emerges from the re-emergence of suppressed memories. The conclusion of colonial rule did not automatically dismantle the epistemological structures established by colonialism. As NgũgĩwaThiong'o (1986) observes, the "colonization of the mind" persisted well beyond the achievement of political independence. Western languages, cultural values, and development models have continued to exert a significant influence on postcolonial societies, leaving lasting imprints on their collective consciousness. Consequently, memory becomes a site of resistance, an effort to reclaim forgotten histories, silenced voices, and erased identities. However, memory alone cannot guarantee liberation. It must be articulated and crafted into coherent narratives that can channel anger, justify demands, and rally public support. These narratives often emphasise themes of humiliation, betrayal, and martyrdom. They are not merely factual recounts, but emotional frameworks that shape collective suffering. Once integrated into public discourse, these narratives function as moral resources: to remember is to accuse, mourn, and seek justice (Ahmed, 2004).

India exemplifies how postcolonial memories can transform into political resentment. Under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideological precursor, the cardbased movement rooted in Hindutva ideology, the narrative of "Majoritarian Nationalism" victimisation has become integral to the nation's identity. This perspective depicts "Majoritarian

Nationalism" as enduring victims, initially of Islamic invasions, and subsequently of British colonial rule, and currently of secular liberalism. The colonial impact on India was both tangible and symbolic. British colonial rule depleted India's resources through exploitative economic practices (Patnaik, 2018) and established racial hierarchies that belittled Indian culture. Figures such as Thomas Macaulay aimed to create "a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in taste", effectively replacing native knowledge systems with Eurocentric ones. This form of epistemic violence continues to resonate in postcolonial India, where the colonial legacy of cultural disparagement and economic exploitation remains deeply ingrained in collective memory (Macaulay, 1835).

Majoritarian Nationalism, in India, has reinterpreted this colonial memory to align it with a civilizational narrative. Within this narrative, the British are depicted as the final invaders in a millennium-long history of subjugation. Muslim rulers from Ghazni and Ghor to Aurangzeb are portrayed not as political leaders, but as destroyers of the "Majoritarian Nationalism" culture and religion. Consequently, the past is moralised, and memory is employed as a tool for retribution. Within this framework, the construction of the Ram Mandir on the site of the demolished Babri Masjid in 1992, along with the renaming of cities, such as Allahabad to Prayagraj, is part of a broader effort to reconfigure historical narratives and assert a particular cultural and political identity, often privileging certain interpretations of history over others, it is the represents efforts to reclaim authentic"Majoritarian Nationalism" heritage (Nandy, 2002). These actions aim to restore "Majoritarian Nationalism" pride while also justifying the marginalisation of minority communities. As AshisNandy (2002) observes, postcolonial anger can become self-destructive. The "intimate enemy", or the internalised logic of colonial exclusion, is redirected against domestic Others. In pursuit of rectifying historical wrongs, new injustices are rationalised. In this context, postcolonial anger is less about liberation and more about reversing power dynamics.

South Africa's historical experiences of colonialism and apartheid continue to serve as a potent catalyst for political discontent. Although apartheid was officially concluded in 1994, the enduring legacies of racial oppression remain deeply entrenched within South African society. Spatial segregation, economic inequality, and symbolic hierarchies persist in shaping the daily experiences of numerous Black South Africans. The political discontent in post-apartheid South Africa is not driven by nostalgia or a yearning for a past era, but rather by a perceived betrayal of the liberation movement. Nelson Mandela's vision of reconciliation, as embodied by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), emphasized national healing through truth-telling rather than punitive measures. However, critics argue that the TRC's limited focus— prioritising truth-telling over material reparations—allowed those responsible for apartheid to evade justice while maintaining the economic privileges of the white minority (Mamdani, 2001).

For numerous young South Africans, particularly Black youth, anticipated freedom remains unfulfilled. Movements such as #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall have emerged, advocating the decolonisation of educational institutions and the removal of colonial-era symbols (Mbembe, 2016). These movements draw upon the legacy of the anti-apartheid struggle while simultaneously critiquing the African National Congress (ANC) for its failure to achieve structural change. This frustration is now directed not only at the remnants of white supremacy but also at postcolonial elites who have prospered under the current system. In India, where the ruling party increasingly exerts control over historical narratives, South Africa's memory battles are characterised by diversity and contestation. There are various interpretations of the past which are evident in public discourse; some emphasise reconciliation, while others advocate for retribution. This diversity, although essential for democratic dialogue, also poses the risk of engendering instability, leading to political disengagement and disillusionment (Mamdani, 2001).

In the Middle East, the intersection of memory and geopolitics is unmistakable. The legacy of colonial demarcations, Western interventions, and authoritarian governance culminated in a markedly fragmented political landscape. Notably, the IsraeliPalestinian conflict is shaped by religious and political narratives of martyrdom, betrayal, and sacred suffering. For Palestinians, the recollections of the historical legacies of the Balfour Declaration and the Nakba of 1948 played a pivotal role in forming their collective sense of identity. The loss of land is not merely a historical event; it represents an ongoing trauma that is continually intensified by Israeli settlement expansion and military actions. In this context, political anger is both existential and transgenerational. It is preserved through oral history, disseminated in refugee camps, and immortalised in art, poetry, and popular culture (Said, 2000). This memory functions as both a mechanism of resistance and a basis for political legitimacy, yet it also perpetuates a persistent state of grievance among Palestinians.

In Zionist narratives, memory functions as a protective mechanism. The Holocaust, a pivotal event in Jewish history, was invoked to justify the establishment of Israel and the ongoing militarisation of the nation. The recollection of destruction is utilised to legitimise state security actions, fostering a perpetual state of alertness and exception (Snyder, 2022). This results in a conflict of victimhood, with each side asserting moral superiority through their own suffering. In Iran, the collective memory of the 1953 CIA-backed coup, which overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, alongside the enduring symbolism of Imam Hussain's martyrdom at Karbala, served as foundational pillars for the ideological construction of the Islamic Republic. These historical touchstones not only provided a narrative of resistance against foreign intervention and domestic betrayal but also helped shape a moral and political framework that legitimized revolutionary governance and reinforced a shared sense of national and religious identity. The state's political culture sanctifies suffering and frames resistance as a religious obligation (Mamdani,

2001). Here, memory transcends mere history, becoming a form of liturgy. These opposing narratives generate vengeance cycles. Political figures reference the past not to transcend it but to relive it. The issue is not a lack of memory but an excess. As Mahmood Mamdani (2001) cautions, the risk of politicized memory is that it often results in selective empathy, where only one's own pain is acknowledged, while the suffering of others is ignored.

Postcolonial political anger arose from legitimate historical injustices. It is neither irrational nor insignificant; rather, it constitutes an emotional response to centuries of systemic harm. However, employing this memory as a weapon can perpetuate the dynamics it seeks to dismantle. Transforming grievances into ideologies risks oversimplifying history, demonising differences, and glorifying anger. Therefore, a just memory should be critical and not vengeful. They must acknowledge suffering without transforming it into a sense of entitlement. It should cultivate shared narratives, rather than merely adversarial ones. As Achille Mbembe (2017) suggests, the future of postcolonial societies depends on their ability to 'come to terms with the ghost' without being consumed by it. The point is not to forget, but to remember in a way that fosters solidarity rather than violence.

**2. Nostalgia and Revanchism: Remembering a Golden Age**

Nostalgia is not merely the nostalgic longing of an individual for a bygone age, but also becomes an instrument in the political field for the construction of collective identity, the articulation of grievances, and mobilization. When these massive economic, cultural, and geopolitical shifts throw societies into turmoil, they can seek solace in the idealized past. This desire to reclaim the perceived peace and prosperity of the past can give rise to revanchist impulses. – a political position based on reversal and retribution. In modern politics, nostalgia provides the underlying emotional content driving reactionary politics, while revanchism is nostalgia being turned into action. Together, these form a powerful political force that uses memory as a means to fashion the future in the image of a mythologized past. In this section, we will analyze

nostalgia and revanchism as drivers of the politics of resentment. Through examining the cases of the U.S., Russia, India and Turkey, the book explores the ways in which turning to historical epochs (real or imagined) serves to legitimise authoritarianism, exclusion, and cultural uniformity. It also examines the psychology and sociology of nostalgia—why it appeals, what it conceals, and how it fuels political discontent.

Unlike personal or cultural nostalgia, political nostalgia is directed at collective pursuits and is based on both individual memories and national myths. Svetlana Boym (2001) outlines two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia, which is a desire to rebuild the lost home, characterized by a longing for purity and authenticity, and reflective nostalgia, embodied in feelings of longing and ambivalence. It is the therapeutic type of nostalgia, the nostalgia for restoring and idealizing a past, in which contemporary revanchist politics is rooted.

Restorative nostalgia claims that higher crime rates, decaying infrastructure, and corrupt politicians are not inherent in society's decline, but rather the result of manipulation by outsiders, elites, or even insiders who are not part of the community. It is a moral dualism between some imagined moral past and present, the latter often deemed as a time of moral decay, social chaos and imbecility. The "golden age," in this context, operates as a moral standard below which one can presently descend or one day rise. The past is reconfigured to be reduced and devoid of contradictions and ambiguities, allowing for a straight moral linearity that dismisses the present's corruption (Huyssen, 2000). It usually comes along with selective amnesia (forgetting what was violent, discriminatory, and unequal in the glorified past). As Andreas Huyssen (2000) observed, contemporary memory is a reductive one that dismisses/mutes historical "noise" that contradicts linear tales. Politicians, like curators of museums, construct historical memories by highlighting heroism and expunging dissent, and making pain disappear. In the process, memory is manufactured for particular political ends, often failing to recall the inequities that contributed to that process.

The most prominent contemporary expression of political nostalgia is encapsulated in the slogan 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA), popularized by Donald Trump. The phrase is a temporizing one, implying that America was great, is not great now, but can be great again. Significantly, it chooses not to identify when this imagined greatness was observed, presumably so that it can be interpreted and construed by everyone to suit their beliefs. MAGA plays to the frustrations of the white working and middle classes by suggesting that America's decline is the result of the machinations of liberal elites, immigrants and minorities. This vision is based on the imagery of 1950s America, characterized by industrial power, cultural integrity, and world domination. But this picture of greatness overlooks the fact that African Americans were systematically oppressed under Jim Crow's laws, that in much of the workforce, women were marginalized, and that the Cold War was an imperial maze. This supposed longing for a time when things were better was essentially based on inequality (Brown, 2019).

Donald Trump's political appeal was significantly anchored in his ability to transform nostalgia into a vehicle for anger and resentment. His oratory frequently evoked a sense of betrayal through expressions such as "They're laughing at us," "We don't win anymore," and "They've stolen your country." The identity of "they" was often deliberately ambiguous, allowing for the attribution of blame to various groups, including immigrants, Muslims, or the liberal media. Thus, nostalgia became the emotional foundation for the desire to reclaim what was perceived as lost. This sentiment was manifested in several policy initiatives, including immigration bans, critiques of critical race theory, and the denunciation of multiculturalism. It also incited violence, as evidenced by the 6 January Capitol riots, which sought to restore a mythical republic by assaulting democratic institutions. In this context, nostalgia evolved into a catalyst for political violence, where the past served not only as an ideal but also as a justification for aggression. The psychological appeal of the "Make America

Great Again' (MAGA) nostalgia lies in its simplicity. In an increasingly complex and globalised world, the past offers moral clarity. The imagined golden age was portrayed as a period when societal roles were clearly defined, institutions functioned efficiently, and America was a global leader. Consequently, political nostalgia serves as an emotional shortcut, transforming contemporary anxiety into certainty and converting resentment into a sense of righteousness (Lilla, 2017).

**3. Russia: Imperial Glory and the Putinist Myth**

In Russia, nostalgia manifests distinctly compared to the populist variant observed in the United States. It is articulated through imperial nationalism, as evidenced by Vladimir Putin's invocation of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union to construct a narrative of national revival. The administration under Putin amalgamated Czarist symbols, Soviet valours, and Orthodox Christianity into a cohesive ideology of Russian exceptionalism. This nostalgic vision endeavours to reverse the perceived "catastrophe" of the Soviet Union's dissolution. In a notable speech from 2005, Putin asserted, "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." For many Russians, the 1990s marked a period of profound humiliation, characterized by economic decline, a decline in status, and increasing Western influence. The past—whether through Stalin's military prowess or the spiritual framework of Orthodoxy—served as a mechanism to restore national pride (Snyder, 2022).

The sentiment of nostalgia is intrinsically revanchist. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was portrayed not as an act of aggression but as reclamation—a restoration of what was considered "rightfully" Russian. Similarly, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine was justified as an endeavour to reunite the "Rus" people, presenting the past as a solution to current fragmentation. Russian state media plays a crucial role in promoting this narrative. Television programs romanticised World War II, depicting Russia as the saviour of Europe. Stalin's statues are reinstated in provincial areas, while a narrative of sacrifice and triumph overshadows the

grim history of the gulags and Stalinist purges. In this context, nostalgia evolves into more than a mere longing for the past; it becomes a tool of governance—history is utilised to legitimise authoritarian policies and territorial expansion (Lipman 2015).

In Turkey, the President skillfully harnessed nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire to construct a post-secular, nationalist identity. Since the early 2000s, the political trajectory of neo-Ottoman ambition has shifted from liberal reformism to authoritarian populism, which is deeply rooted in Islamic conservatism and neoOttomanism. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following

World War I, followed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secular nationbuilding initiatives, resulted in a disrupted legacy. Although Atatürk's reforms modernised Turkey, they also alienated many religious conservatives. The rise of neo-Ottoman ambition has been closely associated with a widespread desire to revive Islamic pride and Ottoman grandeur. Under his leadership, Ottoman symbols, including architecture, clothing, and rhetoric, have reemerged in the public sphere (Özyürek, 2015).

Shows such as Diriliş: Ertuğrul depict the early Ottoman Empire in an idealized and heroic light, portraying it as a period characterized by honour, courage, and a divine mission. The face of neo-Ottoman ambition has referred to the empire as a "civilizational model", contrasting it with what he perceives as the moral decline of the West. This narrative influences domestic policy and supports Turkey's neo-imperial objectives, including military interventions in Syria and Libya, which are framed as Turkey reclaiming its rightful status as a regional leader. Similar to Putin, the face of neo-Ottoman ambition utilises nostalgia to present authoritarianism as a form of cultural authenticity. The revival of Ottoman symbols is not merely about maintaining continuity; it seeks to redefine modernity from an Islamic perspective (Özyürek, 2015). By employing selective nostalgia, the face of neo-Ottoman ambition aims to consolidate its political power while undermining secularism and democratic institutions.

The emotional constructs of nostalgia and revanchism serve as unifying threads among these diverse phenomena. These political movements are propelled not solely by historical occurrences but also by profound emotions, such as loss, betrayal, and a perceived sense of entitlement. When communities perceive that their collective narrative has been disrupted by forces such as colonization, modernization, or globalization, they attempt to reclaim it. Revanchism offers a means to fulfil this aspiration by identifying an adversary—those perceived to have usurped the past— advocating for their defeat to restore former greatness. It amalgamates anger with purpose and intertwines sadness with the desire for retribution. Political leaders who effectively harness this emotional dynamic can mobilise large groups with minimal ideological substance. Emotional resonance itself drives political movements (Lilla, 2017). Concurrently, nostalgia often oversimplifies historical narratives. It erases the complexities of the past, including the violence, exclusions, and inequalities inherent in the so-called "golden age." By interpreting the present through a nostalgic lens, political movements often attribute blame to others, potentially foreclosing future possibilities. As Lilla (2017) observes, reactionary politics is not merely opposed to progress; it is opposed to the future. It seeks to arrest time and revert history to a state of imagined purity.

Invoking a "golden age" serves as a potent and enduring strategy within the politics of resentment, offering individuals a sense of identity, clarity, and moral superiority. However, this approach fosters exclusion, authoritarianism, and violence. When wielded as a tool, the past becomes a trap, perpetuating cycles of grievances and revenge that impede societal progress. The challenge lies not in rejecting nostalgia wholesale. Like humans, we are inherently historical beings, and memory is integral to our identity. The true challenge is to distinguish between reflective nostalgia, which permits mourning and complexity, and restorative nostalgia, which seeks retribution. In an era marked by political anger, it is imperative to question who controls the narrative of the

past. Whose stories are being emphasised and whose are being erased? To forge a more equitable future, we must resist the allure of myth and confront the past with all its contradictions.

**4. Cultural Trauma and the Victimhood Identity**

Cultural trauma has become a crucial and often instrumentalised force in contemporary political rhetoric. Once considered a private matter, trauma is privatised and has become a political weapon used by different factions to win power and achieve legitimacy. Such a metamorphosis entailed the transformation of common pain into a basis of political identity and discourse. As perfectly articulated by Alexander (2004), cultural trauma refers to a sense among a collectivity that a sudden blow has so dramatically disrupted the community's existence that the group members must act to change that existence. This is a trauma that jumps off the page and becomes more than passive memory; it becomes politicised, narrated, and institutionalised, growing into an identity of shared victimhood. Once an identity of victimhood is formed, moral authority is granted for some collective action, which may include retaliation and exclusion of oppressors (Alexander, 2004).

This section considers the effects of cultural trauma on contemporary populism and nationalist politics. The legacy of colonialism, slavery, and ongoing grievances of marginalized communities in the West demonstrates that trauma is often mobilized for political ends. The story of past victimisation not only allows groups to claim moral high ground, but it also legitimises aggressive political tactics such as ostracism and punishment. When victimhood becomes a means of attaining power, however, it loses its humanity. It becomes poisonous … When people become addicted to feeling oppressed, they relish, and they seek out and feed on indignation and outrage. In doing so, the politicization of cultural trauma alters the nature of democratic discussion, transforming political conversation from one driven by motivation and controversy to one marked by resentful and accusatory politics (Campbell & Manning, 2018). The transformation of trauma into a

politicised identity also produces what may be described as "performance trauma". It's no longer enough to have suffered; you must perform suffering to wield political power. Trauma is pervasive, permeating society and influencing all manner of political behavior in much the same way it affects individual behavior. This part explores how trauma narratives take on a life of their own as performatives: performative, contagious, authorizing, effectively reconfiguring the political-moral terrain.

Cultural trauma is not simply a state of suffering from accumulated trauma; it is fundamentally a social phenomenon in the process of meaning-making through stories, images, and institutions. As suggested by Alexander (2004), cultural trauma is constructed with the aid of social agents, such as thinkers, leaders, or institutions, which define an event as traumatizing for society. This way, trauma becomes the cement for identity with the group, describing itself through its history of misery. As a result, cultural trauma does not simply happen to a group; it is engaged in, told, and performed. There are several phases of cultural trauma. At first, something happens to disrupt collective life — colonisation, genocide, a civil war — that sends life into a spin. Next, trauma is told, with elites or intermediaries telling the story that the event wounded the group's communal self. The group's members then claim their suffering as individuals, demand recognition and reformulate their identity around the trauma. Then comes the replay of the trauma in different public and private spheres through the media, politics, and education. Society, in turn, legitimizes or invalidates the trauma (Alexander, 2004).

The debate about trauma tends to be highly contested in modern political discussion. There's a competition among different groups and constituencies to establish that their trauma is legitimate, that their pain is significant and that they should have their suffering redressed. This competition, often referred to as the 'grievance Olympics,' can exacerbate community polarization. When a common public experience is turned into an adversarial battleground, "some groups suggest that their trauma is being

ignored or is more grievous than that of others" (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

The emergence of victimhood identity represents a significant transformation in the construction of identity within contemporary political discourse. Historically, political legitimacy was predicated on attributes such as virtue, strength, or divine authority, with power being justified by qualities such as wisdom, military prowess, or divine sanction. However, in the current era, legitimacy is increasingly associated with experiences of suffering. Individuals who assert victimhood, particularly within the context of identity politics, are frequently perceived as possessing moral superiority. In contrast, those who question or critique their suffering are often viewed as complicit or responsible for their trauma. As articulated by Campbell and Manning (2018), the emergence of a "culture of victimhood" has introduced a novel dynamic in which status is acquired through the public display of suffering rather than through achievements, unity, or virtue. This shift alters the traditional power structures by substituting strength with vulnerability. Victims are regarded as deserving of empathy, recognition, and justice, while those who challenge or criticise their victimhood risk being labelled as insensitive or complicit.

Victimhood can also be a spur to competition. The fighting of competing groups hoping to assert their trauma as more authentic, deeper and more forgotten than others? This antagonism can fracture political and social blocs, leaving some who feel neglected by the system seeking revenge. It also produces a particular form of what might be described as 'sheepish' majoritarianism, or more aptly, 'resentful majoritarianism.' In this mode of politics, dominant groups who feel their traditional power, privilege, or social status is being eroded or challenged begin to respond defensively. Instead of acknowledging these shifts, they reinterpret themselves as victims of unfair displacement, adopting a logic that 'the best defence is a swift offence.' This dynamic fuels a politics of grievance and victimhood, where the majority — rather than exercising confident authority — recasts itself as embattled and persecuted, thereby

justifying aggressive postures against perceived threats to its dominance. (Taylor, 2007). This competitive victimhood is observed in many international political movements. For example, in postcolonial communities, the wounds of colonized peoples have been used to justify demands for not just justice, but superiority and special immunity among political leaders. In states like Zimbabwe, led by Robert Mugabe, for example, a recollection of colonialism was used to vindicate authoritarianism and the control of political power was maintained by its leaders by resorting to the past trauma as a control mechanism to hold on to power and interfere with opposition.

Historical trauma has been a significant driving force behind political activism in postcolonial societies. Prior attempts to achieve sovereignty and justice have, however, been marred with echoes of colonial oppression, slavery and cultural suppression. The Indian fight against British colonialism, South African apartheid and the movement for Pan Africanism illustrate how the lasting effects of historical trauma may fuel collective demands for recognition, reparation and restoration.

The impact of trauma on postcolonial politics is multidimensional. The weight of the past can embolden oppressed communities — but also be used to lend legitimacy to authoritarianism or ethnonationalism. In Zimbabwe, Mugabe began with a focus on redress for the injustices of colonial oppression. Still, in the years since, this narrative of trauma has been used to silence dissent, to exclude ethnic minorities, and to justify mismanagement. In India too, the memory of Partition, coupled with the legacy of centuries of Muslim rule under the Mughal Empire, has been mobilized by majoritarian nationalists to construct a narrative of collective victimhood. Leaders have harnessed historical traumas—real and imagined—to justify policies that exclude Muslims or reduce secular bodies (Mishra, 2017). In such cases, the politics of cultural trauma pulsate between the liberations of memory and the authoritarian nostalgia. On the one hand, it can support “minoritised” forces in asserting their identity and

sovereignty; on the other, it can become a tool of the elite to amass power and entrench hierarchies (Fassin, 2009).

In the West, especially in the U.S. and parts of Europe, we are witnessing a new species of trauma politics. But this isn't about past grievances, it's about perceived dislocation and loss. White working-class populations, particularly men, are increasingly expressing deprivation in existential and symbolic terms. What they see as being lost is often not financial, but rather cultural and social. This brand of grievance politics was on display throughout Donald Trump's presidency, when white Americans were cast as the victims of liberal elites, immigrants and minorities. In India too, the memory of Partition, coupled with the legacy of centuries of Muslim rule under the Mughal Empire, has been mobilized by majoritarian nationalists to construct a narrative of collective victimhood (Mudde, 2016). These reframings enabled dominant populations to appropriate the rhetoric of minority victimhood, but as victims of political, cultural, and economic changes that threatened their way of life. In this regard, cultural trauma becomes anticipatory rather than grounded in the past form of trauma, and not due to what has occurred in the past, but rather to what is perceived and expected to be the future experience of dislocation (Mudde, 2016).

Formulated when cultural trauma entered the political, rather than the historical, mainstream, it shifts beyond just historically marginal peoples. Trauma stories are spreading, and new groups are starting to talk in the language of suffering, which is the language of victimhood, for political effect. For Fassin (2009), what is at play here is the "politics of resentment", in which perceived moral unfairness generates an enmity. In Western cultures, for example, men have been depicted as victims of misandry by anti-feminist groups, and religion may be used to justify or support persecution when the accused party does not share the same religious beliefs. This stealing of the wind from the sails of trauma stories we can also call "trauma inflation." The greater the number of groups that can claim victim status, the less moral weight is attached to their

suffering. The language of trauma becomes diluted and operates as a political tool, something that those in power can exploit to justify policies that are exclusionary and policed with authority.

When groups start to swallow their victimhood, we cross a perilous line from looking for understanding to demanding vengeance. Political movements, granted authenticity on the basis of historical suffering, are liable to regard their grievances not as something to be alleviated but as a source of entitlement to retaliation and oppression. This form of authoritarian memory politics, such as the one established by regimes such as RecepTayyipErdoğan's in Turkey — embodying neo-Ottoman ambitions — and Viktor Orbán's in Hungary, relies on the institutionalisation of historical traumas, transforming past grievances into political capital, to legitimise the undermining of democratic institutions and the repression of criticism (Mudde, 2016). Here, the politics of trauma serves as a means of entrenching power, in which the past is not only remembered, but avenged. Dissenters are declared traitors, charged with denying the sacred memory of the nation, and the trauma narrative is used to stifle the opposition and continue to hold the grip on the power (Fassin, 2009).

Though remembering trauma is important for our grasp of historical injustices, its politicisation has the potential to disrupt democracy. If political conversation revolves around victimhood, it can calcify grievances, weaponise the past and squelch lines of solidarity. Political discourse must move beyond the trauma narrative and adopt the principles of accountability, justice, and healing. Memory must be justice, not revenge. Shaping the context of trauma, societies can heal and reimagine injuries as stitches, instead of scars that divide.

**5. Digital Memory and the Viral Archive**

The digital revolution has brought about dramatic changes in the way memory is collected, accessed, and shared. Until recently, collective memory was controlled and moulded by centralized institutions (such as libraries, museums, and mass media) that acted

as gatekeepers of historical narratives and arranged the knowledge filtering through to society. However, the democratization of this process has occurred with the advent of digital platforms, including social media, blogs, video-sharing sites, and online communities. Memory is no longer solely in the hands of organisations; it is now dispersed, viral, and scattered. The immediacy of digital platforms has created a new milieu of memory, enabling democratic citizens from diverse backgrounds to come together in producing and sharing their own narratives of remembrance. (Zuboff 2019).

In today's dynamic world, history no longer resides solely in academic research or institutional archives; it is produced and circulated in real-time by a multitude of people. Now digital archives are a noisy, unfiltered index of images, videos, hashtags and memes through which communities define trauma and claim victimhood. This transformation has transformed the production and distribution of political anger. The memoryscape of digital tools has been utilized to disseminate and circulate memories of wrongs, which may deepen social fractures by providing opportunities for individuals or groups to claim victimhood based on selective readings of the past (Jenkins, 2016).

This chapter examines the complexity of digital memory as a political archive and contested site of identity and truth. It explores the mechanics of viral memory, the amplification of grievance politics by digital platforms, and the implications of such viral memory on democratic discourse and social cohesion. It also illuminates the gray areas of a digital age in which memory is invoked and abused like never before.

The democratisation of memory owes much to the digital revolution. Since memory has traditionally been constructed and disseminated by a small elite, with narratives being communicated largely through traditional mass media, there has been little possibility for dissent against these master narratives. It is significantly different now, as in the digital age, those with internet access can share thoughts or collective narratives, which can influence the public's perception of events occurring before them.

This democratization enables marginalized voices that were previously excluded from predominant historical narratives to claim their rightful place in past histories, thereby shaping current understandings of the past. Even if it were co-optable, as the racist #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter counter-movements demonstrate, the political power and potential for collective action made possible by digital memory cannot be denied. Hashtags are digital signposts that establish virtual realms of commemoration and solidarity, reaching beyond territories and social groups. These digital acts demonstrate how today's amateur-generated videos, as raw and direct eyewitness videos and personal narrations, make it possible to question established historical narratives and frequently give voice to alternative ones, covering instances of police brutality, sexual harassment, and gun violence (Tufekci, 2017). As a result, political speech has been driven out of formal institutions; it has now been adopted by ordinary people, mobilized by grass-roots organizations, and created a new historical memory.

If digital memory has afforded us ever greater access, it has also made fragmentation society's most cherished default. Unlike the archives of old, which broadcast a single story, digitally controlled landscapes have no centralised control, allowing other realities (often competing) to exist alongside. This fragmentation produces what scholars call "memory wars," in which groups use digital media to contest the meanings of events, accusing each other of historical revisionism and demanding recognition of their suffering. The lack of a Sovereign to resolve these disputes makes it hard to achieve a consensus, leaving the digital memory as a polyphonic space, where multiple voices compete to capture attention within a fragmented public sphere (Berkowitz, 2015). This splintering also puts the idea of a shared history of truth at risk. When each group tells its story, the idea of an objective history slips away, and the memory landscape is often cluttered with competing narratives of suffering. Thus, digital memory functions not only as an instrument of remembering but also as a place of political struggle, where the legitimacy of one group's suffering is constantly

being called into question by the other. This challenge renders those who seek to foster social cohesion and create space for political debate in a very difficult position (Alexander, 2004).

The most fundamental property of digital memory is that it is easily accessible and readily available. Digital platforms are "designed for optimising user engagement, and content inducing high emotional arousal is more at risk for being viral". Perhaps most striking are 'victim' narratives, which harness and amplify emotions of anger, sympathy, and outrage. Viral content frequently relies on powerful imagery—such as graphic violence, incendiary speech, or highly symbolic acts of protest—that evoke immediate and visceral reactions from audiences. The visual and affective elements of these stories make them eminently shareable, spreading rapidly through digital networks and thus extending the reach of the grievance that frames the tale (Papacharissi, 2015).

Algorithms on many platforms play a significant role in the spread of viral content. The actual coding of social media algorithms (be it Facebook, Twitter, TikTok — you name it) is built to prioritize content that encourages thoughtful engagement in the form of likes, shares, retweets, and comments. This focus on engagement is inadvertently helping the spread of emotionally provocative — and generally contentious — content, further fueling grievance politics. This perpetuates a vicious cycle in which anger and outrage increase visibility, leading to further outrage and heightened political polarization (Tufekci, 2017). In such a viral atmosphere, memory is not a fixed entity but a daunting act of performance. Politicians, interest groups, and individuals craft content to encourage you to share it, employing simplified storytelling, striking metaphors, and emotional appeals to embed their messages in people's minds deeply. Therefore, with the growth of this viral archive, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between true and exaggerated claims, which complicates attempts to achieve a common understanding and consensus (Kellner, 2016). The performativity of digital memory leads to a situation where past events are continually reproduced

and intensified against a political backdrop, rather than a quest for truth.

Digital memory, by its very nature, is susceptible to manipulation and misrepresentation. From state-sponsored efforts to rogue individual actors, bad-faith agents seek to exploit digital platforms to distort history and spread disinformation. Their goals often aim to deepen divisions, muddy the waters, and weaken their adversaries. For instance, in 2016, Russia's Internet Research Agency made use of fake profiles, bots and misleading content to magnify sensitive political questions around race, immigration and social justice during the U.S. election. These activities were aimed at vulnerable communities and amplified existing grievances, further polarising politics (Pomerantsev, 2019).

The digital memory environment is increasingly clouded by disinformation surrounding traumatic events. False flag operations, edited footage and conspiracy theories can confuse genuine claims of victimhood. During incidents such as police shootings or terrorist attacks, the dissemination of false information can muddy the waters of justice, making it harder for those who have a legitimate claim to recognition or compensation to receive it. This manipulation of digital memory is also the strategy of what could be called a "hybrid warfare", which instrumentalizes memory, identity, and disinformation to fragment societies and delegitimise democratic processes (Fuchs, 2017). The weaponization of digital memory, accordingly, presents a grave threat to the integrity of public discourse. By manipulating historical facts and utilizing mass trauma opportunistically, not only can such forces undermine confidence in institutions, but also in one another. This decline in trust is damaging the capacity for productive democratic debate and increasing polarisation as an obstacle to addressing the underlying dynamics behind the politics of grievance.

In the digital age, digital memories have become particularly important in defining collective identity. Virtual publics are formed from shared memories, necessities, or historical grounds, which people can be linked to by bonds that transcend geographical or

social distances. These online spaces generate connections among people with similar experiences, fostering solidarity and sparking collective action. Marginalised communities: “Digital memory is one of the most important tools for these groups to represent themselves or strengthen their memory.” For example, indigenous communities employ digital spaces to hold their languages (and cultural practices) and diaspora groups to work with collective memories to sustain across time and generations the threads of culture (Rappaport, 2016). But digital memory also has a role in the creation of an excluding identity. For example, far-right organizations take to digital channels to spread narratives of grievance and deploy memes and viral videos to foster a sense of victimhood, to legitimize xenophobia, conspiracy theories, and violence. These groups utilize digital memory to foster in-group solidarity while simultaneously evoking animosity toward out-groups. As a result, the digital becomes a site of struggle for memory, which informs forms and practices of collective identity and political mobilisation (Mudde, 2019).

The emergence of digital memory archives poses a profound challenge to traditional democratic methods of communication and collaboration. In a healthy democracy, the public debate depends on shared facts and a shared reality. However, the vast landscape of distorted digital memories and contradictory accounts is making it harder to lay the groundwork for meaningful dialogue—social media prioritizes sensationalism over objectivity, amplifying outrage-driven and grievance-based content. As a result, reasoneddiscourse has increasingly been displaced by competing narratives of suffering and injustice in the public sphere (Kellner, 2016). The memory of the digital medium also facilitates confirmation bias, as users are more likely to encounter information that reinforces their existing beliefs. This hardens the formation of ‘memory bubbles’ and ‘echo chambers,’ where people are exposed only to content that validates their existing views. These memory bubbles have evolved into even more divided public conversations, leaving little room for meaningful dialogue and mutual

understanding. In that environment, it isn't easy to pursue social justice policies or work towards reconciliation (Zuboff, 2019).

While the viral and fragmented character of digital memory brings its own challenges, there are ways to develop a more responsible digital memory culture. One pathway involves developing algorithms that prioritize verifiable information and diverse perspectives to create more accurate representations of the world. Moreover, digital literacy efforts can equip users with the tools to critically evaluate sources and recognize disinformation, enabling them to navigate a cluttered digital landscape (Tufekci, 2017).

Civil society initiatives can significantly contribute to fostering responsible remembrance and an inclusive identity. The Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation is one example of digital tools that preserve traumatic memories while generating empathy and education. In the same vein, the creation of the digital memory commons (indeed, curated, yet public platforms for conversation and respect) can accommodate these multiple narratives and care for a more democratic and inclusive culture of memory (Alexander, 2004). Additionally, states and educators should collaborate to integrate digital memory into the school curriculum, helping citizens understand the constructed nature of memory and the vital importance of diversity. By encouraging the critical use of digital platforms and instilling value in multiple stories, we, as societies, can begin to navigate the intricacies of digital memory responsibly and effectively (Rappaport, 2016).

In summary, grievances and identity politics have been profoundly transformed by digital memory. It is a democratization of the remembrance process, but also produces fragmented stories, more grinding anger, and a confusing search for that truth. The viral archive is as much a tool of emancipation as it is of manipulation, forging connections as readily as it is divisions. In this age of political rage, we must certainly tread carefully around digital memory. Memory must be a bridge and not a battlefield. Societies will only be able to transform grievances into collective healing and

shore up democratic values in the digital age by engaging critically and including multiple voices.

**6. Trauma, Memory, and Digital Sovereignty**

The digital revolution has dramatically changed the relationship between memory and political sovereignty. As mentioned before, the rise of digital media has democratized the activities of memory building and spreading, enabling new decentralized collectives of shared identity to form. At the same time, novel digital environments, including social media, video-sharing sites, and blogs, are increasingly determining how people and groups express sovereignty through memory. Memory's fragmentation, compounded by these digital platforms, is creating a complex political environment in which memory reflects not only the past but also informs political agendas and identities.

In today's societies, political trauma—whether related to past or recent events—is often expressed through digital media, marking a new kind of political engagement with suffering as its focus for collective identification/task, and responsibility. As digital spaces amplify these tales of grievances, they also become battlefields for political power grabs. The pervasiveness of digital memory politics impacts society's understandings of sovereignty, truth, and justice, particularly in democratic settings. This section explores the intersection of digital memory, political trauma, and the sovereign, examining how the digital age has reshaped political discourse and public engagement.

It is a common understanding that sovereignty has traditionally been regarded as the right of a state to govern a specific population and territory. This belief was once strongly tied to territory and state power, typically upheld by institutions such as the state, judiciary, and military. Yet the rise of digital platforms has added new layers of sovereignty that complicate and challenge traditional state power. The virtual space, characterized by its domainlessness and information networks, has enabled non-traditional subjects, including social movements, technology giants, and ordinary

people, to claim what I call a form of sovereignty over memory, in that they take control over and influence collective memory.

Digital sovereignty is about who has power over one's own narrative and story and who controls it. This idea is closely related to memory control and manipulability. Territorial and legal controls have been the traditional hallmarks of state sovereignty. Yet in modern societies, we can see this power subsumed as dominance over knowledge and recollection in the digital domain. This changing model of sovereignty contests the state's monopoly on memory and history. A growing body of political movements is hijacking these digital sovereignty spaces, utilizing technologies such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to shape the memory of events and the expression of trauma (Fuchs, 2017). #BlackLivesMatter is redefining digital sovereignty by seizing the story and challenging dominant media representations of racial violence, for instance. Through social media, the movement showcases the experiences of Black Americans and challenges the dominant media narrative with a more compelling portrayal. This type of digital sovereignty enables these groups to undercut the conventional mediators of memory in their approach to the public. Likewise, movements like #MeToo and #NeverAgain use digital media as well to forward versions of trauma and victimhood, and demand that institutions address historical and current wrongs (Papacharissi, 2015).

Political archives are no longer the exclusive preserve of the state. Still, they are increasingly mediated by digital technologies and platforms that play a role in shaping collective memory and framings of the past. As I have argued elsewhere, memory has always been a battlefield in which different groups contend for the ability to present those narratives as the "official" version. In the digital era, this contestation has intensified. The democratisation of memory through the digital and the requirement that historians are no longer the sole owners of narratives of past events, the exclusive custodians and manipulators of institutional memories, but rather one group in competition with other memory contributors, may

suggest something about the above condition. This emerging memory is fragmented when narratives and readings of events conflict and spread quickly. With no gatekeeping bodies such as historians or institutions, competing memory claims circulate without much oversight or accountability. As digital memory is viral, trauma can no longer simply be remembered, but must be actively constructed and politicised. As communities use memory to claim victimhood and power status, the digital archive becomes a site of contestation, where the history remembered is also rewritten (Jenkins, 2016).

The Role of Digital Media in Amplifying Trauma Politics. It is, however, the digital arena that seems most powerfully at work in multiplying trauma politics and spreading content related to historical resentments at an accelerating pace. The trauma narratives circulate to a broader public through the aid of visual media, like the films that depict police brutality or the memes that dramatize historic events. The affective charge of this type of memory form, which is usually accompanied by a demand for action, makes it ripe for virality and political relevance (Tufekci, 2017). This can become a power play that affects, for instance, the collective memory regarding phenomena such as slavery, colonisation, and other past traumatic events, for, at least in the case of the computer at hand, digital memory can have a double status: it can function both from the perspective of empowerment and from the perspective of manipulation.

Memories in the digital age are being fragmented and decentralized, making them especially vulnerable to disinformation campaigns. As mentioned above, digital memory's contagion can also be weaponized by malicious agents, including state-sponsored tropes and special interest machinations, whose purpose is to skew historical narratives and circumvent political goals. This disinformation manipulation capitalises on the emotive nature of memory and grievance politics, making it easier to influence public opinion and evoke fury. One illustration is that of the role the fragmented landscape of digital memory played during the 2016

U.S presidential campaign: the Russian-based Internet Research Agency created fake accounts and circulated divisive content. This media often tapped into racial, social, and cultural resentments, thereby deepening divisions and polarizing opinions. These disinformation operations erode confidence in historical memory, creating a situation where individual and group narratives cannot reach a basic common agreement on the past. The fast spread of fake or untrustworthy news widens political schisms and erodes the value of a constructive dialogue (Pomerantsev, 2019).

The transformation of digital memory into a tool of manipulation poses dire consequences for democratic societies as well. When facts are distorted and manipulated, it becomes challenging to have an intelligent and nuanced conversation about what happened in the past and its ongoing implications today. Memory wars: where different components and cohorts of audiences are using 'the web and social media to dispute the truth and reality of specific past events that have become the focus of digital media activism, contestation and contiguity' such conflict not only impedes collective agreement, but also risks an imbalanced habitat where emotions and ideologies overtake the 'truth' (Fuchs, 2017). This change has important implications for democratic conversation, making the public sphere more fragmented and polarised.

In today's digital mass society, memory is not just the act of recalling past events. The internet does not just amplify grievance politics; it is an arena for individuals and groups to express identities rooted in historic injustices. Through digital memory, there is the possibility of reclaiming oneself and one's stories and identities, which is to reclaim recognition and voice. This is especially visible in movements like #BlackLivesMatter, which has been using digital memory to create a group identity based on a shared consciousness of racial violence and discrimination.

However, digital memory may also contribute to the construction of an exclusive identity. For example, far-right groups have seized upon narratives of grievances and portrayed themselves

as victims, exploiting digital environments to spread xenophobic and antiimmigrant discourses. They are groups who define themselves; they center their sense of identity along lines of cultural and racial displacement, using perceived victimization as a rationale for excluding and even harming others. In this sense, digital memory serves to empower the politics of marginalized communities and the foundational politics underlying divided political views (Mudde, 2019). As digital memory becomes entwined with identity, it also emerges. Groups can mobilize collective action and campaign for political change by shaping their own narratives. But this online mobilisation is not without its difficulties. In the digital space, competing for attention, the spread of false information, and the ephemeral nature of digital memory all complicate the ability to reach consensus on political issues. The result is that the public sphere is becoming saturated with grievances and hatred, instead of dialogue and negotiation (Kellner, 2016).

Digital memory overwhelms democratic speech with its pervasive use. In a democratic society, meaningful political discussion is only possible with a common set of facts and an interest in multiple views. In the digital era, however, memory fragmentation poses challenges to constructing a unified work of memory. With digital platforms broadcasting conflicting narratives of victimhood, the possibility for a reasoned, fact-based dialogue disappears.

On average, digital memory retains emotional memories more effectively than logical ones, and such emotionally charged and engaging content is more effective in capturing user attention. This preference reinforces confirmation bias, as people are more likely to consume content that aligns with their existing beliefs. In the public sphere, political arguments often become heated, and people articulate grievances rather than thoughtful concerns. This change makes it significantly more challenging to address complex social problems, as opposed to groups hiding in echo chambers where their own memories and experiences are reinforced (Zuboff, 2019).

For democracies to function effectively, some common understanding and mutual respect must be in place. However, the viral nature of digital memory allows it to be used and abused for political purposes, further creating divisions and impasses on the road to reconciliation or action. It is in this context that digital channels have significant relevance in shaping political conversations. They have democratized memory access, but they also bring new challenges to democratic relationships and public deliberation.

Despite the fragmented and viral digital memory problems, it is possible to encourage a more responsible digital memory culture. Digital platforms will play a crucial role by prioritizing verified information and accommodating diverse perspectives. In addition, programs that promote digital literacy can equip users with the skills to navigate the complex landscape of digital information, enabling them to vet sources and identify misinformation (Tufekci, 2017). From civil society, initiatives can be generated to produce spaces for dialogue and mutual respect that would allow existing narratives to coexist without necessarily generating conflict. Projects like the Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive demonstrate how digital technologies can be utilized for both preserving memory and fostering learning and empathy. Additionally, the cooperation of politicians and teachers plays a crucial role in integrating digital memory into educational programs, making it easier for citizens to understand the constructed nature of memory and the importance of pluralism (Rappaport, 2016).

Especially in the digital age, stewardship of digital memory will matter profoundly for the future of democracy. Memory should serve as an instrument of discovery and reconciliation, not as a source of division and enmity. Through critical engagement, across an inclusive discussion and responsible practices, societies can chart a way through the muddle of viral archives and turn grievances into collective healing.

# Chapter 10
# Constructing a Political-Theological Paradigm of Peace

### 1. Anger as a Theological Resource

In both classical theology and modern political thought, anger has often been regarded with suspicion. It is framed as a dangerous emotion: unpredictable, irrational, corrosive to public order and ethical clarity. In theological traditions rooted in Christian metaphysics, anger is frequently subsumed under the category of the deadly sins — as wrath (ira) — associated with vengeance, destruction, and the antithesis of divine love. Likewise, liberal political theory, from Locke to Rawls, has tended to marginalise anger, preferring the language of reasoned deliberation, consensus, and procedural justice. Yet, this ideological repression of anger obscures a crucial truth: anger is a signal of injustice. It erupts where pain is silenced, where dignity is denied, and where the structures of power refuse recognition. In this post-secular age, amid the wreckage of liberal institutions and the intensification of violence, the time has come to re-evaluate anger not as pathology, but as a theological resource. This chapter argues that political anger, far from being antithetical to peace, is in fact a precondition for its realization. Drawing on theological and philosophical voices — from James Cone and Hannah Arendt to Judith Butler and Rowan Williams — we will demonstrate that anger, when grounded in ethical discernment and collective memory, can illuminate the path toward justice. It is not a force to be repressed, but a power to be transformed.

The historical aversion to anger is well-documented. Aristotle, in Rhetoric, defines anger as “a desire, accompanied by pain, for conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight” (Aristotle, 2007). Though he acknowledges its motivational potential, anger in much

of the classical tradition is subordinated to reason. Christianity complicates this further. While righteous anger (ira recta) is acknowledged in figures like Christ driving out the moneychangers, the dominant ascetic tradition sees anger as antithetical to divine nature. Augustine cautions against anger as a disturbance of the soul, and Aquinas classifies it as a vice when it is ungoverned by reason (Aquinas, 1948).

However, these traditions also contain countercurrents. The Hebrew prophets are repeatedly driven by divine wrath against injustice. Theologian Walter Brueggemann (1984) highlights how lament and rage are central to the biblical tradition's vocabulary of Faith. Anger, in this light, becomes an act of covenantal fidelity — a refusal to accept the world's brokenness as final. In contemporary theology, James Cone (2011) radically centres anger as the theological response of the oppressed. Cone's theology of Black rage — developed in response to centuries of slavery, segregation, and systemic violence — asserts that God is angry at racial injustice, and that this divine anger must inform Christian ethics. "God's wrath," he writes, "is the love of God in regard to the forces opposed to liberation." Such a perspective challenges the liberal Christian tendency to pacify anger in the name of harmony. For Cone, anger is love sharpened into protest.

In the modern political landscape, few theorists have engaged with anger more profoundly than Hannah Arendt. Though

Arendt is cautious of anger's volatility, she recognises its necessity in revolutionary moments. In "On Revolution", she contrasts the American and French Revolutions, noting that the failure to transform the "righteous anger of the poor" into enduring institutions of justice led to violence and tyranny (Arendt, 1963). While she warns against anger's descent into vengeance, Arendt sees it as the force that disrupts normalisation — that calls the polis back to its foundational commitment to justice.

More recently, Judith Butler has theorised anger as a product of grievability — the recognition that certain lives, when lost or violated, are not mourned because they were never fully recognised.

In Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? (2009), she asks: "Whose lives count as lives?" Anger, in this context, is not merely emotional excess; it is the expression of those whose humanity is denied by dominant frames. For Butler, politicised mourning and righteous indignation are essential practices in reclaiming dignity. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum (2016) defends a critical role for anger in ethical life. In Anger and Forgiveness, she argues that while certain forms of retributive anger can be ethically corrosive, others—particularly forward-looking anger—can motivate action and policy. This "Transition-Anger" is future-oriented, focusing not on vengeance but on transformation. In Nussbaum's words, "anger can protest injustice without endorsing payback."In these formulations, anger ceases to be a force that is antisocial. It becomes instead a moral grammar — a way of naming the world's wrongs and refusing to be complicit in their concealment.

To speak of anger theologically is to locate it within a broader discourse of lament, judgment, and eschatological hope. It is to say that anger arises not simply from unmet desires, but from a violated covenant. In this sense, anger can be understood as the ethical affect of those who take the divine demand for justice seriously. It is what happens when one stands in the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be. Rowan Williams, in his work on public theology, speaks of prophetic anger as a form of "interruptive speech" — the voice that calls the people back to their deepest commitments (Williams, 2005). Anger becomes a form of spiritual attentiveness, a refusal to allow suffering to be normalised. For Williams, such anger must be disciplined by prayer, reflection, and a commitment to the common good — but it must not be extinguished.

In liberation theology more broadly, anger is indispensable. Gustavo Gutiérrez (1988) sees it as the proper response to "institutionalised sin" — the systemic violence embedded in economic and political structures. Without anger, there is no solidarity; without solidarity, no transformation. Here, theological anger is not an unbounded rage divorced from ethics. It is anger

formed by love, shaped by lament, and directed toward the neighbour and the stranger alike. It is the anger of Christ weeping at Lazarus' tomb, not because of death alone, but because the world refuses to see and respond to suffering.

**The Conditions of Theological Anger**

For anger to become a theological resource, it must meet several conditions:

1. Moral clarity: The anger must arise from a clear violation of justice, not personal grievance alone. It must be oriented toward the dignity of the other.

2. Communal discernment: Anger should be processed in the community, subject to critique, and informed by collective memory. Prophetic anger is never solitary.

3. Non-violence: While anger may be fierce, it must not become vengeance. As Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) argued, the pursuit of justice must always be chastened by humility.

4. Hope: Theological anger is eschatological — it is rooted in a belief that transformation is possible, that history is not closed, and that peace can emerge from conflict.

Under these conditions, anger becomes not a barrier to peace but its midwife.

The refusal to acknowledge anger in political theology is not a sign of maturity — it is a form of denial. In a world marred by systemic injustice, ecological catastrophe, and spiritual fragmentation, anger is not merely appropriate; it is necessary. But it must be anger that sees, that listens, and that acts in hope. This is the paradox: peace cannot come without anger. But not just any anger — it must be anger transfigured by justice, disciplined by love, and directed toward repair. The future of political theology will depend not on suppressing anger, but on redeeming it. 2. Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and the Politics of Grace

Suppose political anger, as argued in the previous section, is a just and necessary response to systemic injustice and existential injury. In that case, the follow-up question becomes all the more urgent: what comes after anger? What form of political life, what

ethical imagination, might be capable of healing wounds, restoring dignity, and rebuilding trust? In the wake of historical wrongs — colonialism, racial oppression, political betrayal, cultural genocide — anger can name and indict. But to build a livable world, anger alone is not enough. This part addresses Forgiveness and reconciliation not as sentimental ideals or pious fantasies, but as political and theological practices that respond to rupture without erasing it. Drawing upon the works of Hannah Arendt, Desmond Tutu, Miroslav Volf, and Jacques Derrida, we argue that grace—understood as the undeserved yet necessary gesture of ethical openness—offers an alternative foundation for politics beyond retribution. In a broken political order, grace is not the denial of anger, but its transformation. It holds open the possibility of reconstituting the human.

In her seminal work, The Human Condition (1958), Hannah Arendt identifies Forgiveness as one of the few capacities humans have to interrupt the consequences of their actions. “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done,” she writes, “our capacity to act would… be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover” (Arendt, 1958). For Arendt, Forgiveness is not a private or spiritual act alone; it is a political necessity in a world where action is irreversible and plural. Forgiveness, in this sense, is not a form of forgetting. It does not deny the wrong, nor does it demand that victims remain passive. Rather, it is the political practice of refusing to let the past foreclose the future. Forgiveness creates space for new beginnings by acknowledging that no political community can survive without the ability to move beyond injury. However, Arendt also warns that Forgiveness is fraught with risk. It cannot be compelled; it cannot be administered bureaucratically. And when instrumentalised by the state — as in the context of blanket amnesties or post-conflict truth commissions — Forgiveness can become a cover for impunity. Its power lies in its voluntary nature, in the courage of those who forgive when they could justly withhold.

Nowhere has the tension between justice and reconciliation been more evident than in South Africa's post-apartheid experience, under the moral and spiritual leadership of Desmond Tutu. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) sought to provide a model of national healing that did not rely on retribution. Central to this process was the public telling of the truth, the acknowledgment of harm, and the offering of amnesty in exchange for full disclosure. Tutu's theology of Forgiveness is deeply rooted in Christian conceptions of grace. In No Future Without Forgiveness (1999), he insists that Forgiveness is not weakness but strength — a refusal to be held hostage by the past. "Forgiveness is not forgetting," Tutu writes. "It is abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin" (Tutu, 1999). Yet this abandonment is not unconditional. It demands truth-telling, remorse, and recognition.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) remains a subject of significant controversy. For many, it represented a bold and unprecedented attempt to confront systemic violence without descending into cycles of retributive vengeance. Yet critics have raised serious concerns. Some contend that the Commission allowed perpetrators of gross human rights violations to escape meaningful justice, since amnesty was often granted in exchange for confessions rather than through formal punishment. Others argue that the TRC, in privileging national unity and reconciliation, did so at the expense of individual accountability and the deep need of victims for closure. Beyond these criticisms, scholars also highlight the structural continuities of racialised inequality, economic dispossession, and social marginalisation that endured after the reconciliation process, suggesting that the Commission could not by itself dismantle the entrenched legacies of apartheid. In Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (1996), Miroslav Volfdraws from his experience of the Balkan conflict to propose a theology of reconciliation grounded in the embrace of the enemy. For Volf, true reconciliation does not deny the reality of evil. It insists on naming the wrong, resisting it, and yet refusing to be defined by it.

Theologically, this means that God's grace is not the cancellation of judgment, but its transformation into communion. Volf's model of embrace involves a fourfold movement: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms, and letting go. Each movement captures a dimension of reconciliatory vulnerability. The self begins to the other, risks being wounded again, and yet refuses to retaliate. For Volf, grace is not mere sentiment — it is the disruption of the cycle of vengeance. Critically, Volf also engages the memory of injury. He insists that Forgiveness does not require forgetting; instead, it requires remembering rightly. Memory must become redemptive — not because it makes pain disappear, but because it allows a different future to emerge from the ruins.

Jacques Derrida most rigorously articulates the philosophical challenge to Forgiveness in On Forgiveness (2001). Derrida distinguishes between "conditional forgiveness" — granted when repentance, confession, or punishment occurs — and "pure forgiveness," which he describes as impossible yet necessary. True Forgiveness, he claims, must forgive the unforgivable, without condition, and without seeking restoration. It is a gift without expectation. This radical formulation unsettles both theology and politics. For Derrida, Forgiveness must exceed all instrumental logic — it cannot be reduced to national healing, political expediency, or emotional closure. It is, in a sense, divine. It testifies to the incommensurability of justice and grace. While Derrida's account resists practical application, it serves a critical function: it reminds us that Forgiveness, if it is to mean anything, must retain its excess, its ethical strangeness. Political Forgiveness cannot simply be a strategic gesture. It must remain open to risk, to failure, and to the mystery of human dignity.

The inclusion of Forgiveness in political theology cannot mean the repression of anger. As theologian Emmanuel Katongole (2011) has noted in his work on African political violence, theological peace requires a full reckoning with rage. To forgive is not to bypass justice but to reframe it — not as the imposition of punishment, but as the restoration of relation. Forgiveness, in this

vision, is not an endpoint but a practice, sustained over time. It may take the form of reparations, apologies, institutional reforms, and symbolic acts. It must be accompanied by accountability; otherwise, it becomes sentimental and hollow. Moreover, Forgiveness is not symmetrical. The oppressed are not obligated to forgive; the powerful are compelled to repent. Inverting this structure — demanding Forgiveness without justice — only reinscribes harm.

In an age increasingly shaped by anger, polarisation, and the lingering presence of deep historical wounds, the language of Forgiveness and reconciliation often appears tenuous, even fragile. To many, it may seem naïve to invoke such concepts in the face of entrenched injustice and unhealed trauma. Yet precisely in their fragility lies their radical potential, for Forgiveness and reconciliation may be the only real chance we have at preserving political community in a time of fragmentation. Their power does not lie in erasing conflict, silencing grievances, or pretending that history has not left scars. Rather, their strength lies in their capacity to transform conflict into a new possibility for re-humanization—a process through which both victims and perpetrators can be reseen, not as abstractions or enemies, but as human beings bound together in a shared, if fractured, future. 3. Reimagining Sovereignty: Beyond State and Sacrifice

The idea of sovereignty has served as the cornerstone of modern political life. From the Westphalian order to the liberal nation-state, sovereignty has been imagined as the state's absolute power to command, enforce, and decide — particularly in moments of crisis. But beneath this juridico-political structure lies a theological substrate, often overlooked: the idea that sovereignty mimics or even replaces divine omnipotence. Carl Schmitt (2005) famously argued that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts." The sovereign decision is not merely a political one; it carries the symbolic weight of the sacred, the power to give life meaning—or to withhold it. Yet in our present age — one of climate collapse, populist violence, disintegrating institutions, and rising political anger — the concept

of sovereignty is under strain. As the legitimacy of states declines and as sacrificial logics are revealed in their cruelty, political theology must ask: can we reimagine sovereignty without sacrifice? Can there be authority without violence, belonging without exclusion, power without blood? This section explores that possibility. Drawing on postliberal theology, critiques of state violence, and non-Western imaginaries, we argue for a reimagining of sovereignty that rejects the sacrificial logic and instead turns toward mutual vulnerability, responsibility, and grace.

Carl Schmitt's claim that "sovereign is he who decides on the exception" captures the essential link between power and theology in modern political theory (Schmitt, 2005). The sovereign, in this view, suspends the law to preserve it — a move that legitimises violence in the name of order. Political theology, for Schmitt, is not a separate sphere but the hidden grammar of secular modernity. His thought reveals that the modern state does not abandon theology; it appropriates its forms while denying its content. But Schmitt's account is not neutral. It valorises decision over deliberation, authority over reciprocity, and homogeneity over pluralism. The exception becomes a site of theological and political redemption — a moment in which the sovereign sacrifices legality to restore unity. The logic is fundamentally sacrificial: lives may be taken, freedoms suspended, enemies created, all in the name of a higher coherence. In Schmitt's political theology, sacrifice is the price of sovereignty. This framework continues to shape contemporary governance — in authoritarian populism, in permanent states of emergency, and in nationalist politics that portray dissent as heresy. The challenge for a post-Schmittian theology is not simply to critique sacrifice, but to imagine political life beyond it.

The anthropologist-theologian René Girard provides a compelling framework for understanding the link between sovereignty and sacrifice. In "Violence and the Sacred" (1977), Girard argues that early human societies developed sacrificial rituals to contain mimetic violence—that is, violence arising from imitation and rivalry. The scapegoat — an innocent victim — was

killed or expelled to restore social harmony. Religion, in this view, originates not in transcendence, but in bloodshed concealed by myth. Modern politics, Girard suggests, has not escaped this pattern. Even ostensibly secular states rely on scapegoating — immigrants, minorities, dissidents — to preserve order. The violence of the state is masked as necessity, its victims rendered invisible or disposable. If Girard is correct, then reimagining sovereignty requires breaking the scapegoat mechanism. It means rejecting the lie that peace requires bloodshed, that identity needs an enemy, and that unity must be bought at the expense of exclusion. It means, in theological terms, recognising the Cross — not as divine sacrifice to appease wrath, but as the exposure and refusal of the sacrificial lie (Alison, 1993). Jesus is not the last sacrifice, but the end of sacrifice.

Critiques of sovereignty also emerge from postcolonial and indigenous theologies, which challenge the Eurocentric presumption that the nation-state is the normative form of political organization. Scholars such as R. S. Sugirtharajah and Tink Tinker have noted that the imposition of state sovereignty in the Global South was often an act of colonial violence, rather than liberation. The modern state — with its borders, police, and legal codes — was constructed as a colonial instrument of control rather than a community. This has implications for political theology. If sovereignty is rooted in domination rather than consent, its theological legitimation must be interrogated. The postcolonial context reveals that sovereignty, far from being a neutral principle, often perpetuates sacrificial structures: the criminalisation of indigenous identity, the silencing of subaltern voices, and the marginalisation of non-Western epistemologies. The theological challenge, then, is not to baptise the nation-state, but to decentre it — to imagine forms of political life that emerge from shared vulnerability, reciprocity, and hospitality, rather than sovereignty as domination.

Is there a way to speak of sovereignty without returning to domination? Some theologians have attempted to reclaim the term,

not as absolute power but as relational authority grounded in responsibility and care. William Cavanaugh, for instance, distinguishes between the state's monopoly on violence and the Church's model of shared power rooted in mutuality. In Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism (2002), Cavanaugh envisions the Church not as a theocratic institution, but as a counter-sovereign polity—one that witnesses to a form of life beyond coercion. Sovereignty, in this model, is dispersed, participatory, and shaped by sacramental practice rather than military or economic control. Similarly, Rowan Williams has argued for political authority grounded in "attentiveness to the dignity of the other." In Faith in the Public Square (2012), he suggests that power must be "answerable to the claim of the voiceless." For Williams, authority does not derive from command, but from the capacity to hear, to serve, and to make space for the stranger. This is not sovereignty as lordship, but sovereignty as listening. Such visions remain fragile and countercultural. But they mark the beginning of a theological reimagination — a shift from sovereignty as force to sovereignty as hospitality.

To move beyond political anger, we must move beyond political structures that generate it by design. Sovereignty, as it has been historically constructed, is a mechanism of exclusion. It creates borders, defines enemies, and demands sacrifices. It is sustained by fear and often clothed in divine language. But theology offers another story. The divine is not the one who demands sacrifice, but the one who enters suffering. The Cross does not affirm the necessity of violence; it reveals its futility. The resurrection is not triumph by force, but the vindication of love. A political theology of peace must therefore reject sacrificial sovereignty. It must imagine communities not held together by fear, but by grace; not by the sovereign's decision, but by the people's shared life. This is not utopia. It is a different starting point — a refusal to found politics on blood.

**4. Listening, Slowness, and the Ethics of Attention**

We inhabit an age of rapid-fire communication, algorithmic acceleration, and distracted attention. Politics has become a theatre of instantaneous reaction, where nuance collapses into a slogan, and reflection is drowned by perpetual urgency. In such a context, it is no accident that political anger flourishes—not because it is wrong to be angry, but because we lack the depth of attention required to transform that anger into ethical insight or structural change. Modern political life, shaped by digital technologies and neoliberal temporalities, discourages slowness, silences listening, and disfigures the human capacity for contemplation. In this section, we propose that a political theology of peace must begin by reclaiming the ethical disciplines of listening and slowness. Drawing on thinkers such as Simone Weil, Byung-Chul Han, Rowan Williams, and Ivan Illich, we argue that attentiveness is not a passive state but an active ethical practice—a form of resistance against the commodification of time, the brutality of speed, and the erasure of the other. The ethics of attention are thus a theological project: it seeks to remake political community through presence, patience, and receptivity, rather than domination or haste.

The moral philosopher and mystic Simone Weil defined attention as the "rarest and purest form of generosity" (Weil, 1952). For Weil, attention is not merely focus; it is the radical suspension of one's own ego in order to receive the presence of the other. In her theological anthropology, the attentive soul mirrors the divine act of creation itself: the act of making space for the other to exist. Weil's conception of attention is deeply rooted in theology. To truly attend, one must set aside the will to possess, the impulse to control, and the rush to respond. This applies to both prayer and politics. The attentive person does not act hastily; they wait, listen, and receive. In Weil's words: "The soul empties itself of all its own content in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as it is" (Weil, 1952).In political terms, this means cultivating spaces and practices that welcome vulnerability — that listen before they legislate, that linger before they make a decision. Such

attention is rare because it is costly. It requires us to resist the speed of ideology and market logic. But without it, there can be no real community — only performance. In contrast to Weil's stillness, the Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han diagnoses modernity as a "society of fatigue" (Han, 2015). In his analysis, late capitalist societies have moved from disciplinary regimes to achievement-based coercion, where individuals internalise the demand for acceleration, productivity, and perpetual availability. Time itself becomes a commodity to be managed and optimised. In such a world, attention is fragmented, and silence is feared. Han links this to a deeper cultural pathology. The loss of slowness is the loss of ritual, meaning, and depth. The faster we live, the more we burn out. The more we achieve, the more we collapse. Political life, in this model, mirrors digital life: impulsive, polarised, and incapable of reflection. The "shitstorm" (Han's term) becomes a metaphor for our age — a torrent of outrage without pause, digestion, or transformation (Han, 2017). Political theology must confront this regime of speed. For Han, resistance lies in contemplative practices — the recovery of silence, walking, listening, and the observance of liturgical time. Theology offers a different temporality: one not defined by market rhythms or Twitter feeds, but by the sabbath, ritual, and kairos—the time of God. To build peace requires a spiritual reorientation of time itself.

Listening is not simply hearing. It is an ethical posture: the act of making oneself present to what is other, unexpected, or painful. In an age of distraction, listening becomes an act of political courage. As Rowan Williams (2012) puts it, "to listen is to give someone the space to be who they are, without the compulsion to fit into your categories."Listening, in this sense, is profoundly political. It challenges the sovereignty of the self. It refuses the arrogance of immediacy. It demands slowness, humility, and vulnerability. In deliberative democracy, listening is often cast in procedural terms — waiting your turn to speak. But in theological terms, listening is a form of hospitality. It is the act of receiving the stranger without precondition. This has direct implications for

political theology. Suppose we are to rebuild political trust, especially across lines of historical injustice and anger. In that case, we must create conditions where deep listening can occur — in truth commissions, public rituals, restorative circles, community forums, and liturgies of lament. These are not peripheral to politics. They are its foundation.

Modern technologies do not merely mediate our attention; they shape and structure it. Social media platforms are designed for interruption, engagement, and emotional intensity, not for contemplation or care. The algorithm rewards outrage. The scroll rewards immediacy. In such an environment, the ethics of attention are systematically undermined. Ivan Illich, writing before the digital age, anticipated this crisis in his critique of technological "tools" that restructure human relations. In Tools for Conviviality (1973), Illich warned that certain technologies erode autonomy and conviviality—the shared life of mutual presence. While he was writing about cars and schools, his insight applies to smartphones and digital surveillance: our tools reshape our souls. Illich's alternative is convivial technology — tools that foster presence rather than distraction, encounter rather than escape. Theologically, this calls for a politics rooted in embodiment, ritual, and mutual recognition. Algorithms cannot mediate peace. It requires physical, temporal, and moral presence. What would it mean to build a politics that honours slowness? Not inefficiency or inertia, but the kind of time that makes listening possible, that allows memory to emerge, that holds space for lament and hope. In Christian theology, this vision is captured by the sabbath — the sacred interruption of work, the refusal to instrumentalise time. Walter Brueggemann (2014) argues that it is a resistance to Pharaoh's economy — the endless production of bricks without straw. It is the declaration that not everything must be earned, that time can be received rather than managed. On the sabbath, the human being is not defined by utility but by belovedness. A politics of peace must therefore become a politics of sabbath. It must build institutions, rituals, and habits that slow down, that listen deeply, and that make room for grace.

Without this transformation of time, no amount of policy will suffice. Peace is not speed. It is attention.

Political anger is not healed by distraction or denial. It is healed through the difficult, ethical, and theological practices of listening, slowness, and presence. These are not luxuries. They are the necessary conditions for any politics worthy of the name. In an age of anger, noise, and algorithmic frenzy, the recovery of attention is revolutionary. It says: "I see you. I hear you. I will not rush past your pain." It is the beginning of peace — not peace as erasure, but peace as presence.

**5 .Broken Promise and the Possibility of Repair**

Modern politics was born under the sign of promise. The Enlightenment, liberal constitutionalism, and decolonisation each gestured toward a future governed by reason, freedom, and equality. Political theology, whether in its explicit or disguised forms, often served as the ground upon which these promises were articulated: that the people are sovereign, that justice is universal, that history moves towards emancipation. But as the 21st century advances under the shadow of climate collapse, resurgent authoritarianism, digital disintegration, and unresolved colonial trauma, the promise appears broken. This section asks: Can the broken promise of modern politics be repaired? And if so, how? What role can political theology play in this difficult work? Rather than a nostalgic return to idealized origins or a cynical acceptance of collapse, we argue for a theological politics of repair—a politics that begins in lament, engages in truth-telling, and dares to hope without illusion. In this effort, the works of Paul Ricoeur, José Esteban Muñoz, Willie James Jennings, Achille Mbembe, and Dorothy Day offer valuable guidance. They help us envision repair not as restitution to a lost purity, but as creative re-weaving of the torn social fabric.

A myth of perpetual improvement sustained the liberal project: that through rational discourse, democratic institutions, and market integration, societies would progress toward harmony. This narrative — tied deeply to the theological motif of providence —

collapsed under the weight of its exclusions: slavery, empire, patriarchy, and ecological degradation. The "universal" subject of liberalism was never universal; it was constructed in the image of the powerful. Paul Ricoeur's reflections on wounded memory offer a helpful starting point. He argues that human communities must live with the memory of evil — not to remain trapped in guilt, but to refuse amnesia (Ricoeur, 2004). Forgetting, in politics, often masquerades as peace. But it is false peace, purchased at the cost of the silenced. The task of political theology is not to return us to a mythic moment of coherence, but to sustain communities in the midst of fracture. Repair begins by naming the brokenness — not as aberration, but as the real. There is no untouched ground to which we can return. There is only the possibility of stitching something more just from the threads we still hold.

If the promise is broken, why not surrender to despair? The late cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz, in his influential work Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (2009), urged his readers to resist treating the present as a totalising prison that forecloses the possibility of transformation. For Muñoz, the here and now should not be understood as the horizon of all that is possible, but rather as a limiting framework that can be unsettled through critical imagination. Within his queer-of-colour critique, he articulated hope not as a naïve optimism or a denial of present suffering, but as a deeply political, performative, and speculative act — an anticipatory mode of living that gestures toward worlds and futures not yet realised. In this sense, hope functions as a form of resistance, enabling minoritised communities to envision modes of being and belonging beyond the constraints of heteronormativity, racial capitalism, and social exclusion. Muñoz thus invites us to reimagine politics itself as animated by a horizon of possibility, where utopia is not an unreachable dream but a guiding force that calls us to strive for a more just and inclusive future. He argued it is "not yet here," but glimpsed in the gestures, art, and yearnings of marginalised lives. Hope is not a program; it is a disidentification with the world as it is. Political theology, in this sense, must

become apocalyptic — not in the sense of catastrophe, but in the Greek sense of apokalypsis, unveiling. The unveiling of injustice, yes — but also of new possibilities. Repair is not simply a technocratic adjustment; it is the reactivation of moral and spiritual imagination. To repair the broken promise, theology must speak not only of ethics, but of beauty, ritual, joy, and the stubbornness of the sacred in unlikely places. Hope emerges not when suffering ends, but when it is shared, honoured, and transfigured.

Willie James Jennings offers one of the most profound theological critiques of modern political formation. In The Christian Imagination (2010), he demonstrates how colonial Christianity severed the bond between land, body, and belonging, thereby producing racialized and placeless subjects. Repair, in Jennings' vision, must involve not only economic or legal redress, but theological reformation: a remapping of identity that reconnects people to creation, community, and the divine. Jennings speaks of replanting — a metaphor for re-rooting life in contexts where displacement has been the norm. Replanting is not nostalgic. It does not seek to restore a pristine past. It is adaptive, humble, and patient. It listens to the land, learns from Indigenous wisdom, and resists the violent abstraction of modern statecraft. In political terms, this means moving beyond the language of restitution alone. True repair requires a spiritual reorientation, a new grammar of belonging that is not mediated by nation-state, market, or race. Theology, in this mode, is not merely critical. It becomes constructive.

Achille Mbembe's work on the postcolonial condition offers another critical angle. In Necropolitics (2019), Mbembe exposes how modern sovereignty is often exercised through the control of death—a grim echo of the sacrificial logic explored earlier. Yet even in such bleak terrains, Mbembe locates a poetics of survival: the fragments, dreams, and practices that resist the finality of domination. Repair, for Mbembe, cannot simply be about compensation. It must involve recognition of harm, transformation of institutions, and the restitution of dignity. But it must also

acknowledge that some wounds cannot be repaired in any final sense. There is no clean ledger, only the ongoing struggle to honour the broken. This is where poetics — as against mere policy — becomes essential. Political theology must recover the language of lament, testimony, and invocation. It must be capable of speaking to the unspeakable, of holding together contradiction, of pointing beyond technocracy toward the mystery of justice. Perhaps no one embodies the politics of repair more than Dorothy Day, the Catholic anarchist and co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. Day's praxis was marked by radical hospitality, solidarity with people experiencing poverty, and unwavering resistance to war. But her theology of repair was grounded not in ideology, but in grace — the belief that every human, no matter how wounded, remains capable of love. Day's work reminds us that repair is a relational process. It happens in soup kitchens, in jail cells, at vigils, and in acts of stubborn presence. It is sustained by practices of daily fidelity, not grand gestures. Political theology must resist the temptation to leap from critique to abstraction. It must remain grounded in the embodied, slow, painful work of rebuilding trust.

Lament, too, occupies a central place in any discourse of reconciliation and repair. Without the practice of lament, efforts at repair risk collapsing into denial, prematurely closing wounds in the name of resolution or progress. Lament resists such closure by insisting that grief be acknowledged in its own right, rather than subsumed into instrumental strategies of political utility or social management. In this sense, lament functions as an ethical and theological posture: it honours the weight of suffering and loss without reducing mourning to a means toward an end. It creates and sustains a space in which the irreparability of certain wounds can be named, where the unredeemed character of history is allowed to appear without being silenced. At the same time, lament gestures beyond itself, holding open a fragile horizon of trust in what cannot be predicted or controlled. It keeps alive the possibility that communities fractured by violence may discover forms of solidarity that are not yet visible, and that futures marked by justice and peace

might still emerge, even if their contours remain uncertain. In this way, lament functions both as resistance to denial and as an act of hope, grounding the work of repair in honesty while refusing to foreclose the possibility of transformation.

The grand promise of modern politics—that human beings would finally govern themselves with justice, live together in freedom, and recognize one another as equals—has, in many respects, collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions. The Enlightenment dream of self-rule and universal equality has too often given way to structures of domination, exclusion, and inequality, leaving behind broken institutions and disillusioned citizens. To acknowledge this failure is not merely a matter of political critique; it is a recognition that the frameworks within which modern politics has operated have proven insufficient to secure the dignity and flourishing of all.

The task of theology in this context is neither to deny the depth of this failure nor to romanticise the fragments left in its wake. Theology must resist the temptation to turn ruins into idols of nostalgia, clinging to what is shattered as though it were whole and intact. Instead, it is called to cultivate faithfulness amidst the ruins, to search for signs of renewal not as guarantees or certainties, but as wagers of hope. To speak of "resurrection" in this sense is not to claim that history inevitably bends toward redemption, but rather to affirm the possibility of life emerging precisely where death and despair appear most final. Such a wager sustains the imagination when political solutions falter, keeping alive the conviction that despair is not the final horizon of human community.

Within this framework, repair cannot be understood as a singular or conclusive act, a moment after which all wounds are closed and injustices reconciled. Rather, repair is better conceived as a perpetual vocation—an ongoing commitment to mending the torn fabric of human relations and social life. It is theological in that it acknowledges the infinite worth and irreducible dignity of every human life, even and especially when political or economic systems fail to recognise such worth. It refuses to allow the failures of

history to erase the divine affirmation of human value. At the same time, repair is political, for it dares to believe that history is not sealed off by necessity, that alternative futures remain possible, and that communities fractured by violence or exploitation might yet discover new forms of solidarity.

In this sense, the theological imagination does not retreat from politics; rather, it expands it. It insists that justice and freedom are not exhausted by modern political projects, but point toward deeper horizons of meaning in which the possibility of renewal endures. To remain faithful in the ruins is thus both a theological stance of hope and a political act of defiance, testifying to the conviction that even in the face of failure, the work of repair continues and history can indeed be otherwise.

# Chapter 11
# The End of Political Secularism?

### 1. Crisis of Legitimacy in Governance

In every corner of the world, whether in mature liberal democracies or in places where an authoritarian regime is transitioning to something better, we are witnessing a crisis of political legitimacy. The legitimacy of traditional bases of authority, such as constitutions, representative legislatures, bureaucratic expertise, and secular rationality, has come to be distrusted, less valued, and less effective in resolving conflicts. And what was hailed as the "end of history", denoting the triumph of liberal democratic rule and secular constitutionalism, instead turned into a historical impasse. The very architecture of the modern state, supposed by so many since the Enlightenment to be built on rational legal authority and secular impartiality, is under question—not just by marginal populists or theocrats but by serious thinkers across the political spectrum.

This study contends that it is indeed more than a simple mismanagement and economic shortfall: it is an unraveling of the edifice of secular legitimacy that the crisis is ultimately about. This state of affairs necessitates a reconsideration of the theological account through modern, secular frameworks and calls for a revival of political theology if we are to grasp the present malaise. Embedded in Max Weber's (1919) pathbreaking definition of the modern state, as an entity with the exclusive right to use force in a defined territory, was a faith in procedural rationality and bureaucratic neutrality. The 'disenchantment of the world' was crucial to this story. For Weber, the essence of politics lay beyond charisma and theocracy, in bringing order to the realm of legality and institutions. However, this consensus among the secular is now

broken down, where authority is derived from reason and legitimacy comes from established procedures.

From the 6 January Capitol riots in the United States to the storming of Brazil's presidential palace, and from the farmer protests in India to the Gilets Jaunes movement in France, dissatisfaction with state institutions is not merely a reactionary phenomenon; it is deeply entrenched. This discontent is manifested in declining voter participation, the widespread acceptance of conspiracy theories, scepticism towards the media, and even the outright dismissal of judicial rulings by state officials themselves. The issue is not necessarily that these institutions fail in their procedures; rather, their moral authority is becoming increasingly unconvincing. The modern belief that procedural rationality and bureaucratic impartiality are sufficient to uphold political life eroded over time. Indeed, as Schmitt (2005) argued long ago, political power cannot rely solely on legality; it must also appeal to the sacred.

Carl Schmitt's notion of political theology continues to exert a significant influence on secular thought. His assertion that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt, 2005, p. 36) transcends a mere historical observation, offering instead a metaphysical analysis. The authority of the sovereign, sanctity of the constitution, and the state's extraordinary powers during crises are all vestiges of theological ideas that have been transmuted into political concepts. In the current crisis of legitimacy, Schmitt's ideas have acquired renewed significance. The sovereign's ability to "decide the exception" has been underscored recently through the invocation of emergency powers during the COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergencies, and anti-terrorism legislation— each instance resulting in the suspension of liberal norms under the guise of salvation. These exceptions do not reveal the weakness of political theology, but rather its persistent, albeit concealed, presence. The state continues to perform acts akin to miracles, determines

redemption, and identifies adversaries, even under the pretence of secularism.

Jürgen Habermas, a distinguished proponent of the postEnlightenment liberal order, has increasingly acknowledged the limitations inherent in relying exclusively on procedural legitimacy. In his later works, Habermas (2008) introduces the concept of a "post-secular society", positing that even within secular democracies, religion continues to serve as a source of meaning, unity, and ethical motivation. While Habermas did not reject secularism, he conceded that democratic institutions cannot depend solely on procedural rationality for legitimacy. He contends that the public sphere should accommodate religious discourse, provided that it is expressed in secular terms. However, this requirement for translation raises a critical issue: Does it diminish political depth? This is the dilemma confronting Habermas: if religion is permitted in the public domain only after undergoing self-transformation, its sacred influence is effectively neutralised in advance. Consequently, political legitimacy remains tethered to a secular framework that continues to alienate significant segments of the population, particularly in postcolonial, multireligious societies.

In postcolonial states, regardless of the adoption of the vocabulary of secular legitimacy, a premium is hard to enjoy. The secular state, often presented as an inheritance of colonial rule or an elite-inspired concept, is not always in harmony with native moral traditions. The liberal theoretical framework of individual freedom, procedural justice, and rational argument is often one that does not resonate with communities that base their ethical principles on communal, sacred, and ancestral norms. Aditya Nigam (2008) views the postcolonial state as being trapped between mimicry and disarticulation, as an imitative secular form that replicates the colonial state yet lacks the symbolic force to command loyalty in any genuine sense. In these circumstances, especially in India, political discontent is not just economic or cultural; it is theological. Movements like Majoritarian counterpose sacrality to a Western, secular state that tramples their native metaphysics under the boot

sole of the Western secular economy. The rise of the digital age has intensified the crisis. Social media platforms are the new public squares, but they are not conducive to reasoned debate; instead, they foster viral anger and polarization. Hannah Arendt's notion of the public sphere as a space for deliberation and political judgment is being overtaken by the logic of algorithmic velocity (Arendt, 1958). Institutional confidence deteriorates when confronted with decentralised networks that produce "truth", wherein conspiracy theories, misinformation, and religious references converge. The liberal state, already challenged in its self-justification through legal frameworks and constitutions, now competes with WhatsApp messages, viral memes, and digital martyrs. The digital public sphere is not devoid of politics; rather, it is imbued with theological elements. It engenders new rituals, martyrs, and sacraments, from demonstrative protests of climate activists to the online veneration of political assassins. The sacred re-emerges not through traditional religious institutions but through the viral exhibition of political purity. This analysis does not advocate for a complete rejection of secularism, but acknowledges that secularism alone is insufficient to sustain political legitimacy. The institutions of liberal modernity — courts, constitutions, and elections — require reevaluation in light of their underlying theological foundations. Political theology is not a replacement for democracy; it constitutes the fundamental structure of every political system, whether it is acknowledged or not.

Mishra (2017) argues that the anger expressed by those who perceive themselves as marginalized is justified, as it represents a demand for meaning, dignity, and justice that secular laws often fail to address. To restore political legitimacy in contemporary society, it is imperative to transcend mere policy improvements or fairer electoral processes and instead re-engage with the sacred: collective moral visions, historical grievances, and ethical commitments that form the foundation of political existence. In the subsequent sections, we will examine how the resurgence of religious nationalism, the emergence of sacred violence, and the revival of

martyrdom challenge the secular consensus—and how a revitalised political theology might offer solutions in this era of discontent.

**2. The Struggle for Symbolic Power**

The crisis of secular liberalism has moved beyond the theoretical horizon of critical theory and assumed practical dimensions, manifesting in constitutional collapses, ideological cleavages, and restrictions on civil rights, regardless of whether the context is democratic or dictatorial. As we have already indicated, this diminution is not just one of rational-legal authority, but of the return of the sacred to the public domain as well. But what are the consequences of this rebirth? Are we witnessing a resurgence of new theocracies disguised as nationalist populism, or is this crisis an opportunity for a more pluralist, post-secular political space?

In order to make sense of this tension, one apparently has to return to Jürgen Habermas's (2008) seminal observation that modern societies might be entering a "post-secular age". This is not a return to pre-modern theocratic rule, but rather a recognition of the profound influence of religious and metaphysical traditions in shaping public space. Secular rationality, for Habermas, must coexist with religious worldviews and yet should not subordinate or exclude them. In his dialogical construction, the public sphere serves as the site of mutual translation, where religious arguments become accessible to secular actors and secular arguments become accessible to religious actors. The post-secular, then, is distinguished by conversation, not theocracy. Yet this hopeful scenario clashes with political developments in numerous communities where sacral politics is on the rise. Instead of the dialogical coexistence of religions, there is rather political exploitation of the sacred. Here, religious symbols are used not to demonstrate pluralism, but rather to claim the privilege of ethno-religious supremacy. Under these circumstances, the public sphere is not a realm for translations, but rather a battlefield for untranslatable intercepts. Here, Michel Foucault's (1979) idea of "regimes of truth" is pertinent. The diverse forms of the sacred are

reconstituted into a unitary metaphysical regime closely allied with state power and symbolic violence.

The violent sacralisation of politics leads to what Talal Asad (2003) terms the "privatization paradox": secularism, despite its purported neutrality, frequently enforces a particular epistemic and political framework that marginalises religious ways of life. The response to this marginalisation, especially in formerly colonised regions, extends beyond a mere quest for inclusion and seeks to reconstruct the entire foundation of political modernity. However, this reconstruction risks becoming all-encompassing, as it not only aims to displace liberal secularism but also to supplant it with uncritical, sacred nationalism. Theorists such as Aditya Nigam (2021) and Pankaj Mishra (2017) contend that the contemporary turn toward politics requires a confrontation with what may be described as the mesmerising spell of Western political modernity. This project has long sustained itself on the deceptive claim of a universalism that is, in fact, profoundly exclusionary and false. For Aditya Nigam, the trajectory of India's postcolonial secular-nationalist project has always been marked by a deep and unresolved contradiction. On the one hand, its leaders and intellectual architects attempted to institutionalise a vision of the state grounded in rationalist, universalist, and nonreligious principles, borrowing heavily from the Enlightenmentinflected ideals of Western modernity.

On the other hand, this effort was superimposed upon a society that is anything but uniform—an immensely diverse cultural landscape, saturated with religious sentiments, emotional attachments, and deeply embedded traditions. This disjuncture, Nigam argues, created a persistent tension between imported models of governance and lived social realities. Instead, he argues, the crisis is not an exception at all but a postponement of reckoning with that contradiction. Within this framework, sacral politics is not simply a matter of a reactionary turn, but also demands something like symbolic restitution.

When the symbolic redress is without regard for institutional pluralism or rational debate, it becomes an authoritarian principle based on myths. Instead of standing as a mediator between various cultural positions, the state functions as a podium for embracing civilizational dominance. Carl Schmitt's (2005) concept of political theology becomes particularly relevant in this context, not because it necessarily invokes God or the gods in any literal or doctrinal sense, but because it foregrounds a deeper structural insight about the genealogy of political ideas in modernity. For Schmitt, the fundamental claim is that the central categories of modern political thought — sovereignty, authority, legitimacy, and even the concept of the exception — are not entirely novel creations of secular reason but rather secularised transpositions of theological ideas. In other words, the modern political order, while presenting itself as autonomous and rational, continues to carry within its conceptual architecture residues of theological thinking. This does not simply mean that politics is secretly religious, but rather that theological origins shape the very form of its concepts. Thus, in recognising this continuity, Schmitt compels us to rethink the secular-modern narrative of radical rupture and instead consider how the theological past haunts political modernity that it seeks to transcend. From a constitutional figure, the leader becomes a fantastic sovereign, where exception and norm become part of the same process. This symbolic control apparatus also reconfigures relations between the public and power. Democratic liberalism demands that power be answerable, divided and discussable. In sacred populism, it becomes a performance, a centripetal set of images that is beyond question. Hannah Arendt (1958: 463) cautioned that the danger of totalitarianism was not violence alone, but rather the transformation of politics into a spectacle of sacred unity. This is what we see today in the ugly spectacle of populist performance, where that sacred national occurrence occludes enlightened discussion, and mythological storytelling fills the vacuum of truth.

In those contexts, a political theology as critique would study not the bearers of power, but the founding conditions of the

symbolic state. Why does the secular order fail to command loyalty? Why is the image of an authoritarian saviour so frequently attractive to people? Part of the answer lies in liberalism's indifference to collective meaning-making. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) noted in After virtue, liberal modernity, committed instead to nonteleological and traditional-defying moral ideas, has developed an emotive environment in which moral pronouncements become unintelligible: According to the logic of emotivism, so-called "moral" statements no longer function as genuine carriers of truth claims or objective ethical content; rather, they are reduced to the status of disguised imperatives or subjective expressions of approval and disapproval. In this sense, moral discourse loses its literal meaning and collapses into a rhetoric of command masked as moral reasoning. The erosion of shared moral frameworks creates a profound vacuum within the public sphere, leaving individuals disoriented in the absence of stable normative anchors. It is precisely this void that becomes fertile ground for the emergence of sacralised forms of politics, which steps in to supply an illusion of certainty, order, and moral cohesion. Such politics operate by clothing contingent and partisan visions of the social order in the aura of sacredness, thereby constructing a fantasy of collective unity and unassailable moral clarity that compensates for the disintegration of traditional moral languages. At the same time, the liberal public sphere is often hostile to theological or metaphysical questions. The foregrounding of "value neutrality" is itself a morally loaded position that isolates religious communities and prevents their engagement. This is something that can be seen clearly enough in Europe, where Muslim immigrants are frequently "secularized" as a condition for citizenship. The outcome is not integration but resentment, nurturing an environment in which politico-theologies emerge that are perfectly opposed to the secular-liberal paradigm of the Left (Roy, 2007).

The prevailing tensions suggest that the future of political communities cannot be resolved through simplistic secularism or the revival of theocracy. Instead, a comprehensive examination of

the political-theological foundations underpinning all forms of sovereignty is required. Giorgio Agamben's (2011) distinction between "oikonomia" (the governance of life) and "glory" (the symbolic representation of authority) sheds light on this crisis. The populist-authoritarian regime exercises control over life through biopolitical mechanisms such as surveillance, media, and infrastructure. At the same time, it legitimizes its authority through displays of glory, including temples, speeches, sacred texts, and images of martyrdom. The sacred and mundane are no longer separate but are amalgamated in the figure of the sovereign. At this juncture, political theology reclaims its emancipatory potential. Thinkers such as Walter Benjamin (1996) and Ernst Bloch envisioned a messianic temporality—one that disrupts the linear progression of capitalist modernity with moments of hope, justice, and utopian vision. Unlike Schmitt's authoritarian theology, Benjamin's political theology is revolutionary, situating sovereignty not in the state but in the ethical disruption of the oppressed. In this view, the sacred is not a tool of domination but a horizon of liberation.

For such a vision to be realised, democratic societies must reengage with the sacred, not as a rigid doctrine, but as a form of symbolic existence. This requires a reimagining of the public sphere—not as a neutral arena for dispassionate debate, but as a moral community capable of upholding diverse traditions related to values, meaning, and justice. Claude Lefort's (1986) concept of the "empty place of power" offers an initial framework. In a democracy, power is never fully possessed; it circulates, is contested, and remains accessible to all. Consequently, the sacred should not be concentrated in a single sovereign entity; rather, it should be distributed across the practices of public discourse, ethical accountability, and historical reflection.

The role of the sacred within contemporary political contexts remains deeply contested and conceptually ambiguous. On the one hand, its resurgence may culminate in the emergence of new theocratic formations that operate under the guise of democratic

institutions, thereby masking authoritarian impulses with the language of popular sovereignty. On the other hand, the sacred also possesses the potential to nurture more pluralistic and genuinely post-secular modes of civic life, in which diverse traditions of meaning and faith are recognised as constitutive elements of the public sphere rather than as residues to be overcome. For political theology, the urgent task is to clarify this tension, not through the safety of abstract critique alone but through serious engagement with the material and symbolic struggles that increasingly define our present historical moment. Whether societies drift towards mythic authoritarian imaginaries or move towards uncovering the emancipatory and solidaristic possibilities of the sacred will ultimately depend upon how we reconfigure the contested intersections between faith and reason, sovereignty and justice, as well as collective memory and the political imagination that shapes our common future.

**3. Liberalism's Secular Crisis and Metaphysical Populism**

The modern liberal political order — of secular reason, representative institutions, and constitutional individualism — was erected on a specific metaphysical bet: that you could do politics without Gods, myths, or tradition. An unenchanted polity was envisioned as being dominated by procedural rationality, upheld by democratic consensus. However, that bet, which was successfully settled after the Enlightenment revolutions and the post-war liberal consensus, appears increasingly shaky. We're seeing something broader still than a backlash against liberalism, whether in the form of economic inequality or populist demagoguery, but an assault on the modern, secular state itself, conducted with a rebellion against the entire secularist vision of contemporary politics. This insurrection has taken a global form as a kind of metaphysical populism — a symbolic and political reawakening of the transcendental, mythic, and sacred, which typically finds expression in nativist, nationalist, and religious terms. This is important to differentiate from the more traditional authoritarianism. Metaphysical populism is not just authoritarianism or undermining

of checks and balances; that goes without saying: Its real meaning is the deep rejection of the anthropological basis of liberal modernity itself. Theological political theorist William Cavanaugh (1995) argues that, at a more general level, modern politics has been shaped within a quasitheological framework, and it is its lack of meaningful narratives of belonging, sacrifice, and redemption that makes it open to more explicitly theological substitutes.

In this sense, the ideal of the liberal subject — a self-authoring, rational entity possessing rights and interests (the man) — becomes increasingly superficial. Critics on both the left and right argue that the subject does not do enough to sustain the emotional, spiritual, and communal connections at the heart of political life. In his famous After Virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) portrayed the liberal subject as a dismembered being: empty of story, virtue and tradition. The political fallout from such fragmentation is already becoming clear; the triumph of communalism, religious nationalism and digital tribalism is an expression of a craving for moral unity and metaphysical anchorage. Populist leaders have deftly exploited this vacuum of existence. To the leader of Hungary's ruling Fidesz party, the inventor of the America First style of nationalism, and the originator of India's technocraticnationalist mode of governance. The central figures in Turkey's modern politics have presented themselves not merely as politicians but as protectors of a civilizational essence, protectors of a nation's sacred identity. Their language often intertwines the latest mass communication technologies with ancient myths, focusing on lineage, sacrifice, and destiny. The populist language of purity, authenticity, and divine mission has supplanted the liberal language of procedural fairness and pluralism. It is not a case of random betting on horses, but rather a reflection of the appropriation of the resources of symbolism that liberalism has failed to develop.

In The Kingdom and the Glory, Giorgio Agamben (2011) makes clear that historical theological foundations persist in contemporary political systems, especially in supposedly secular systems. Discourses of sovereignty, aesthetics of power and state

rituals are based to a large extent on historical Christian understandings of divine rule. Populist movements then revive these dormant theological elements, while reinforcing and solidifying the underlying framework of secular modernity through explicit performances of sacred authority, such as protest marches, oaths, flag ceremonies, martyrologies, and national myths. They are far more than mere cultural ornaments or symbolic trinkets; rather, they function as active instruments in the construction and maintenance of political legitimacy. Their significance becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of the notion of power as fundamentally productive rather than simply repressive. In this sense, power does not operate solely by prohibiting, silencing, or constraining individuals and communities; it also actively generates identities, shapes subjectivities, produces norms, and organizes collective imaginaries. Thus, the relevance of these cultural forms lies precisely in their capacity to participate in the productive dimensions of power, by which new forms of political meaning and legitimacy are brought into being. (see Michel Foucault, 1979), which is particularly important here. WhatsApp populism doesn't just impose its will; it creates new identities, affects, and modes of existence. Yoking together digital media, religious poses and performative nationalism, they have built an enchanted public sphere in which every political act is transformed into a ritual of inclusion. This is how the population becomes depoliticized — and not by oppression, but a surfeit of gloss. In the words of Hannah Arendt (1958), the room is left vacant for public speech, rationality gives way to emotion, and when it comes to difference, it succumbs to uniformity.

The visible hand of the state appears comparatively weak, not due to any intrinsic lack of power, but because its authority is not infused with the same intensity of emotional charge. Without the sacred, neutrality, and the language of bureaucratic governance that it borrows, the language of the centre is devoid of actual feeling. But this criticism is not new. Max Weber (1919) emphasized that in the early 20th century, modern rationalization had led to the

"disenchantment of the world." To Weber, a politics without charisma is a calculating, anti-charismatic machine; men and women are unlikely to die for it. Indeed, what we are experiencing now is a worldwide reaction to this disenchantment, frequently taking the form of reactionary and exclusionary movements. The question is whether a new form of post-secular politics can emerge, which reaches out to the sacred without resorting to an oppressive theocracy. Intellectuals like Jürgen Habermas (2008) argue for a "complementary learning process" between secular and religious sectors. In this sense, religious reasons are not relegated to the private realm but are converted into publicly available arguments. But such translation requires more than just intellectual openness; it involves institutional transformation. Political arrangements must allow space for theological imagination without being dominated by any single tradition.

The downfall of Nehruvian secularism in India illustrates the dangers of consigning the sacred to the places of personal faith. In this way, the view that religion can be separated from politics overlooks the interweaving of myth, identity, and community in lived experience. As Rajeev Bhargava (2010) suggests, the secularism that must be practiced in a multi-religious society is a contextual and dialogical one, rather than a mere replica of the European model based on the fence theory. Alas, this contextual vision has been overtaken by the people's move to Majoritarian ideologies; a fusion of ethnic and religious identities is being orchestrated in the service of what may be termed a project of "cohesive metaphysical nationalism."Thus, the state is no longer a neutral broker, but a divine agent of cultural fate. In Russia, we see the same thing happening, with the Orthodox Church making common cause with the government to provide moral legitimacy for the man who has restored a figure equivalent to the last Roman emperor, the Central figure in post-Soviet Russian politics. This unity of church and state is not just a tactic; it's who they are. Russia, the Slavophiles argue, is a living being, a mystical organism that has been infected by Western liberalism and reborn through

spiritual awakening. This story has, of course, a fearful echo in American Christian Evangelicalism, where liberalism is a satanic deviation and nationalism a godly destiny. In both cases, neither economic nor military weakness has caused the secular state to falter; rather, it is the sense of the secular as negligible from a metaphysical perspective.

The power of these movements extends not only to theology but also to emotion. They generate mythmakers that create the mythos of the collective and the discourse of self-importance. In contrast, liberalism articulates itself through rights, contracts, and markets, and does not fulfill the human longing for transcendence. Secular modernity, as Charles Taylor (2007) explains in A Secular Age, has not suffocated the religious bias so much as it has disarticulated and interiorized it. Still, in times of crisis, privatised sacred blooms anew in political force. Metaphysical populism, too, marks a return and demonstrates once again the deficiencies of a hard-and-fast democratic theory. Deliberative democracy models, which rely on reason-based communication and consensus, assume a disenchanted populace. But as current events make clear, political identity is just as much a function of sacred narratives as it is of policy choices. The conspiracy theories, the sacrifice martyrdom, and the symbolic violence are not just an aberration; they are an expression of a re-sacralized political imagination. Ditobbe finds himself compelled to acknowledge that contemporary democratic theory can no longer afford to ignore the claims and insights of political theology. For him, the task is not merely to gesture towards religion or the sacred as peripheral concerns but to recognise and admit their constitutive presence within the very ambit of democratic life. If democratic theory fails to engage seriously with the ways in which theological imaginaries continue to shape political subjectivities, institutions, and forms of legitimacy, it risks rendering itself increasingly irrelevant. In other words, the future vitality of democratic thought may well depend upon its capacity to integrate political theology as an indispensable interlocutor rather

than dismissing it as an anachronistic residue of pre-modern politics.

At this critical juncture, the issue is not whether the sacred should engage in politics, as it already exerts influence. The pertinent question is how to channel this influence towards inclusivity rather than exclusion, and towards equity rather than domination. This necessitates reconceptualising secularism not as the absence of religion but as the political management of the sacred. The establishment of new civic institutions capable of accommodating metaphysical diversity without succumbing to metaphysical absolutism is required. The path forward may be found in what some scholars term "agonistic pluralism," a framework wherein differing worldviews engage in continuous debate without seeking to annihilate one another. As Chantal Mouffe (2000) posits, the objective of democracy is not to achieve consensus but to cultivate legitimate conflict. In a post-secular context, this implies acknowledging that religious and metaphysical assertions continue to influence political life. The challenge is not to suppress them, but to guide them into democratic expressions. In summary, the liberal crisis is not merely economic or institutional; it is metaphysical in nature. The secular mindset that once underpinned liberalism was disintegrating under the pressure of symbolic longing. Metaphysical populism has filled this void, offering myths, rituals, and identities that liberal proceduralism cannot rival. Whether this signifies the end of secular politics or the beginning of post-secular reimagining depends on our ability to reconstruct the sacred without succumbing to despotism.

**4. Reclaiming the Sacred Without Tyranny**

The advent of the modern era was characterised by a profound transformation: the separation of the sacred from the political domain. During the Enlightenment, reason was elevated as the ultimate arbiter of truth, politics was organised around the social contract, and the sacred was relegated to the private sphere. Political secularism has emerged as both a theological shift and a pragmatic approach to governance. However, the era of political

secularism is drawing close attention. As previously discussed, the liberal order no longer furnishes citizens with a metaphysical and symbolic foundation that is essential for sustaining a political community. In its place, various neo-sacral political movements—from populist nationalism to religious revivalism—are reintroducing the divine, mythical, and metaphysical into the realm of politics. This section is important as it presents the broader argument throughout the book. If we are indeed witnessing the decline of political secularism, what are its prospects? Is it feasible to establish a political order beyond secularism that does not regress into authoritarian theocracy or ethno-nationalist myth-making? Can the sacred be reclaimed without giving rise to tyranny? To address these questions, we must scrutinise the limitations of both liberal secularism and metaphysical populism while envisioning new political configurations that acknowledge the enduring influence of the sacred.

For an extended period, the liberal state has prided itself on its purported neutrality, pledging not to endorse or impose any particular conception of a good life. However, as scholars such as John Milbank (1990) and William Cavanaugh (2004) have observed, neutrality is illusory. Liberal secularism is, in reality, a metaphysical project grounded in specific assumptions about the self, reason, and society. It perceives the autonomous individual as the primary political unit, assumes a clear demarcation between the public and private spheres, and considers religion as a set of beliefs that can be extricated from political life. These assumptions are not self-evident truths but are deeply rooted in a Western theological tradition that aimed to disenchant the world to reconstruct it under the aegis of reason. Liberalism's failure to acknowledge its own metaphysical underpinnings has facilitated the emergence of a more overt and often exclusionary re-sacralisation of politics. From India's Majoritarian nationalist agenda to Russia's Orthodox civilizational vision, the state evolved from a neutral mediator to a sacred guardian of collective identity. As Carl Schmitt (2005) famously asserted, "All significant concepts of the modern theory

of the state are secularized theological concepts." When secular legitimacy wanes, the underlying theological elements re-emerge frequently in distorted and perilous forms.

This scenario is emblematic of the dilemmas that define contemporary political life, wherein citizens are often confronted with the necessity of choosing between options that are each, in their own way, unsatisfactory or deficient. Secularism, particularly in its liberal form, frequently fails to provide a sense of profound meaning, belonging, or metaphysical grounding, leaving individuals adrift in a morally and spiritually thin public sphere. By contrast, metaphysical populism captivates through compelling and emotionally charged narratives. Yet, it does so at a significant cost: the erosion of pluralism, the subordination of rational deliberation, and the curtailment of individual liberty. Meanwhile, intellectual frameworks such as Neo-Thomism and modernist thought have repeatedly demonstrated their insufficiency in addressing the profound existential anxieties and ethical vacuities that characterize Western modernity, revealing the limits of traditional and rationalist approaches in responding to contemporary socio-political and spiritual crises. What is needed is a third position — one that acknowledges the political dimension of the sacred, while resisting its authoritarian abuse. This is an issue of political theology that requires rethinking from the ground up. Among the scholars who have paved the way for a new look at this matter are Giorgio Agamben (2011) and Jürgen Habermas (2008). In Agamben's notion of the "remnant"—a postsovereign community that is no longer predicated on dominion in messianic time—we see a politics not based on domination. The Habermasian concept of a post-secular society is one in which religious and secular citizens learn from each other, due to the enduring relevance of religious insights to the public sphere. These 'frames' suggest the possibility of a political community that is 'neither desacralized nor theocratic' but 'symbolically and ethically enriched'. In this community, the sacred is not monopolized by the state, nor restricted to one Religionsgemeinschaft (religious community), but rather a

contested space and diversity. This vision aligns with Hannah Arendt's (1958) pivotal conception that politics is a space of appearance, action, and plurality—a space not profaned by unity but predicated on diversity.

It requires, in order to re-seize the sacred without repression, a new political ethic based on humility, plurality, and what philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992) referred to as "an ethics of recognition." This method starts with the recognition that political communities all rest on narratives, symbols and rituals by which they define themselves. The aim is not to eradicate these sacred narratives, but to subject them to democratic scrutiny and examination. Charles Taylor (2007) provides some interesting thoughts in this respect. Taylor claims in A Secular Age that the religious impulse has not altogether disappeared with secular modernity, but has multiplied. We live in a time of "crosspressures" in which a range of and often contradicting spiritual alternatives occupy the same space. A healthy political system must contain those tensions without succumbing to either relativism or fundamentalism. The ethics of the sacred are also the politics of listening. As noted by Prasenjit Biswas (2015) in his reflections on Northeast India, the political rationality of modernity has long disregarded indigenous cosmologies and spiritual traditions. The process of decolonising the political sacred means recovering these other voices and granting them ontological distinction. This is about more than cultural representation; it's the visceral reimagining of political thinking.

In a post-secular democracy, a primary challenge becomes the construction of civic institutions and rituals that can accommodate a diverse range of metaphysical perspectives. This, in turn, requires a radical rethink about schools, courts, parliaments, and public places, not as the secular desert is often taken to be, but as venues of symbolic action. For instance, citizenship ceremonies or national days and commemorations should not merely affirm universal principles, but also create space for reflecting upon the sacred character of the community, service, and the memory of the past.

Canadian philosopher Kingwell (2009) argues for "civic humanism", a revival of the ancient aspiration towards public virtue untainted by totalitarianism. In this context, the public life is more than just the aggregation of interests or the adjudication of rights; it is the work of creating, building, and sharing meaning. It's the kind of political work that education, art, public discourse and myth-making demand. Digital spaces also warrant reevaluation. As commentators like Noam Chomsky (2017) have noted, the Internet has become a site of ideological struggle, misinformation and symbolic warfare. The issue is not just one of content regulation, however, as these are broader questions on what it means to create a digital public square that allows for the discussion of sacred values such as justice, dignity, and freedom. This is not a case for state censorship; it is an argument for political education.

To confront the planetary crisis of the Anthropocene, resacralization as such would have to address the conjoint problems of environmental destruction, species extinctions, and climate disasters that accompany the disintegration of liberal secularism. Political theology, therefore, must broaden in the 21st century to situate itself in relation to the Earth at large — not just human societies. The importance of a cosmopolitical theology—one that treats the Earth not as a resource for plunder, but as a sacred being—is recognized by scholars such as Keller (2013) and political ecologists like Latour (2018). This view echoes indigenous beliefs of the inseparability and sacredness of land, water and life. Recovering this aspect of the sacred is not just a matter of justice but of survival. These are politically important findings. The movements for climate justice, land recovery, and nature ritual go beyond just policy claims — they are metaphysical claims. They call the secular liberal state to account not just for the secular liberal cultural sensibilities it crushes but for its actual complicity in a cosmological violence that made the world profane. It is the task of regaining the sacred to resist this violence and envision political communities that are not just of citizens or their subjects, but also of rivers, mountains, and the spirits of ancestors.

It is not simply that individuals have become more irrational, nostalgic, or susceptible to emotional appeals; rather, the issue lies in the profound failure of liberal modernity to provide the symbolic, ethical, and spiritual sustenance that is an intrinsic part of human existence. The re-emergence of the sacred within political life should not be understood as an aberration or anomaly; on the contrary, it signals a more fundamental absence—a vacuum left by a system incapable of addressing humanity's deeper, existential, and moral needs. Yet, the resurgence of the holy does not inevitably culminate in tyranny or authoritarianism. By acknowledging the enduring presence of the sacred in politics and by designing institutions that safeguard its plurality, openness, and humility, societies may cultivate a genuinely post-secular democratic order. Constructing such a democracy, however, is neither straightforward nor automatic; it demands the invention of new narratives, institutional frameworks, and modalities of political practice capable of engaging with a world that is simultaneously famished, fragmented, and deeply interconnected. The alternative is stark and unmistakable: a landscape dominated either by metaphysical violence, in which symbolic and spiritual energies are co-opted toward exclusion and coercion, or by a condition of symbolic void, where meaning and moral imagination are irretrievably diminished. Thus, the imperative of contemporary politics is to craft forms of governance that are at once sacred and genuinely political, responding to both the ethical and existential demands of the present age.

**5. Hope Beyond Secular Collapse**

The structure of political secularism is collapsing under the weight of resurgent nationalism, theological populism, environmental collapse and a metaphysical void at the heart of the liberal order. We are at a civilisational tipping-point. It is not enough, in other words, to criticize the shortcomings of secularism or to name the political vestiges in liberal institutions.

Rather, we have to face the task of thinking beyond secular modernity. In this section, we analyze the force of a postsecular,

postliberal politicotheology that is capable of transforming political hope, without retreating into nostalgia or capitulating to nihilism, through the power of moral courage, historical memory, and collective imagination. Ours is not an institutional crisis but an existential one — the signs of a profound exhaustion in the Secular and liberal imagination. Secularism was not simply the possibility of disenchanted politics, as Taylor (2007) has noted; it was the recreation of the social imaginary, where there was a preference for immanence over transcendence. After neoliberal technocracy, however, Taylor's "buffered self" has transmogrified into a disenchanted self—one that is disconnected, estranged, and yearning for meaning. This desperate search for grounding, however precariously, is the background against which reactionary populism and identitarian theologies have emerged.

As we reach this critical juncture, it becomes imperative to engage with the rich repository of political-theological traditions—not as rigid or predetermined dogmas, but as dynamic resources capable of opening new avenues for reflection, critique, and constructive imagination, and as tools for the critique of false universalisms of modernity and the discovery of a new kind of political association. Giorgio Agamben (2011) has shown that Western governance is informed by Christian theology through the tension between oikonomia and sovereignty. But Agamben also spoke of messianic time as the time of the interruption and deliverance. The task, then, is to learn to shift from critique to composition: to acquire radical agency that redeems and reclaims the possibility of what Adorno once called 'negative redemption'—a politics that breaks the power of secular domination without founding a new sacred order. Theological-political notions of sovereignty, exception, sacrifice, and incarnation ought to be reimagined, not abandoned. One promising path is opened up by Hannah Arendt's (1958) idea of natality as the "ground of political action." Because its reserve is natality, the ability to begin again, a theology of hope is possible even without eschatology. It is a reminder that politics is not preordained toward repetition or

catastrophe, but can contain spontaneity, forgiveness and diversity." In this light, post-secular political theology should emphasize human dignity, solidarity, and moral imagination more than it should divine command or institutional religion. Jürgen Habermas's more recent reflections on "post-secular society" (2008) are helpful yet equally narrow. Habermas does grant that secular reason must be open to religious insights, specifically where the language of morality and suffering is de-posited in religious traditions. However, Habermas remains a hostage to proceduralism and technocratic rationality. What we need is not simply more dialogue between religious and secular voices, but a re-politicization of the moral imagination — a grappling with suffering that doesn't lend itself easily to bureaucratic abstraction.

The contributions of thinkers, such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), are especially germane here. MacIntyre criticizes the disintegration of liberal morality and calls for a return to virtue ethics that is grounded in community narratives and moral histories. MacIntyre, however, often appears to adopt a stance that can be read as either nostalgic for a lost moral coherence or as somewhat sectarian in orientation, insofar as his project tends to emphasise the recovery of particular traditions of virtue within bounded communities. In this framing, his vision can seem to reduce ethical and political life to a series of competing enclaves of meaning—' I have my group, and you have yours'— rather than offering a framework that can fully reconcile plural traditions within a broader, shared moral horizon. A radical political theology would build upon MacIntyre's insights, then direct them toward liberation, pluralism, and decolonial critique. This approach would mean appropriating moral traditions not as static regimes but as dynamic, disputed and subversive sites of justice. No less, Noam Chomsky's political interventions remind us that elite secularism is commonly a mask for imperial violence and class rule. Chomsky's denunciation of U.S. foreign policy, corporate media, and technocratic elites emphasizes the structural violence contained within the management of secular liberal governmentality. In the same light,

then, political theology must likewise develop a materialist focus attentive to the materialization of suffering, economies of exclusion, and infrastructures of death at the basis of occidental modernity. A political theology reinvigorated stands against both the nihilism of the postmodern left and the authoritarianism of the religious right. It would be eclectic, drawing from Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and Indigenous traditions, not as an act of imposing a theocratic worldview, but as a way of challenging the a-metaphysical void of the modern liberal order. In this respect, Giorgio Agamben's idea of "destituent power" is especially helpful. The destituent power does not intend to govern or modify the state's functioning, but to deactivate the forms of power that master and segregate it. It is the politics of interruption, refusal and messianic withdrawal. Nevertheless, the strategy of mere withdrawal or retreat from the political sphere is profoundly inadequate. As Hannah Arendt has so forcefully argued, political freedom is not sustained through absence but through active participation and engagement; it is action that constitutes the very essence of political life. Hope, in this context, cannot remain a passive abstraction or an intellectual category to be theorised at a distance. It must be made tangible, embodied, and enacted. Importantly, hope differs from optimism: while optimism often presumes a naïve confidence in favourable outcomes, hope is rooted in a deeper ethical commitment to remain in relation to the world even in the face of despair, rupture, or apparent futility. Such hope demands more than legal frameworks or bureaucratic institutions; it calls for rituals that bind communities together, for practices that cultivate resilience, and for a poetics of belonging that exceeds the language of policy and regulation.

Consequently, any articulation of a planetary political theology in the present moment must necessarily be ecological, decolonial, and reparative in its orientation. Such a vision does not seek to erase or wholly repudiate the accomplishments of modern secularism; indeed, it readily acknowledges the profound achievements associated with secular modernity—achievements such as the institutionalisation of human rights, the expansion of scientific

exploration and technological innovation, and the gradual, if uneven, realisation of democratic pluralism. Yet, at the same time, this perspective insists that secularism, in its current form, is insufficient to resolve the crises that are, at least in part, themselves the products of secular modernity's internal contradictions. The ecological emergency, the deep scars of colonial violence, the collapse of shared symbolic orders, and the global rise of exclusionary populisms all signal the limits of a purely secular political horizon.

# Chapter 12
# Toward a Post-Liberal Grammar of Justice

## 1. From Enlightenment Reason to Moral Exhaustion

The political framework established by modernity, characterised by liberal rationalism, individual autonomy, and the secular replacement of theological authority, has now reached its epistemological and moral limits. The "end of history" proclaimed by liberal triumphalism in the late 20th century no longer represents the zenith of human political development; rather, it signifies a significant misinterpretation of political destiny. What is required today is not merely a critique of liberalism and its secular foundations, but a fundamental reconstruction of political thought from the remnants it has left behind. This part of the work undertakes that mission, examining the evolving philosophical landscape and proposing a new framework of justice that transcends the confines of liberalism.

The Enlightenment's rationalist revolution gave rise to the modern political concepts of freedom, autonomy, equality, and justice, with philosophers such as Immanuel Kant laying the groundwork for contemporary democratic ideas. Kant (1785/1997) argued that human dignity is anchored in the capacity for rational moral autonomy, thereby positioning individuals as the cornerstone of political legitimacy. The sensible individual, capable of self-governance, was perceived as the ideal foundation for a just political system. However, this abstract notion, when divorced from its historical and material context, often proved inadequate for addressing global injustices. Although Kant's moral framework advocated for universality, it neglected the significance of contextual differences in political life, a critique advanced by

modern theorists such as Iris Marion Young (1990) for its inability to address systemic inequalities.

Rousseau (1762/2011) sought to establish the foundation of a legitimate social contract. He posited that true freedom is realised through adherence to a general will, which is informed by reason and oriented towards the common good. While Rousseau's concept of the general will has inspired numerous democratic theorists over time, his abstract interpretation often falls short of addressing the conflicts inherent in diverse societies. In attempting to reconcile Rousseau's republican ideals with Kant's notion of individualism, contemporary liberal states have inadvertently created bureaucratic Leviathans—impersonal entities that claim impartiality, yet often perpetuate economic and political inequalities (Rawls, 1971). The tension between individual autonomy and collective governance has left liberal democracies in a state of moral exhaustion. Habermas (2008) argues that this disenchantment is manifested in an institutionalized processing of freedom and justice, which cannot generate shared ethical involvement. Politics as a forum for substantial debate has been devalued by market forces and by managerial administration. We have turned a common domain of mutual respect and significance into a patchwork marketplace.

In order to surmount this impasse, we investigate Hegel's idea of freedom as not a fixed characteristic, but a historical achievement realized in and through struggle, recognition, and ethical life (Sittlichkeit). According to Hegel (1807/1977), "An individual self-consciousness is only in and through being recognized" by another, with dignity constituting a reciprocal relationship. This recognition lies at the heart of the Hegelian dialectic: freedom is something that is continually realized through ongoing and ever-changing social interactions and historical struggles. Whereas Kantian freedom is formal, Hegelian freedom is relational, taking into account the lived experiences of human beings and their social conditions. This idea of recognition was later featured in critical theories of justice and identity, especially in the works of Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth. They see in the politics of recognition a path to alleviating

alienation in societies where members of marginalized groups are in a state of non-recognition. This connects directly with the current concerns of a breakdown in political dialogue and the rise of populism, frequently driven by resentment from overlooked communities that have not benefited from existing identities. But Hegel cautioned against fixed ideas of recognition. As Hegel (1807/1977) explains, the dialectic requires that each stage be both negated and preserved in a higher synthesis. It had a sound, low-cost base and a relatively flexible workforce. Recognition is therefore open to change. In this current political moment, this entails surpassing identity politics to create a justice framework that does not serve predefined categories, but rather engages in a process of mutual recognition that evolves.

It is a wellspring of contemporary ethical theory, yet it also takes a heavy battering, not least at the hands of political theologians like John Milbank and Giorgio Agamben. These thinkers doubt the possibility of a purely secular or nominalist understanding of law, stripped of all divine or communal sources of authority that give it content. For Agamben (2011), when sovereignty is disentangled from its theological context, it yields an empty concept with no substance. In such a reading, political power is simply a form, a copy of divine kingship in a terrestrial setting. Moreover, Kantian deontological ethics, which retreats to moral universals, tends to detach a moral agent from their social context. Although Kant's framework attempts to accommodate universal principles of justice, it may not adequately address the contingencies of historical and structural injustices. As Young (1990) and other feminist theorists argue, justice is more than equitable distribution; it also concerns social hierarchies, histories of oppression, and the inclusion of marginalised voices. It is for this reason that a postliberal theory of justice cannot be based on Kant's abstract vision of morality, which does not include historical empathy and active citizenship as components of justice.

Rousseau's thought continues to have a significant impact on discussions of democracy and justice today. His attack on

inequality, his ideal of civic virtue, and his vision of democratic politics as participatory still resonate with contemporary complaints against neoliberal governance and authoritarian tendencies in present-day states. The idea that people must be 'forced to be free' (Rousseau, 1762/2011) encapsulates the paradox at the heart of modern sovereignty: real freedom often demands coercion, but when elite members of society apply this coercion, it almost instantly turns against itself, becoming domination. A post-liberal democratic vision might retain Rousseau's commitment to the general will while eschewing its homogenising elements. Arendt's (1958) insights, which emphasise the importance of plurality in politics, propose that freedom is not attained through submission to abstract rationality but through individuals' capacity to appear in public, speak, and act collectively. This perspective reinterprets the general will from a singular moral authority to a pluralistic deliberative process that respects the diversity of human experiences and perspectives.

One significant critique of liberal universalism is its dismissal of the metaphysical underpinnings of political life. Carl Schmitt (2005) argued that all important political concepts are essentially secularized forms of theological ideas. Liberalism's attempt to extricate the sacred from politics has not eradicated the theological dimension; rather, it has transformed it into new forms, such as nationalism, technocracy, and identity. This observation prompts a critical enquiry: Can political neutrality be maintained without acknowledging the deeper metaphysical or spiritual needs of individuals and communities? This issue does not advocate for a return to theocracy or the authoritarian resacralization of politics. Instead, it reminds us of the importance of recognizing that human beings naturally tend to seek meaning in their political lives. For Hegel (1807/1977), the state was not merely a legal entity; it was the actualization of the ethical spirit (Geist). Likewise, Rousseau's civil religion was not preoccupied with dogma, but with the moral solidarity necessary for a democratic life. The post-liberal politics of theology should recapture the moral particularity of the political

without falling into the idolatry of dogmatic or authoritarian enactment.

Here, Hannah Arendt's (1958) notion of natality—as humankind's ability to begin anew—affords an equally alternative counterpoint to what may be a pessimistic account of the (albeit deteriorating) state of liberalism. Arendt has always traced the human capacity for creativity, forgiveness, and diversity to a new political vision that is not bound by the failures of the past nor limited by the deficiencies of any existing system. In this way, political imagination can be resurrected with ethical and spiritual substance, translating into hope and change despite crisis. The inadequacies of liberalism, in terms of neglect of marginalized minorities and decline of effectiveness as a universal political theory, highlight the need for a new understanding of justice. A post-liberal political perspective requires a new thinking of the intricate, dialectical categories of freedom, justice and recognition. Weaving the thoughts of philosophers such as Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, and Arendt, along with modern critiques of liberalism, we can begin to sketch a justice that is founded on historical and sociological facts, yet remains flexible.

**2. The Eclipse of Community**

In the twenty-first century, a paradoxical reversal has become increasingly visible: the very technologies that promised unprecedented interconnectedness, mobility, and communicative immediacy have coincided with a growing fracturing of political imagination and collective will. What was once conceived as "the social"—a realm of shared identity, affective solidarity, and magmatic unity—has been steadily eclipsed, not merely by the decline of older forms of community, but by the triumph of managerial rationality, market logics, and algorithmic governance. In this transformation, the social is no longer treated as a generative field of belonging or a source of collective agency, but instead as an object to be administered, predicted, and optimized. This "eclipse of the social", therefore, cannot be reduced to a simple rhetorical shift or discursive adjustment within liberal politics; it is symptomatic of

a more profound structural displacement, whereby the very grounds of political community are hollowed out. Modern liberalism, in its pursuit of universalized abstract rights, procedural justice, and depersonalized institutional frameworks, has inadvertently eroded the community-based foundations of long-term solidarity. In privileging neutrality, formality, and abstraction, it has weakened the capacity for shared imagination, common struggle, and durable bonds of political belonging that sustain genuine communal life.

The liberal tradition, especially in its Anglo-American incarnations, is, at its base, predicated on the idea that the individual is the fundamental unit of moral and political conversation. In John Locke's "Second Treatise of Government," for example, Locke emphasizes property and consent as primary principles of a legitimate political order that emphasizes individual sovereignty at the cost of collective identity (Locke 1689/1980). This perspective is further developed by classical economists like Smith, who, despite acknowledging the power of sympathy and moral sentiments, ultimately subordinated social relations to the invisible hand of the market (Smith, 1759/2002). By contrast, thinkers such as Karl Marx criticized liberal individualism as a distortion of genuine social relations. As using Marx's (1867/1990) formulation, "the liberal state reproduced alienation by mystifying the exploitative character of capitalist production". The free individual was not so free after all — He was constructed and disciplined by the structural determinations of class, labor, and capital. Today, one still needs to hear Marx's perspective, since political rhetoric insists on celebrating autonomy while covering up deep social divisions. And in the 20th century, with the advent of neoliberalism, society was further hollowed out. As Michel Foucault (2008) elucidated in his analysis of homo economicus, the neoliberal individual is no longer a citizen engaged in public life but rather an entrepreneur of the self, perpetually enhancing personal value. This transformation has not only depoliticized the individual but has also cast doubt on the community, perceived either as a vestige of the past or as a challenge to liberal pluralism. The decline in the social dimension

must be examined from both theological and political perspectives. Carl Schmitt (2005) argued that the foundational concepts of modern political theory are essentially secularized versions of theological ideas. In premodern Christian theology, the social was anchored in koinonia, which denotes spiritual fellowship and communal life under a divine presence. From an ecclesiological perspective, humanity was conceived as enscommunis — a being constituted through relational ties and communal belonging, rather than through isolated individual autonomy. Modern political theology has frequently overlooked this aspect, focusing instead on issues of sovereignty and exception, thereby relegating the social sphere to the realms of sociology and economics. However, as theorists like Claude Lefort (1986) observed, modern democracy emerged from the "dissolution of the markers of certainty" that were once provided by divine rights and ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the absence of these markers, the social could have served as a source of shared meaning, but nation-states co-opted it, and later, capitalist markets did the same. MacIntyre (1981) compellingly argued that the modern liberal order, distancing itself from traditions of virtue and communal life, now exists in a moral void. The decline and eventual "death" of the Aristotelian conception of the polis—a space in which ethics and politics were deeply intertwined within a shared framework of communal life—gave rise to what Alasdair MacIntyre famously terms emotivism. In this condition, moral discourse no longer rests upon a rationally accessible set of shared virtues or teleological ends, but instead collapses into the expression of subjective preference and affect. What was once debated and negotiated through reference to common goods and civic purposes is now reduced to an inability to resolve disputes about values, as moral disagreement is displaced onto mood, sentiment, and individual inclination rather than grounded in rational deliberation or collective ethical reasoning. Thus, the decay of the social community is also the disappearance of the moral community.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau stands as the classical critic of modern liberalism's self-destruction. His concept of the general will was meant not to subdue or destroy individuality, but to socialize individuals into a moral community. Rousseau (1762/2011) famously declared: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains" — which in his view was due not merely to political servitude, but to a lack of insight into society as a realm of ethical indebtedness. The general will may be an abstract idea, but it implies that real freedom lies in cooperating with others and not being isolated or cut off from interaction. Rousseau warned against the advent of "the particular will", as opposed to the general will, where the particular will would ascribe only to itself and oppose the strength of the whole, acting against the best interests of the state as a whole. It is a worry that one can see playing out today, with a politics characterized by the absence of any coherent idea of justice, as individuals compete with groups for recognition. To recover Rousseau's insight, it is necessary to reimagine social life not as a limitation of freedom, but as its essential condition. The community must no longer be viewed as a vestige of pre-modernity, but rather as the framework of ethics and politics that we can never relinquish.

Nietzsche, commonly portrayed as an opponent of morality and tradition, proposes a counterdiagnosis of the social malaise. Nietzsche's (1887/1989) The Genealogy of Morals examines the emergence of moral existence, but it originates in ressentiment, a vengeful transvaluation of values born out of social suffering and marginalization. Nietzsche describes how the depletion of communal energy necessitates an inward means for power and virtue. This analysis is crucial for understanding contemporary populism and the dynamics of identity politics. In an era of frayed social ties, people are drawn to, and bond within, reactive moral communities — tribal, nationalistic, and religious — as their resentments of elites eclipse all other political and moral motivations. Here, the social appears not as a site of comradeship, but as a theatre of frustration. To overcome Nietzsche's nihilistic vision, one needs to recover the sense of the will to belong as a

positive force: a desire not for sameness or purity, but for recognition and shared meaning. As philosophers such as Charles Taylor (1992) have argued, the task of civil society is a commitment to a "deep diversity" politics in which different narratives enrich the social within a common morality.

Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism offers a distinctive perspective on the erosion of the public sphere. In her influential work, The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951/1973), Arendt provided an account of how people who are cut off from interpersonal relationships are vulnerable to mass movements. The alienation that many people experience today — that is, the disconnection from civic involvement and genuine connection with others — provides fertile ground for the growth of propaganda and authoritarianism. Arendt's understanding of the social realm was subtle; she separated it from the private sphere of necessity as well as the public sphere of politics. Still, she feared the abolition of the social as anything but administration and welfare. Thus, in the course of retrieving the social sphere, it must be kept as a distinct field of action, discourse, and visibility. Therefore, for a reinvigorated political theology, it becomes necessary to mediate between the imperative of community and the alterity of plurality. The church, the commons, the council: these are not just old, religious forms, but also prefigurations of new social types that can resist both liberal individualism and authoritarian massification.

The focus of this crisis has added a dimension to it in Noam Chomsky's analysis of mass media and the manufacture of consent. In the current information age, the social realm becomes a field of manipulation, a spectacle on which public opinion is not formed through reasoned debate, but rather as a spectacle. As Chomsky (1988) puts it: "Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a dictatorship." A loss of public reasoning is not a coincidence; it's a product of a society that is afraid of genuine interactions with society. As social theorists like Habermas (1984) have argued, the rational-critical public sphere has been corrupted by the installation of market and administrative imperatives. Even dissent, in the

current context, is liable to be subsumed under commodified identity politics or algorithmic marginalisation. To rebuild the social in this space means articulating the truth, debating it, and giving it meaning. Political theology plays a decisive role in this—not as dogmatic imposition, but rather as an effective and hierarchical redirection to a transcendental horizon that embraces speech not only as expression, but also as redemption.

**3. Rethinking Legitimacy**

The problem of legitimacy has persisted into modern political times, following the disappearance of divine-right monarchs and the decline of ecclesiastical authority. The secular foundations of political legitimacy — carefully articulated during the Enlightenment through appeals to reason, the consent of the governed, and the construction of social contracts — are increasingly showing signs of erosion in the contemporary world. What once appeared as stable grounds for sustaining authority and ensuring the cohesion of political orders now confronts profound challenges, as societies grapple with intensifying political polarization, the spread of moral relativism, and the growing fragility of institutional structures. The very principles that sought to replace theological or metaphysical justifications for power with rational, consensual, and universally applicable norms are being destabilized, revealing the extent to which Enlightenment projects of legitimacy are vulnerable to new conditions of conflict, fragmentation, and distrust. Today, legitimacy is no longer a self-evident ideal, but rather a subject of dispute. This section examines how the sacred persists behind the secular and how present-day power needs to be reformulated in theological terms in order to maintain the illusion of authority. By engaging with thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Rousseau, Schmitt, Habermas, and contemporary theorists, we critically examined the remnants of sacred legitimacy and the fragile framework of secular beliefs. Immanuel Kant's political project was predicated on the notion that autonomy could serve as a new moral foundation for legitimacy.

In his essay What is Enlightenment? Kant (1784/1996) argued that individuals should "dare to know" (sapere aude) and liberate themselves from dependency through the use of reason. This idea of rational self-governance became integral to his deontological ethics and political philosophy, particularly in The Metaphysics of Morals (Kant, 1797/1996). Kant's conception of the rational subject — unrestricted, universal, and abstract — was developed in a theological context. The categorical imperative mirrors the structure of divine command, and internal moral law suggests a secularised form of conscience imbued with transcendental significance (Yovel, 1980). Consequently, even as Kant endeavoured to remove heteronomy from politics, the moral-political subject he envisioned remained influenced by the theological impetus to ground law beyond mere preference or power. Thus, modern legitimacy is founded not on the outright rejection of the sacred but on its transformation into abstract reason.

While Immanuel Kant concentrated on the notion of autonomy, G. W. F. Hegel endeavored to reconcile the individual with the state through a dialectical approach to freedom. In his seminal work The Philosophy of Right (1821/1991), G. W. F. Hegel presents the modern constitutional state (Rechtsstaat) as the highest institutional realization of ethical life (Sittlichkeit). For Hegel, the state is not merely a legal or administrative apparatus concerned with the regulation of individual behaviour, but rather the rational embodiment of freedom itself, in which subjective liberty and universal rationality are brought into reconciliation. Within this framework, personal freedom does not stand in opposition to collective order; instead, it achieves its fullest expression through participation in the ethical structures of family, civil society, and ultimately the political state. The Rechtsstaat, as Hegel envisioned it, integrates the immediacy of individual autonomy with the universality of rational will, thereby overcoming the tensions between private interest and the common good. In this synthesis, the modern constitutional state becomes the concrete manifestation of reason in history, giving ethical substance to law and political

authority. For Hegel, the state was not merely a contract or an instrument of power; rather, it represented the manifestation of historical reason, a developing spirit (geist) that actualised freedom through its institutions. Notably, Hegel's political theology was more explicit than that of Kant. His interpretation of history as a rational process bore clear theological implications, functioning as a form of secular theodicy in which the state supplants the church as the locus of redemption. Hegel (1991) asserted, "The march of God in the world is the state." However, by substituting reason for Providence, Hegel preserved the metaphysical framework of Christian eschatology: linear history, purpose, and ultimate reconciliation. However, in contemporary times, the Hegelian state is in disarray. Its institutions no longer possess the same ethical authority, and its promise of reconciliation appears increasingly hollow amid the decline in democracy, market dominance, and environmental degradation. The modern state, once envisioned as a vessel of universal reason, struggles to justify the most fundamental norms of civic coexistence.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau foresaw the inadequacy of political representation in authentically embodying the general will. In his seminal work, The Social Contract (1762/2011), he contends that sovereignty, once transferred, becomes compromised. For Rousseau, the legitimacy of law was anchored not in procedural mechanisms but in its direct manifestation of the collective moral will. However, contemporary representative democracies have reduced this concept to mere formal abstraction, thereby distancing decision-making from participatory deliberation. The current legitimacy crisis partially stems from the disjunction between the governed and their leaders. Political representation now functions more as an administration than as an expression of moral and political will, with legitimacy diminished to procedural compliance rather than collective conviction (Urbinati, 2006). As Rousseau cautioned, when laws no longer reflect the general will, they become instruments of domination, masquerading as neutrality.

The imperative, therefore, is to reconceptualise legitimacy not as a matter of institutional stability or electoral endorsement, but as an ongoing process of public meaning-making. This necessitates a political theology capable of interrogating the myths and rituals underpinning secular legitimacy while fostering opportunities for renewed collective agency.

Carl Schmitt is renowned for his assertion that "sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt, 2005). Schmitt posits that politics is defined not by adherence to established norms but by the capacity to transcend them, particularly during crises when legal frameworks prove inadequate. Consequently, legitimacy is founded not on legality but on authority, which Schmitt contends has a theological origin. He argued that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state" are essentially secularised theological ideas (Schmitt, 2005). This perspective elucidates the underlying theological elements of modern political structures. Liberalism's emphasis on law, procedures, and rights conceals its reliance on exceptional power that eludes complete rationalisation. In emergencies, liberal systems frequently resort to authoritarian measures, such as surveillance, executive orders, and indefinite detention, thereby underscoring the sacred core of sovereign power. The disquieting implication is that modern legitimacy is predicated on faith in sovereign authority. This phenomenon is not exclusive to authoritarian regimes; it is also ingrained within the framework of liberal democracies. Any comprehensive political theology must, therefore, acknowledge the "exception" as an inherent structural condition, rather than a mere temporary anomaly.

Jürgen Habermas endeavored to re-establish legitimacy through the notion of communicative rationality. In his seminal work, The Theory of Communicative Action (1984), he posits that legitimacy arises from the voluntary consensus of citizens engaged in rational discourse. Within this framework, the public sphere serves as a venue for establishing norms based on mutual understanding. Despite its commendable intention, this model faces practical challenges. The fragmentation of public discourse, the

proliferation of misinformation, and the commercialisation of communication have undermined the foundations for genuine deliberation (Fraser, 1990).

Furthermore, Habermas's secular rationalism presupposes a shared epistemic foundation that is lacking in pluralistic societies marked by religious, cultural, and ideological diversity. Habermas later acknowledged the enduring significance of religion in democratic contexts. In Between Naturalism and Religion (2008), he advocated for a "post-secular" society wherein religious and secular individuals engage in translation processes. Nevertheless, this inclusive approach cannot fully address the profound metaphysical divisions present in contemporary societies. The crisis of legitimacy is not merely a breakdown in communication: It's a breakdown in shared meaning.

In 1984, Jean-François Lyotard famously announced the end of grand narratives, instead preferring the multiplicity of language games to universal foundations. Similarly, Jacques Derrida, writing in 1990, challenged the very possibility of grounding legitimacy in any determinate or final signifier. For Derrida, the attempt to anchor political or juridical authority in a fixed foundation is always haunted by instability, since meaning itself is marked by difference — an endless play of deferral and difference that resists closure. Within this framework, justice cannot be reduced to codified law, established norms, or definitive institutional arrangements. Rather, Derrida insists that justice is always "to come" (à venir), an ever-deferred horizon that can never be fully actualized in the present. It operates less as a stable possession than as an infinite promise that interrupts and unsettles existing orders, exposing their incompleteness and contingency. In this sense, the pursuit of justice is inseparable from recognition of its perpetual deferral, its resistance to total determination, and its role as an ethical demand that continually exceeds positive law. However, while these visions make evident the violence of grounding claims, they also would put political communities at risk of relativism and nihilism. If legitimacy can be grounded, does it need to be given up? Or

perhaps alone political theology has something to offer in terms of recognizing the impossibility of foundationalism and yet being able to affirm collective ethical responsibility? Such an approach would not attempt to restore metaphysical certitude, but rather to nurture political responsibility in the midst of uncertainty. It utilizes religious traditions not as sources of dogma but as sources for moral imagination to sustain meaning where proceduralism falls short.

Contemporary struggles for legitimacy oscillate between independence and authority, reason and revelation, and proceduralism and power. Yet in spite of these vagaries, the sacred continues to live in the profane. From Kant's moral law to Hegel's rational state, from Rousseau's general will to Schmitt's sovereign decision, the structure of legitimacy is still rooted in theological significations. The way forward is to recognize that the sanctified must still be politicized — though not in a return to theocracy, but in service of new kinds of solidarity, ethical commitment and community. Now, there is no longer a politics of withdrawal into tradition or reason as absolute, but a political theology that must recreate or reinvent legitimacy as an activity of collective meaning-making in conditions of fragility. In this quest, remnants of modern political theology can serve as the basis for a refreshed, post-secular faith — not in eternal political truths, but in the human ability to conceive, give meaning to, and transform the very terrain upon which they live politically.

**4. Polysemy to Political Exhaustion**

In today's rapid decline of existing political ideologies, to quote Badiou, "only the most peculiar remainder persists — the spectral return of the political, not in triumph of a new form of governance or in the realization of justice, but in the persistence of the political, even as its traditional form dissolves". Out of the ruins of revolutions, empires, and liberal certainties emerge new and awful phenomena: nationalist work-ups, identity-driven disavowal, post-truth relativism and nihilistic sovereignty. This section examines the metamorphosis from revolutionary optimism to a weakened state of sovereignty, taking note of the political sphere

and its not-disappearance but rather fragmentation, which accumulates into spectrality, as a theologically questionable phenomenon. What is not merely lamented in politics is the loss of coherent ideals, but the way in which this depletion produces new myths of authority, violence, and belonging. To this end, we draw on thinkers like Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Noam Chomsky, Alasdair MacIntyre, Aditya Nigam, Michel Foucault, Pankaj Mishra, and others whose work demonstrates the extent to which political life continues to be shaped by occulted theological and moral forces, even or especially when it presents as disenchanted.

In the post-Cold War era, Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously declared the "end of history", suggesting that liberal democracy had emerged as the ultimate form of human governance. However, history did not conclude; rather, it was fragmented. The grand narratives of class liberation, rational consensus, and emancipatory modernity were disintegrated under the dominance of neoliberalism, which transformed politics into economic management and equated freedom with consumer choice. As Pankaj Mishra (2017) argues, this moral and existential void has ushered in an age of anger, where disillusioned populations gravitate towards myth, identity, and resentment. Revolutionary politics, once heralded as the harbinger of a new world, now appear nostalgic, utopian, or co-opted. Even grassroots movements frequently find themselves overwhelmed by institutional inertia or co-opted by the spectacles of digital capitalism. The revolutionary subject, once envisioned as the proletariat or citizen-sovereign, is now dispersed into fragmented identities — racial, ethnic, religious, and gendered — often mobilised for recognition rather than systemic change (Fraser, 2013). In this context, the very notion of the political as a transformative domain is threatened. Giorgio Agamben (2005) describes a transition from politics to "bare life," where individuals are reduced to mere biological existence, stripped of their political agency. The refugee supplants the citizen, the activist by the consumer, and the sovereign by the technocrat. What remains is not

a dynamic polis but a managed populace whose expressions of anger are either pathologised or commodified.

Historically, revolutionary hope has catalyzed modern political discourse; however, it has now been supplanted by the spectacle of depleted sovereignty—governments clinging to legitimacy devoid of moral or transformative vision. Contemporary sovereignty is neither divine, rational, nor revolutionary; rather, it is characterised by technocracy, paranoia, and performativity. Leaders across various regimes are increasingly relying on emotion, myth, and fear, substituting these for reason and tradition with spectacle. Michel Foucault's (2008) concept of governmentality explains how modern power operates not through repression, but through the normalization, surveillance, and management of life's processes. However, rationalised biopolitics in recent years has also seemed to crumble under the pressure of crises. The climate disaster, pandemic failure and algorithmic governance have laid the fragility of the liberal administrative state naked. In this time of exhaustion, sovereignty returns not in the form of rational planning, but as an exception and an affect. As Agamben (1998) elucidates in Homo Sacer, it is the modern sovereign who decides which lives are worthy of being maintained and which should be left behind. Political power is therefore the ability to let die, rather than to produce life — a dark reversal of the promise of the Enlightenment. This hollowed out sovereignty is not simply authoritarian, but nihilist: It doesn't provide a purpose or transcendence — only management, surveillance, and emergency. Political choices are made on the basis of crisis, not on the merits of ideals. In this sense, the divine nature of sovereignty remains — but a meaningless sacredness, a bankrupt affirmation of order without justice.

In his classic 1981 book, After Virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre surprises us with a myth: There was no such thing as "morality" and our understanding of the word, he argues, is a fragmented remnant of a once-changing and deeply rich universe of truth. In the mindset of liberals, morality has been detached from the deeper purposes of human existence and from the shared life of community with others.

This approach has produced individuals who may possess a sense of morality in the abstract, yet lack the broader context — such as tradition, relational bonds, or ultimate life goals — through which that morality can find meaning, direction, and practical application. The emotivist state of affairs, the claim that moral statements are just saying what they prefer, is driving our political chaos and tribalism. With no shared moral language, legitimacy will have to draw from procedural neutrality or populist homogeneity, neither of which can claim abiding authority. Meaningless rituals are empty; populism, devoid of ethics, collapses into violence. MacIntyre's appeal for the recovery of the moral tradition is not simply a matter of sentiment; it is a political-theological provocation: to trace sources of communal life that are able to bear justice and duty. This perspective also echoes post-colonialist criticisms. For example, Aditya Nigam (2006) examines the failures of secular nationalism in India, which initially offered liberation but ultimately led to the development of a bureaucratic elite culture. Modernity sans moral and spiritual content becomes an instrument of technocratic rule and elite domination. Political theology, therefore, must address not only the moral decomposition of the West, but the ways in which it has been globalised and refracted in complex form.

We inhabit an era dominated more by spectacle than by genuine political communication. The process of "manufacturing consent" within capitalist democracies — where media institutions shape and manipulate perceptions of reality to mold public opinion in alignment with the interests of ruling elites —was already a critical warning articulated by Chomsky (1989). But modernday spectacle has gone beyond mere manipulation into a realm of hyperreality. Jean Baudrillard's (1994) idea of simulation can be helpful here: politics does not just distort reality, but wipes it out. From reality television to leaders by clickbait, carefully curated news algorithms and newsfeeds mediate, fragment, and fuel political engagement, which is driven by passion. This change sabotages deliberation and leaves the public sphere in shambles. In this sense, the sacred doesn't disappear; it resurfaces or returns in

different guises or modes: in personality cults, in nationalist rituals, in moral panics and end-of-the-world conspiracy theories. Arendt (1958), for example, contended that politics is embedded in action, the plural aspect of massing together, and the joint capacity to begin anew. But today's public domain is action and performance, outrage rather than dialogue. Theatricality in politics is not only superficial or pretend; it is the shape sovereignty takes when sovereignty itself is discredited in a disenchanted world.

In reference to the problem of exhaustion, political theology cannot limit itself to enjoin a return to a sacred power or firm ground. There is a need to hold accountable the role of the sacred in today's political life and not overlook how symbols, rituals, and narratives function to legitimate or justify violence. However, the sacred is not just a relic of the past; it is a potential source of the future, generating solidarity, resistance, and transcendence. As Agamben and Foucault have argued, contemporary institutions often reframe religious categories in the language of secular thought. Not only are rational categories, such as sovereignty, rights, and democracy, but they are also terrains within theological discourse. It is political theology that uncovers these transformations and delves into its capacity for the possibility of redemption. It is in this context that Pankaj Mishra's (2017) call for moral and spiritual reinvigoration is relevant. In a world full of anger and frustration, rebuilding political authority does not require a checklist of policy alterations or a mechanism of institutional renovation. It must solve existential dislocations and historical trauma. As a result, political theology cannot simply criticize, but must also imagine the kinds of community, belonging and justice that might emerge outside of the realm of thinned-out sovereignty.

As the dominant form of politics continues to unravel under the weight of its own internal contradictions, we find ourselves in a landscape where no coherent ideology offers guidance, and no obvious alternative appears ready to supplant it. What emerges instead is a spectral political terrain—one that is haunted by the lingering aspirations of the past, overshadowed by the pressing

crises of the present, and yet strangely open to the possibilities of future reconfiguration. This spectrality does not signify emptiness; rather, it signals the unsettled presence of unfulfilled promises and unexhausted hopes.

The weakening of sovereignty, often taken as evidence of the end of politics itself, should instead be recognised as an invitation to reimagine politics altogether. Such re-imagination cannot rely solely on technical or institutional fixes, but requires the cultivation of a distinctive theological and moral imagination — an imagination capable of discerning meaning in fragility and of reawakening the ethical and spiritual dimensions of life lived in common. To pursue this task, we must engage not only withphilosophers who lament decline and dissolution, but also with those who labour to revitalise the ethical, communal, and even transcendent heart of human existence.

The vocation of political theology, then, is to give voice to the absence left by discredited ideologies, not by filling the void with fantasies of purity, exclusion, or violence, but by refusing the compulsion to fill it at all. Instead, it must acknowledge absence as a space for fragile but genuine commitments—to solidarity, to justice, and to the search for shared meaning. In this recognition lies the possibility of a politics that does not deny crisis but transforms it into a horizon for new forms of collective life.

**5. Reimagining Politics Beyond Modernity**

As we approach the conclusion of this study, it is clear that the current crisis in politics extends beyond the confines of institutions and ideologies; it is existential and even theological in nature. In attempting to cleanse political debate of the sacred, modernity ended up clearing the space for its bastardized return. It is not merely the decay of liberal rationalism and secular nationalism that scholars observe in our age of political disenchantment, but also the resurgence of myth, sentiment, identity, and nostalgia for transcendence in the domain of politics. These are not irrational throwbacks; rather, they are part of political life itself. We want to attempt to understand the return of the sacred to politics today, to

see why an approach like political theology is helpful to make sense of this return, and to speculate what a post-liberal political imaginary might look like today, one with a stake in the future, a future against nostalgia, reactionary or nostalgic, on the one hand, and against despair and nihilism on the other. By drawing upon an eclectic constellation of thinkers — including Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Talal Asad, Georges Bataille, Charles Taylor, Rajeev Bhargava, as well as Cornel West and Dipesh Chakrabarty — we suggest that political theology is not only subject to appropriation. Still, we should rather be reclaimed as a critical weapon to question authority, rethink justice, and fill the public sphere with meaning.

Max Weber's (1919, 2004) concept of the "disenchantment of the world" (Entzauberung) succinctly captures the defining character of modernity—a historical condition structured by rationalization and bureaucratic order, yet marked by the erosion of mystery, transcendence, and spiritual depth. Nevertheless, disenchantment is not an immutable condition; it provokes counteraction. The yearning for a moral foundation, collective identity, and spiritual connection resurfaces in political manifestations. Carl Schmitt (2005) acknowledged that all significant political ideas are secularized iterations of theological concepts. In times of crisis, sovereignty is revealed not as a neutral legal mechanism but as a theological proclamation of exception. However, it is not merely metaphorical. From the rise of religious nationalism in nations such as India, Israel, and the United States to the apocalyptic narratives embraced by populist movements and conspiracy-driven subcultures, the sacred is re-emerging in highly politicised and often exclusionary forms. As TalalAsad (2003) illustrated, the purported secularism of the modern state is not impartial; it is the result of specific historical and theological transformations in perceptions of religion, law, and violence. The implications are profound: the "post-secular" era is not characterised by the absence of religion but by its transformation. Political theology must address this transformation by examining how sacred narratives are employed, modified, and applied in

contemporary society. This necessitates a conceptual shift from presuming that religion is diminishing to recognising how it is reshaping the political landscape.

Among the most perturbing and troubling results of postmodernity is the collapse of universal narratives. Humanism, Marxist internationalism, and liberal cosmopolitanism were, at some time, illuminations of global justice and human beauty. But in today's conversation, they are likely suspect and thought of as artifacts of Western imperialism, cultural genocide, or neoliberal hypocrisy. This change has drawn new attention to local, particular, and identity-related attitudes. Chakrabarty (2000) advocates for a "provincialization of Europe" to challenge Eurocentric presuppositions in the structuring of political and intellectual thought. And yet the question that we must answer, or at least find a way around, is this: How can we affirm the legitimacy of particular identities without being a racist, a nativist or a tribalist? Without shared standards of right and wrong, politics will be guided not by a quest for justice but by struggle among claimants of victimhood. Charles Taylor (2007), in his analysis of the "politics of recognition," argues that contemporary identity politics calls for more than rights; it requires validation. But appreciation can be tinged with resentment when it's not reciprocated. So the call is to think up a post-universal ethics: a way to say yes to pluralism while encouraging solidarity. Political theology is instructive here. In both Christian and Islamic traditions, the ummah and ecclesia are visions of community constituted by a shared ethical mission rather than an ethnic or territorial base. While we cannot simply transfer these notions to secular politics, they challenge us to think beyond liberal individualism or ethnic nationalism. Throughout this book, a persistent theme is the enduring nature of sovereignty as a theoretical and political framework. Even when it manifests in a democratic form, sovereignty continues to function as a zone of exception, a domain where violence is sanctified in the pursuit of order. Walter Benjamin's (1921, 1996) distinction between "law-making" and "law-preserving" violence is pivotal in this context.

The modern state legitimises its authority through both its foundational acts (such as revolution, constitution, or conquest) and the ongoing enforcement of law (via police, courts, and surveillance). However, what transpires when law becomes depleted, legitimacy wanes, and violence is no longer perceived as redemptive? This has resulted in a state of political nihilism. Georges Bataille (1992) characterized this as the "sovereign moment" of excess—where the boundaries of rational control are exceeded, and the sacred re-emerges through transgression. The resurgence of violence in contemporary politics —evident in the proliferation of vigilante groups, the intensification of state militarism, and the rise of insurrectionary movements — signals not merely conditions of material deprivation but also a deeper metaphysical yearning for meaning, order, and transcendence. In the absence of justice, violence transforms into a distorted sacred form, an attempt to restore meaning through disruption. Political theology should address this issue. In theological terms, redemption involves not only forgiveness but also transformation. Politically, this implies reclaiming sovereignty not as domination but as the capacity to construct a world collaboratively. As Cornel West (2004) asserts, justice is a public expression of love. Political authority should be founded not on the right to kill but on the duty to care.

The exhaustion inherent in contemporary politics necessitates the rejuvenation of moral imagination. However, this rejuvenation cannot be accomplished through technocratic solutions or by reviving outdated ideologies. It must begin with a redefinition of what it means to be human: our collective experiences of living, suffering, and hoping. Rajeev Bhargava (1998) advocates for an "ethical secularism" that does not exclude religion but rather embraces its diversity. This concept aligns with the notion of collective public reason enriched by moral traditions. Such a political approach would avoid being theocratic or nihilistic; instead, it would be dialogical, rooted in mutual recognition, and focused on the common good. This renewal also requires education.

Hannah Arendt (1961) cautioned that each generation must start anew, not because the world is a blank slate, but because it is fractured. Education, storytelling, and public memory are crucial to this endeavour. Moral imagination is not inherent; it must be cultivated. Political theology, therefore, is not merely an abstract field but a formative practice — a way of engaging with the world, attentive to its wounds and potential. It questions not only the nature of power, but also its purpose. It considers not only who governs, but also whose name and for what purpose. This book takes its departure from the raw emotions of anger— anger that emerges out of widespread disillusionment, a sense of betrayal, and the profound alienation that have come to characterise the present political climate. Our time is often described as the 'age of anger,' a phrase that not only signals the ubiquity of frustration but also gestures toward the structural crises of democracy, capitalism, and identity. Yet it is crucial to stress that this "age" does not constitute the conclusion of history nor the final chapter of political possibility. To the contrary, even amid collapse, new horizons remain open.

From a theological perspective, every crucifixion intimates the possibility of resurrection; death is never absolute but is accompanied by the potential for renewal. Similarly, from a political standpoint, every downfall — whether of institutions, ideologies, or regimes — carries within it the seeds of reinvention. However, this renewal must resist two common temptations: the lure of nostalgia, which seeks refuge in an idealised past, and the seduction of a reckless futurism, which aims to construct an artificial future detached from the realities of human experience. Neither the past nor the future, taken in isolation, can function as our saviour.

What is required instead is a politics of transcendence — a mode of political imagination that does not evade the concrete struggles of life but rather elevates them to the level of ethical seriousness and symbolic depth. Such transcendence does not entail the imposition of religious doctrines upon governance; instead, it

seeks to recover the moral resonance, the symbolic richness, and the ethical intensity that make politics a truly human vocation. It calls us to reimagine the polis not as a mere marketplace of interests or a battlefield of power, but as a sacred space in which justice, truth, and love may take root and flourish. As contemporary societies confront the dual crises of liberal fatigue and postmodern disintegration, political theology does not claim to deliver ready-made solutions. Its contribution lies elsewhere: it provides orientation, offering a compass with which to navigate uncertainty. It reminds us that politics cannot be reduced to procedures, rules, or governance mechanisms. Politics is existential in nature. It concerns not only how we manage institutions but also how we live together, how we endure crises, and how we envision a common destiny. Ultimately, it touches the deepest questions of identity and becoming: who we are, and who we might yet become.

The broken promise remains broken. But grace insists: it is still worth trying to mend.

## "LET GOD BE GOD"

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