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Towards a typology of mediated anger: Routine coverage of protest and political emotion

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This paper establishes the importance of studying mediated anger. It first develops a typology of mediated anger, suggesting it is performative, discursively constructed, collective and political. It applies this typology to routine coverage of anger in UK protest coverage during a two-month time period in 2015. The analysis demonstrates that anger serves as a cause of engagement and a barometer of public feeling. It sets out a *spectrum* of discursive constructions of mediated anger. At one end sits *rational and legitimate anger*, which forms the basis for social change. Along the spectrum sits *aggressive and/or disruptive anger motivated by rational and legitimate concerns*. At the other end of the spectrum lies *illegitimate and irrational anger*.

The analysis shows that protesters can be simultaneously angry *and* rational, peaceful and legitimate. Discourses on protest construct a common-sense theory of political motivation, whereby anger explains the desire for political engagement, but only occasionally brings about other negative emotions or actions. As such, the paper contributes a more nuanced understanding of anger as a political emotion.

Keywords: affect, anger, demonstrations, emotion, journalism, protest

Introduction

Historically, anger has been a much maligned force in political life, and seen as a dangerous force of violence and aggression. However, this paper establishes the importance of studying mediated anger as a political emotion. It suggests that anger, as constructed through media coverage, is a distinctive formation which operates and circulates in patterned ways. It develops a typology of mediated anger as performative, discursively constructed, collective and political. It then applies this framework to routine coverage of anger in protest coverage in UK newspapers during a selected two-month time period in 2015. The analysis demonstrates that there is a *spectrum* of discursive constructions of the legitimacy of mediated anger. At one end sits *rational and legitimate anger*, which forms the basis for comprehensible projects for social change. Along the spectrum sits *aggressive and/or disruptive anger motivated by rational and legitimate concerns*. Finally, at the other end of the spectrum lies *illegitimate and irrational anger*.

The attempt at taking mediated anger seriously should be understood against the backdrop of a historical neglect of emotion in scholarly approaches to political life, which have been closely tied to a liberal democratic understanding of public discourse (e.g. Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2001). The liberal approach has tended to view emotion as anathema to good citizenship (Pantti, 2010). The ideal citizen, instead, should be rational, impartial and dispassionate (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013a). Nonetheless, an “affective turn” (Clough and Halley, 1997) across humanities and social sciences over the past few decades has called attention to the centrality of emotion in social life. Amongst political scientists and social movement scholars there is a growing consensus that political participation is motivated by emotional engagement. As Westen (2007) suggests, this body of work is based on the premise that the “*political brain is an emotional brain*. People participate because they *care* or feel passionately about an issue, and conversely, the choice of *inaction* also comes about as a result of affective responses (Berlant, 2007; Gould, 2010, p. 32). Similarly, Kim (2002) has called for “an emotions theory of preference formation by which emotions provide a commitment mechanism for activism by altering the salience hierarchy of personal identities and preferences.”

Evidence suggests that political participation appears to be driven in large part by impulses that run counter to ideals of liberal democracy. Instead of being driven by rationality, citizens who participate appear to be fuelled by passion and emotions ranging from love to hatred, and encompassing disgust, fear, compassion and care. Scholars thus reflect on the rise of “passionate politics,” “the politics of affect,” (e.g. Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001) and the “emotional public sphere” (e.g. Lunt & Pantti, 2007), to mention just a few labels reflecting an increased awareness of how citizen participation is shaped by emotion.

These approaches challenge the deeply entrenched binary distinction between emotion and rationality, instead suggesting that they need to be understood as closely entwined and interdependent. They see political engagement, participation, discussion and decision-making as inevitably predicated on *both* emotion and rationality, viewing the two as inseparable (Jasper, 2011). This requires a fundamental rethinking of scholarly approaches to emotion. Instead of ignoring emotions, we need to be willing to see their central place in public discourse and understand their workings in a nuanced manner. As Thompson and Hoggett put it, the “point is that wishing the emotions were not there will not make them go away; they will be present in deliberative forums whether or not they are officially excluded” (2001, p. 353). Since they first made this argument more than 15 years ago, the close relationship between political participation, anger and rationality has been extensively investigated by social movements scholars (e.g. Goodwin, Jasper & Poletta, 2001; Flam & King, 2007; Jasper, 2011).

In this context, it is important to make a distinction between the range of different emotions that are articulated by groups and individuals and circulate in the public sphere, and also the context-specific ways in which they operate, and the resulting responses they elicit. For example, personalized and emotional storytelling that allows us to empathize with the life experiences of distant others has been seen as

crucial to cultivating cosmopolitan sensibilities (e.g. Chouliaraki, 2006), and central to media coverage of events such as natural disasters and humanitarian catastrophes (Pantti et al. 2012), while emotions such as generosity may contribute to overcoming divisions and carve a path towards social justice (Nussbaum, 2016). Such arguments highlight the potentially positive consequences of the expression and elicitation of emotion.

Anger in public discourse

In taking emotions seriously, it is first of all important to understand that they operate and circulate in distinctive and patterned ways in public and mediated discourse. As research has shown, the majority of emotions expressed in public are negative (Martin and Rose, 2003), and mediated discourse is no different (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013b). In this context, one particularly important emotion to study is that of anger. As this article will demonstrate, anger is so crucial because of the ways in which it has frequently operated as a distinctly *political* emotion (Lyman, 1981, p. 61). Anger has been maligned in political thinking as a negative emotion, and one that potentially gives rise to aggression and violence and therefore requires management (e.g. Hochschild, 1983). Philosophers since the Stoics have viewed the “civilized life as one that avoids anger” (Holmes, 2004, p. 127). Anger is recognized in social theory as a reaction to injustice, and therefore inherently relational (Holmes, 2004). This understanding of anger was articulated by Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, where he defined anger as ‘an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one’s friends’ (1968: 1382–3).

Scholars in disciplines such as psychology and philosophy have typically viewed anger as an *individual* emotion which is unavoidable and difficult to control, and ultimately destructive to social relations. For example, the legal philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2016) has provided a compelling articulation of the dangers of

anger in her book, *Anger and forgiveness: Resentment, generosity, justice*. Here, she makes the case that anger is *never* normatively justifiable. She argues that “anger is not only not necessary for the pursuit of justice, but also a large impediment to the generosity and empathy that help to construct a future of justice” (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 8). This is because individual anger is usually accompanied by a desire for payback or retribution, which is socially counterproductive. There is, in Nussbaum’s view, one “borderline case of genuinely rational and normatively appropriate anger that I call *Transition-Anger*, whose entire content is: “How outrageous. Something should be done about that” (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 6). That is to say, Transition-Anger is appropriate because it entails moving beyond the pure emotion of anger to think about possible ways out of it, towards the resolution of injustices. However, she suggests that even if anger is rarely normatively justifiable—or rational—it has three roles that are valuable in *instrumental* terms:

First, it is seen as a valuable signal that the oppressed recognize the wrong done to them. It also seems to be a necessary motivation for them to protest and struggle and against injustice and to communicate to the wider world the nature of their grievances. Finally, anger seems, quite simply, to be justified: outrage at terrible wrongs is right, and anger thus expresses something true (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 211)

While Nussbaum’s (2016) detailed excursus into individual anger shows its moral and social inadequacy, her recognition of the usefulness of anger occurs in the context of collective anger; that is, anger expressed by groups of individuals, directed at a shared injustice.

This article sees *mediated anger* is a very different creature from the anger expressed by individuals who are, to use Nussbaum’s (2016) example, angry with their partners, perpetrators of crimes against their friends, or irritating colleagues. Instead, the understanding of mediated anger developed here shares a series of

features with the types of anger at work in social movements. Anthropologists and sociologists of emotion who have studied such movements share the assumption that anger is a political resource which is based on the public articulation of shared grievances (e.g. Holmes, 2004). Their analysis is premised on “the constitution of emotion, and even the domain of emotion itself, in discourse or situated speech practices (Katriel, 2015; Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990). These observations point to the fact that any analysis of anger needs to make differentiations between different types of anger, and that *collective anger articulated in public* may be a very different creature from *individual anger aired in private*.

Towards a typology of mediated anger

Mediated anger is distinctive because it is *performative*, *discursively constructed* through journalistic narratives, and usually *collective*, and *political*. Through these features some forms of mediated anger are discursively legitimated, and come to stand as exemplars of what Nussbaum (2016) refers to as *Transition-Anger*, oriented towards claims to justice and social change.

First, mediated anger is *performative* in the sense that it is based on the performance of actors in the public sphere. As social movements scholars and anthropologists have noted, emotions are, in the first instance, culturally constructed (Katriel, 2015), but the ways in which these cultural constructions take on meaning through their public articulation matters greatly, and is frequently highly strategic. When we speak of mediated anger as performative, this also reflects the fact that the authenticity of the emotions that circulate in mediated public discourse is impossible to ascertain, and that it is both more relevant and interesting to consider *which* emotions do gain purchase in the public sphere, *why*, and *with what consequence*. The ways in which we speak about anger in public matters hugely precisely *because* they are performative. And the performative construction of emotion that springs to life through mediated discourses also has significant ideological consequences. It provides

an emotional compass that we – as audience members and citizens – can use to orient ourselves and distinguish between more or less legitimate and rational forms of anger.

Secondly, mediated anger is *discursively constructed* through the narrative of journalists. That is to say, when we speak of anger as it appears in news coverage, it represents not the emotion as felt in an individual body, but rather journalists' interpretation of behavior of actors with reference to the emotion of anger as situated within the narrative of the journalistic text (see also Wettergren, 2015). But, if journalism is one of the key vehicles used for both establishing and perpetuating particular emotional regimes, it also facilitates the sharing of particular legitimate ways of talking about our feelings. The ways in which we talk about our feelings in the media, in turn, shapes the conditions of possibility for shared action. If we accept Foucault's (1978) understanding of discourse as a site "in which power and knowledge coalesce through a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" (Carlson, 2016, p. 353) it also entails an appreciation of journalism as "a set of institutionalized practices embedded within a web of sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting discourses that generates social meanings." In the case of mediated anger, journalistic interpretations – as the paper explores in more detail – have significant ideological implications. As Eksner (2015, p. 193) has suggested, emotion "displays in language may be employed as tools of hegemony by dominant groups and state institutions, and as vehicles of resistance by non-dominant groups."

On the basis of this key tension in the understanding of the role of mediated anger as a political emotion, this paper takes a closer look at how it is constructed in routine coverage of protest. Scholarly work on the media coverage of protests suggests that they are largely framed, through reliance on a "protest paradigm," as disruptive to the social order (Boyle, McLeod and Armstrong, 2012; McLoud, 2007). This is precisely because of the irrational behavior of angry protesters who threaten to turn violent. The extent of public anger is, in turn, often used as a means of predicting participation in protest, and therefore the potential for violence and other forms of disorder (Greer & MacLaughlin, 2010). Describing protesters as "angry" has

frequently served as a strategy for discrediting a movement and its tactics. However, mediated anger is also contextual, as interpretations of anger are inherently ideological. This is well illustrated in DeLuca and his colleagues' work on blog debates over the Occupy Wall Street movement. Their study found that when right-leaning blogs described protesters as angry, it "was usually identified as a cause for concern—that is, protesters' anger was seen as illegitimate and potentially dangerous." By contrast, left-leaning bloggers viewed the anger of the protesters as legitimate and therefore *not* dangerous (DeLuca et al., 2014, p. 494). In this case, commentators across the political spectrum identified anger as an important explanatory framework. But the discursive construction of this anger depended on the political vantage point of the writer. That is to say, the same expressions of anger can be seen as simultaneously disruptive and productive; destructive and empowering. As the paper will demonstrate, the ideological construction of protest is central to the political complexities of mediated protest, and frequently reflects not just positionings on the political spectrum, but also broader geopolitical contexts.

Finally, mediated anger is usually *collective* and therefore ultimately *political*. Though anger is in the first instance an individual emotion, it comes to matter politically when it is articulated by collectives in public, towards a shared objective of addressing an injustice. In media coverage, it is often the case that emotions are described as belonging to or articulated by collectives, in marked contrast to how emotion discourse operates in everyday talk (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013b). While individual emotions *do* make an appearance in media coverage, collective emotions – particularly anger – appear to be both more frequent and more newsworthy. This should not be surprising: While individual emotions are frequently relegated to the private sphere, collective emotions – particularly anger – serves as a marker of importance, highlighting possibilities for disruption of the social order and the emergence of transformative political projects.

The ways in which anger operates in the context of social movements has become a matter of interest in recent years, as scholars studying oppositional and marginalized groups have begun to recognize anger as an important resource of

collective empowerment (e.g. Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 2011). Indeed, the feminist slogan “the personal is political” speaks precisely to the significance of making public, collective and hence political the shared but discursively privatized experiences of women – in terms of varied challenges that are marked with gender, including those of child care, domestic violence, and housework, which would otherwise be relegated to the private sphere. Deborah Gould (2010, 2012) has studied the role of anger in queer and feminist movements. She took a particular interest in the potential of political empowerment through the labelling of emotions – as when lesbians “feeling bad” collectively relabeled their emotion as anger (Gould, 2012). By naming and articulating the negative affect of “feeling bad” about the consequences of patriarchy as “anger,” it becomes a public and collective emotion which empowers the angry group to take action. Similarly, in work on the AIDS activist group Act Up (Gould, 2010), she examined how anger, as a collective emotion, was encouraged as a positive resource, whilst despair was discouraged. Frances Shaw (2014), in recent work on Australian feminist blogging, demonstrated that through blogging, feminists gave “form and shape to the dissonance they felt in their own lives, and to share the discourses that enabled them to turn it into policies claims.” The expression of feelings of anger, then contributed to the creation of a political community. What this work shares is a recognition that collective anger can be a particularly useful resource for oppositional political life (see also Holmes, 2004), and that anger is readily recognized as an expression of shared injustice. As Lyman (2004, p. 133) has suggested, “anger is an indispensable political emotion – for without angry speech the body politic would lack the voice of the powerless questioning the justice of the dominant order.” This, in turn, points us in the direction of what Nussbaum (2016) refers to as Transition-Anger: An anger which is normatively legitimate because it involves claims for justice and social change; not merely voicing and explaining the emotion, but also raising the question of what should be done about it. When mediated anger is collective and political, then, it has the potential to transcend the narrow self-interest and retributive orientation of individual anger.

Studying mediated anger in protest coverage

This study focuses on the discursive construction of anger in routine mainstream media coverage of protest. It is based on a sample gathered through Nexis UK searches on stories published in UK newspapers during the two-month period between July 1 and September 1, 2015. The selected time period was based on an interest not in looking at the coverage of one particular protest, but rather in examining the routine ways in which mediated discourse constructs the relationship between anger and protest. For this reason these time periods were selected for the *absence* of major protests which might skew the coverage. Instead, the aim was to examine a variety of forms and contexts of protests as they occur and are interpreted in a global media landscape. An initial search for the terms “protest” or “demonstration” in the headline returned a total of 1914 stories, providing a baseline for understanding the frequency of stories about demonstrations or protest. The initial set of searches reveal that anger is a prominent, but not exclusive framework for discussing protest, insofar as the phrase was used in just under 14% of stories.¹ This was narrowed down to examine stories that discussed anger and protest, by adding the search terms “anger” OR “angry” anywhere in the text. This yielded a sample of 262 stories during the same period. After the exclusion of irrelevant stories,² a final sample of 246 stories formed the basis for the study.

Many of the protests covered during the sample time period occurred outside the UK - that is to say, in national and political contexts that were unfamiliar to newspaper audiences and therefore required explanation and domestication (Claussen, 2004). In this context, coverage of demonstrations in Morocco over a trial of a woman wearing a skirt to market, and in Bangladesh over the lethal beating of a young boy, matters because it tells us not just about what is going on elsewhere in the world, but

¹ The search was not extended to other emotion words, such as “outrage,” “fury” or “rage,” as this study focused on mediated discourses that explicitly invoked anger.

² A closer examination of the sample of 262 stories revealed that 16 of them were not relevant, as they dealt with topics such as the death of a protest singer, or language use in the EU, or because they reflected onlookers’ anger with protesters, rather than the anger of the protesters themselves

also because it signals, through journalists' discursive construction, how domestic audiences should interpret it. This enables us to investigate the complexities of the cultural politics of anger, to paraphrase Ahmed (2004), and to understand how mediated constructions of anger are tied into larger global contexts. Nonetheless, there was also a significant number of stories dealt with domestic protests within the UK – including frequent mentions of widespread protests by farmers over their treatment by supermarkets, but also encompassing Cardiff residents taking to the streets to complain about a new council rubbish bins and Rotherham taxi drivers protesting against a new licensing law.

Regardless of the location of protests, coverage did not offer simple or unitary constructions of the anger of demonstrators. Rather, the ways in which the protests and the role of anger within them were described in the coverage appeared to be shaped by several factors. First of all, there was what we might call a geopolitics of protest coverage at play, which means that “globalised power relations shape the view from the nation state” (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2013, Chapter 3). Journalists may be more likely to provide extensive coverage to protests in countries that are viewed as significant to domestic interests, just as opinionated journalism may privilege causes aligned with such interests. At the same time, the ideological orientation of newspapers matters in the context of a highly politically polarized and deeply heteronymous journalistic field in the UK (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 5). Right-leaning newspapers may be more interested, for example, in reporting favorably on concerns about immigration on the continent, while left-leaning newspapers may have greater editorial sympathy for anti-austerity protests in Greece. This demonstrates the complexities of the discursive construction of mediated anger, and how the same expressions of anger may be refracted rather differently depending on the political lens through which they are interpreted.

The analysis indicates there is a *spectrum* of discursive constructions of the legitimacy of mediated anger. At one end sits *rational and legitimate anger*, which forms the basis for comprehensible projects for social change. Along the spectrum sits

aggressive and/or disruptive anger motivated by rational and legitimate concerns. Finally, at the other end of the spectrum lies *illegitimate and irrational anger*.

Rational and legitimate anger

What is particularly striking is that in the vast majority of cases—211 out of 246 stories, or 86%—the anger of protesters was described as both rational and legitimate. The role of anger in these stories was to provide an *explanatory framework* for understanding the protests. As such, the media came frame a variety of different protests as being driven by, and giving voice to, politicized forms of anger which may be legitimate.

The *Bristol Post* was one of many newspapers to report on farmers protesting against dairy import policies introduced by supermarkets, and led their story as follows: “Dairy farmers angry about the importing of milk to make cheese, yoghurt and other products have held peaceful protests at supermarket depots” (Ashcroft, 2015). This lead is particularly interesting in its suggestion that the dairy farmers, despite their anger, staged *peaceful* protests. The story continued by providing details of the farmers’ grievances and the broader retail and policy context, including changes in EU regulations. Although anger was an important theme in the article (the word “angry” was repeated in a later section), the anger was both substantiated and legitimated by a more detailed explanation of the substance of their opinions, suggesting rational argumentation rather than unrestrained passion and the possibility of violence which are so often seen as a theme of protest coverage. This was, indeed, a typical pattern in stories that constructed anger as rational and legitimate. For example, a *Sunday Times* article about protests in the Ukraine linked the actions of protesters to generalized feelings of anger over a public appointment: “An anti-government protest took place last week outside the central bank and there was anger among critics of the government over the appointment of a state prosecutor thought to have close links to Russia” (Beliakov & Franchetti, 2015). Here, the emotion of anger

is associated with, but not described as causal of, the protest. The anger described here is one which is aimed at a highly specific, but also potentially rational, grievance: that of the appointment of a “state prosecutor thought to have close links to Russia.” Anger provides a necessary framework which legitimates the protests, rather than framing them as disruptive, aggressive or violent. For the center-right *Times* newspaper, it also provides an opportunity to report on opposition to the Russian government, frequently targeted for its repressive and anti-democratic practices in the British press. This story exemplifies a range of coverage in which protesters or their actions were not specified as being angry, but the narrative suggested that the anger of specific populations—critics of the Ukrainian government, some Greeks, German villagers, Welsh library users and South African students—helped to explain the protests. In this sense, anger becomes a barometer of public opinion: It functions as a measure of the seriousness of the underlying social issues raised by the protest. In doing so, it operates as an injunction to care through the journalists’ mediated witnessing (Cottle, 2013; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen & Cottle, 2012). It suggests that news audiences ought to pay attention to these stories precisely *because* groups and collectivities are angry. For example, a story in the *Western Daily Press* about the farmers’ protest first established the legality of farmers’ actions before suggesting that their anger indicated the need to take their claims seriously:

The farmers in these protests are not breaking the law. They are at worst causing inconvenience to some shoppers and some extra work for supermarket shelf-stackers.

But no-one should under-estimate their anger or their need for support. They need to be taken seriously and their voices need to be heard. (“Listen to...”, 2015)

In several cases, articles made distinctions between justified anger on the one hand, and aggression and violence on the other. A *Bedford Today* article about a group of women demonstrating at the treatment of refugees at Yarl’s Wood immigration removal center specified that although “people were angry and upset it wasn’t an aggressive atmosphere, it was incredibly supportive” (West, 2015).

This demonstrates a common discursive construction whereby the politicized expression of anger appears legitimate precisely because it is occasioned by rational claims oriented towards social justice, and is expressed in a peaceful manner. However, even if this was a common way of situating anger as controllable and therefore constructive, there was also a number of instances where anger was understood as legitimate despite causing disruption and/or violence.

Aggressive and/or disruptive anger motivated by rational and legitimate concerns

The construction of anger as legitimate, even if accompanied by aggression, disruption or violence occurred in a total of 14 stories, representing just under 6% of the sample. In this small number of stories, violence and disruption was mentioned – often in passing – while significant attention was devoted to explaining the substance of the underlying grievances. For example, a *Telegraph* story about a demonstration calling for a “yes” vote in the Greek referendum over whether to accept the European Union bailout package mentioned threats against journalists but framed it in the context of a broader public mood of anger at media coverage:

At a demonstration calling for a "yes" vote, journalists and camera crew deemed to be left-wing were threatened with violence. There has been growing anger among some Greeks over the coverage of the referendum, according to German news website Focus, which one of the main gripes being that private broadcasters are too biased in their reporting. (Berlin, 2015)

Here, the protest is only very briefly described. This description recalls conventional understandings of protesters as violent (in this case, against perceived left-wing journalists and camera crews). The context, however, provides an explanation for this behavior in terms of anger at media coverage of the referendum—anger that may be grounded in legitimate grievances. This discursive construction is also at work in a *Telegraph* story about student protests in South Africa:

The South African president, Jacob Zuma, agreed to a freeze on university fees last night after thousands of protesting students surrounded his offices and fought pitched battles with riot police. The protests, in which demonstrators ripped down security fences, set fire to portable buildings and hurled bricks at police, were the latest in a week of disturbances prompted by anger at inflation-busting fee hikes. (Laing, 2015)

Some of these stories also cautioned that the disruptive behavior was characteristic only of a minority of protesters, with the vast majority being peaceful. For instance, a story reflecting on the 10-year anniversary of G8 summit in Edinburgh contrasted images of rioters with those of the enormous anti-poverty protest:

The most graphic images of the events surrounding the G8 summit ten years ago show angry rioters clashing with baton-wielding police officers on the streets of the Capital.

But just as dramatic are the pictures of a quarter of a million people filling the city centre as they march through Edinburgh in bright sunshine, calling on the world leaders to "Make Poverty History"" ("G8 ten years on", 2015)

However, despite this small number of stories which recounted instances of disruption or violence as part of a normatively justified protest, there were also instances where disruptive violent behavior was seen to discount the legitimacy of particular demonstrations.

Illegitimate and irrational anger

Anger was discursively constructed as both illegitimate and irrational in a total of 21 stories in the sample, representing just under 9% of the sample. The small number of stories constructing anger in this way is, in a sense, surprising, given the fact that such treatment reflects the “protest paradigm,” which focuses on conflict and violence as a way of discrediting protesters and describing them as irrational (Boyle, McLeod and Armstrong, 2012; McLoud, 2007). A significant number of these articles appeared in the right-wing *Mail Online*, accounting for a total of 8 articles, representing 38% of all stories which constructed protest in this way. In one such story, the journalist described the “shocking behaviour” of participants at San Francisco’s monthly Critical Mass bike ride, as evidenced in a video recording obtained by the media organization: According to the newspaper headline, a “[s]hocking video shows mob of bicyclists attacking female motorist in a rental car during cycling safety protest... The angry mob stopped the car's progress and wouldn't let the driver move” (Bleier, September 1)

The irony of participants in what was allegedly a “cycling safety protest” behaving in an unsafe and violent manner here serves to underscore the irrationality of the protesters, and undermining any substantive message associated with the actions. Indeed, describing protesters as angry and disruptive was sometimes used as a strategy to discredit them. Such a strategy was, for example, used by politicians to denigrate protesters. As elite sources, they serve as the “primary definers,” (Hall et al., 2013) determining the framework through which the story is interpreted. In an *Essex Chronicle* report, Priti Patel, Conservative Member of Parliament for Witham, complained about a group of elderly disabled constituents in handing in a petition to protect the National Health Service (NHS) from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnerships (TTIP) between the US and EU. She described them as engaging in “appalling harassment and thuggish behaviour”:

They [...] came to the Conservative office unannounced, created a disturbance by banging on windows, the office door, taking pictures of the office and frightened the lady working in the office.

"By their own admission they arrived there in an 'angry' state." She added: "This campaign has nothing of any substance to say about the NHS and the organisers are more interested in twisting and misrepresenting my comments on this matter rather than engaging constructively about local health services. (Dyer, August 5)

In this account, the anger of protesters rendered them irrational and therefore disturbing and frightening, while having "nothing of any substance to say about the NHS." Against this framework, the article went on to interview the protesters and discussing the substance of their concerns: "The People's NHS fear the TTIP deal could mean multinational corporations privatising huge swathes of publicly owned assets, including the NHS, with the British Government unable to stop them" (Dyer, August 5).

Some of the stories explicitly described anger as harmful to social cohesion, and juxtaposed it to more positive affective responses such as compassion. For example, a report on protest against large-scale migration in Germany, published in the *Sunday Times*, analyzed a perceived shift in the emotional climate of politics as follows:

In Sumte, across Germany and indeed throughout continental Europe, compassion for foreigners fleeing war and barbarism in their homeland has given way to anger and fear, boosting support for populist parties and raising the prospect of a violent backlash. (Campbell, October 25)

Here, the emotions of anger and fear are marked as destructive, in clear opposition to "compassion for foreigners fleeing war and barbarism in their homeland," and potentially giving rise to violence. This points to the ways in which mediated anger cannot be seen in isolation, but is discursively co-constructed with other political emotions, and gains meaning through these associations. This is further

complicated by questions of *who* the protesters are, and *what language* they use in articulating their grievances. Along those lines, several of the protests that were constructed as illegitimate involved openly racist language and groups known for extremist views, as in this *Mail Online* account of a video detailing tension between the Ku Klux Klan and the New Black Panther party:

Angry clashes erupted between members of the Ku Klux Klan and the New Black Panther Party.

And in the same video, a white man in a light blue top threatens the black people in attendance by saying 'I'll hang your black *ss,' while another angry white supremacist shouts at the crowd: 'You come here and I'll knock you on your black *ss muthaf*ker.'

Meanwhile, a man holding the Confederate flag told another African American that they were 'the color of excrement,' Raw Story reports. (Robinson & de Graaf, 2015)

The openly racist behavior of Klan supporter was juxtaposed with the compassionate actions of a police officer on the scene at the demonstration:

As hatred and racial intolerance engulfed a rally over the Confederate flag in South Carolina, a poignant picture of a black police chief helping a man who was wearing a swastika T-shirt emerged on Twitter.

The sick man, according to reports, had suffered from heatstroke and was being helped by Leroy Smith, the director of the South Carolina Department of Public Safety.

Smith's ability to show compassion to the man draped in clothes bearing the insignia of racist intolerance has gone viral and been retweeted over 2,000 times since it was shared on Twitter. (Robinson & de Graaf, 2015)

Here, again, anger is constructed as normatively undesirable, illegitimate and exclusionary through its juxtaposition with the desirable pro-social emotion of compassion. In stories that rely on this juxtaposition, it appears that compassion serves as an antidote to exclusionary anger, establishing “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983) that tell us how we ought to behave in the company of others.

A final category of illegitimate anger was premised on establishing the protest as arising from the irrational behavior of a small group or just one aberrant individual, as in this story about a man demonstrating against parking tickets by driving a horse and cart into a town center:

The driver of a horse and cart that brought town-centre traffic to a standstill in an extraordinary protest has threatened to repeat it "every day".

Ray Beecham blocked High Street, Croydon, with his horse and carriage for 20 minutes as part of a bitter dispute with the council over parking tickets.

He caused a queue of buses and cars stretching to Wellesley Road before being moved on by police on Thursday afternoon.” (Baynes, 2015)

Here, the protest is marked as “extraordinary,” and the police involvement is noted, serving to underscore the ways in which it is both irrational and illegal. In addition, this story and other similar ones appeared to suggest that for one person to cause such disruption on the basis of their individual grievances was normatively undesirable. This, once again, points to the importance of mediated anger as collective and therefore political: To count as legitimate, media constructions of anger require a shared cause which is always-already directed towards social change. It is therefore a species of what Nussbaum (2016) refers to as “Transition-Anger.” But, counter to the allegedly rare occurrence of Transition-Anger in everyday life (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 36), mediated constructions of anger appear to be dominated by this form.

Interpreting mediated anger

Anger is used as an overarching framework explaining the motivation to engage in collective action. Mediated anger is legitimate when it provides a means to express collective, rather than individual, grievances. So, typical of newspaper discourse more broadly, anger is expressed on the part of groups, rather than individuals, and is central to the formation of their claims and grievances in the public sphere. However, the *consequences* of protesting in anger which in turn impact on the horizons for political action, are dependent on context, and often articulated in the context of other emotions, like compassion. What this implies is that there is a broad discursive “common sense” agreement on the role of anger as a mobilizing emotion. But there is also a recognition that anger can be channeled into more or less constructive forms of political action, and the consequences of anger largely depend on the context. This analysis also demonstrates that it is not simply the case that an emphasis on anger in protest serves to discredit protesters or neglect their message. Rather, journalistic discourses suggest that people protest *because* they are angry, but this anger is, in the majority of cases studied here, both rational and legitimate. This complicates dominant scholarly accounts of the construction of protest, even if some scholars have noted a move towards a more nuanced representation of activists emerging over time (Di Cicco, 2010). It should be noted that the distinctive patterns detected in this paper are based on routine coverage of a range of protests over an extended period. This, in turn, implies that the kinds of demonstrations studied here may be distinctive from those that form the basis of most studies of protest coverage, which focus on large-scale discrete events that are often, by their very nature, more extensive and therefore more disruptive than the demonstrations dominating my sample, which frequently either occur outside the UK, or are small-scale and localized. These features, in turn, require journalists to contextualize the protests by explaining the substantive concerns animating them in the first place – a practice that contributes to their legitimization. This highlights the need for more extensive research on routine coverage of smaller-scale protest, which might serve to further refine the protest paradigm.

What is clear is that in the examples given here, the power to discursively construct the meaning of the protest—and the role of anger within it—appears to be entirely within the hands of the journalists. Yet protests are, by their very nature, performative and public acts which are often carefully orchestrated, particularly with the respect to the display and management of emotions, whether positive or negative (Juris, 2008). Here, it is interesting to note the use of anger, disruption and violence as an explanatory framework for constructing protest has been strategically resisted by non-violent social movements. This is particularly important in a time of “image politics” designed to create “critique through spectacle” (DeLuca, 1999), but has long been a feature of social movement approaches. For example, the tactics of the anti-war protests of 1960s, including placing flowers in the soldiers’ guns and the injunction to make love not war, were particularly striking because they were both consistent with the message of the movement and also contested dominant media constructions of protest. More recently, the Occupy movement has constructed itself as horizontal, egalitarian, creative and strategically non-violent movement (e.g. DeLuca et al. 2012). The umbrella revolution in Hong Kong garnered sympathy around the world precisely because its polite participants, brandishing only umbrellas, were met by disproportionate police violence. Research shows that protesters were predominantly described as “gentle” and “polite,” and that the violence was caused by the disproportionate and violent official response (Xu, 2014). What these movements share, then, is a deliberate and strategic reversal of the presumption of political theory that collective action is necessarily predicated on anger and therefore causing violence. This suggests that despite the importance of anger as an explanatory framework, it is also one which is contested by the movements themselves. Anger, then, is a complex and inherently ideological discursive resource.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to establish the significance of mediated anger. The paper first developed a typology of mediated anger, suggesting that we should view such anger as distinctive because it is performative, discursively constructed, collective and political. Examining a sample of UK newspaper stories featuring routine protest coverage, the paper suggested that the idea of anger as a cause of engagement and a barometer of the intensity of public feeling is central to media discourses around protest, and ultimately forms an injunction to care. Mediated anger is variegated and complex, depending on its articulation with other narrative elements. For this reason, the paper set out a *spectrum* of discursive constructions of mediated anger. Although, in a majority of cases, it appears to be rational and legitimate, and even disruptive or violent protests may be counted as such, there are also exceptions. Anger in protests is more likely to be constructed as illegitimate when it results in violence; when it is associated with intolerance or extremism; and when it is associated with very small groups or individuals, rather than collectives articulating shared grievances. This, in turn, suggests that protesters can be simultaneously angry *and* rational, peaceful and legitimate. Discourses on protest construct a common-sense theory of political motivation, whereby anger explains the desire for political engagement, but only occasionally and not necessarily brings about other negative emotions or actions. This anger, in turn, stems from collective and publicly articulated grievances, usually against larger injustices that no individual can address on their own. Through these stories, then, anger is always-already political and has the potential to change the world, for better or worse.

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