

# **ANGRY? #METOO.**

## AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HARNESSING THE POWER OF FEMALE RAGE

Word count: 37.000

**Sigrid Wallaert**

Student number: 01408158

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tom Claes

Readers: Prof. Dr. Farah Focquaert and Prof. Dr. Marysa Demoor

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*Nothing to see over here. Just sharpening my talons. Stretching my wings. Practicing my banshee shriek that makes terrible men explode into clouds of dust and blow away in the wind.*

*- Lauren Groff, Twitter*

*We are not goddesses or matriarchs or edifices of divine forgiveness; we are not fiery fingers of judgment or instruments of flagellation; we are women forced back always upon our woman's power.*

*- Audre Lorde, Uses of Anger*

*Overnight, like a girl in a myth being hunted by a god who's determined to have his way with her, she has altered herself, remade herself so she can't be had by anyone.*

*- Ali Smith, Autumn*



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# Preface

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A dissertation like this one is always a learning experience, and in writing this thesis I certainly learned many things. Firstly, I learned that an academic piece of work can nonetheless elicit an enthusiastic response from the general public. Thesis-writing was prime among conversation topics this year, and when people heard that I was writing mine about female rage, I received a broad array of reactions ranging from confused to interested to slightly bemused. As always, about twenty percent of people still think I have been studying for a degree in psychology for the last few years. From the remaining eighty percent, however, I enjoyed hearing a varied and thoughtful response. I was recommended articles, radio programmes, even a collage artist that would provide a fresh perspective on my topic. I was asked to explain and to contextualise, and I found many an interested audience for my ramblings. In talking to people outside of the field of philosophy or gender studies and being met with keen interest, I discovered the importance and the fruitfulness of broadening the accessibility of academic work. While research and thinking are definitely productive and fruitful, it is equally important to build and safeguard links between this research and the majority of people who are situated outside of academia, or inside of it but in different fields. Most people I encountered were open to learning and receptive to new ideas. To let this potential go to waste by confining research to an ivory tower would be a mistake.

Secondly, I learned to appreciate the joy of research. Immersing myself in one topic for a year turned out to be an immensely rewarding task and one I would gladly start again. I had the singular experience of allowing research to “flip your mind,” as Sara Ahmed called it (McGregor, 2019): when reading a certain book or article suddenly opens up an entirely new perspective on the problem you have been working on, and spins you around to face in a new direction. I had this experience when reading Amia Srinivasan’s *The Aptness of Anger* (2018), which has now become a model of good writing for me. Another one of the joys of research is the way everything suddenly seems to be linked to the topic you are researching. In my personal reading, I found myself highlighting quotes about anger and feminism, picking them out with ease because my mind was so attuned to the topic. The experience of building a network of interconnected bits of knowledge is extremely rewarding, and one I hope to build on in the future.

Thirdly, I learned the importance of having the right people surrounding you when undertaking such a difficult project. I want to thank my supervisor, prof. dr. Tom Claes, and my reader, prof. dr. Farah Focquaert, for their generous support and stimulating conversations in shaping this thesis. They believed in this project and in me, and more valuable support is difficult to imagine. I would also like to thank my friends, most importantly Ine Versigghel and Levi Haeck, for always being there for me and my boring updates about the thesis writing process. Sharing word counts and writing goals back and forth might seem banal, but little things like these are essential to feeling less alone in what is essentially a very lonely writing process. Next, I want to thank my cat, Poesli, who cannot read this but was nevertheless an invaluable and very soft source of support and distraction. And lastly, I want to thank my parents, Tomas Wallaert and Martine Wezenbeek. Without them, I would be nowhere, and words cannot grasp how grateful I am for their unconditional love and support. Thank you.



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# Introduction

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The choice of a subject to write a master's thesis on is one that feels important even if in the grand scheme of things it might not be. Whatever you choose will be an area of research you will be immersing yourself into for about a year, and a situation where you are utterly sick of it after two months is best avoided. So when the time came for me to decide on my topic, I took the decision seriously. I knew I wanted to work in the field of feminist philosophy, but the precise area I wanted to work in was still unclear. In order to get some ideas, I looked around me, in the news and on the general internet. Soon enough I started to notice a trend in feminist circles. More and more, women were talking about anger. Under the term 'female rage' different writers were arguing for a revaluation of anger, or maybe just a valuation of it, since women's anger historically has not been valued very highly. I noticed a trend in both on- and offline publications of more and more women talking about their anger, and urging other women to let their anger run wild. Examples are books like Soraya Chemaly's *Rage Becomes Her* (2018), Brittney Cooper's *Eloquent Rage* (2018), and Rebecca Traister's *Good And Mad* (2018), or the series of articles on female rage that were published by online platforms like *Bitch Media* (e.g. Zeisler, 2018) and *Electric Literature* (e.g. Harding, 2018). As can be seen from the dates of these publications, this 'anger turn' in feminism roughly happened in 2018. It was preceded and spurred on by the #MeToo movement which started roughly in 2017, as I will explore in more depth in chapter 1. At the time of writing, in 2019, the academic wing of this anger turn seems to be taking effect, with several publications on women's anger appearing or being set to appear. Here, examples are volume 19, issue 4 of *Feminist Media Studies* (2019), from which I used several articles in this thesis, or the special issue of *Signs* on the topic of rage, which is set to appear in 2021 (*Signs*, 2019). Cynics might argue that the current rise in female anger is just another part of the global resurgence of populism (Wood, 2019). While I can see how one might arrive at this link, I would like to take a more hopeful stance. Rather than being part of the populist wave crashing down on the world, I think that the anger turn in feminism is a reaction to this wave, working against it rather than with it. As I will attempt to show in these pages, anger, and especially women's anger, can be a tool of special value in political revolution and in

combating oppression. To see this resurgence of anger as part of that of populism, then, is missing the point.

Women's anger is not new. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, for example, several instances of "women's uproar" are documented (Haemers, Bardyn and Delameilleure, 2019, p. 189). However, the anger turn that can be observed around 2018 deserves special attention. For while women's anger has presumably always been felt, it has not always been expressed. As I will show in the following chapters, the suppression of women's anger can take many forms, and these have certainly been at work throughout the ages. Historically, women's anger has been suppressed rather than expressed. So the fact that now, women are reclaiming their anger and starting to notice its value, is worthy of further investigation. At the start of this project, the active reclamation of anger was clearly felt, especially online. A theoretical framework to capture this surge in rage and a philosophical investigation of the value of it, however, are still lacking. This thesis aims to make a start towards filling those gaps. In providing philosophical backing to the lived experience of many women, this thesis tries to support and frame their anger, offering theoretical support structures to feminist activism. I believe that philosophy should not confine itself to the walls of the ivory tower, but it should dare to venture outside and see what is going on. This thesis started with such a tentative exploration, and it attempts to use the tools academia provides to analyse the findings, in a way that is hopefully of use to readers both in- and outside of it.

When initially exploring possible topics and stumbling upon female rage, my very first question was simply: what is going on? After some more exploring and reading and theorising, this vague question was distilled down into one main research question and four sub-questions, each of which corresponds to a chapter of this thesis. The main, overarching question this thesis tries to answer is: can anger be a valuable communication tool for women, especially in the context of feminist activism? While the entire thesis aims to provide an answer to this question, this task is accomplished by dividing it up into four sub-questions. The first one of those is: what is the background against which this 'anger turn' is situated? In order to understand the phenomenon of female rage and to know what is at stake, it is essential to get a view of the bigger picture. This question is answered in chapter 1. I start by examining some of the expressions of female rage that can be found in the online space. Next, I look at how the #MeToo movement originated and spread, and how it

might have been a catalyst to the anger turn. I also investigate some of the reasons women today might have to be angry, and I look at how the popularisation of anger and the popularisation of feminism are interrelated. Finally, I turn to the inclusivity of the female rage movement and what kinds of people are and are not included in it.

Moving on from this first question, and with the background it provides in mind, I turn to the second sub-question: why and how is women's anger silenced? To answer this question, in chapter 2, I take on the theoretical framework of testimonial injustice, a term coined by Miranda Fricker (2007) to signify the ways in which messages can fail to receive the uptake they deserve due to biases on behalf of the receiver. I first try to grasp what exactly testimonial injustice is and how it can be useful in the context of this thesis. Next, I look at a few factors that can influence testimonial injustice. The first of these factors, an important one in my context, is that of gender. The testimonial playing field is often slanted to benefit men, which influences the uptake women senders get for their messages. Next, I look at class, which again influences the way one's message is received. This can happen inadvertently, as a consequence of one's social identity, but it can also be manipulated. I then move on to examine the ever present dichotomy between rationality and emotion or mind and body, and the way in which recourse to rationality can be used as a means to safeguard the status quo. After that, I look at power inequalities and the way they influence the slope of the testimonial playing field. Lastly, I study the way in which the label of 'personal' is applied mostly to women's work and how it is thereby used to discredit it. Overall, this second chapter paints a picture of how *testimonial injustice* can affect women, and how it can prevent their angry messages from receiving the uptake they deserve.

In chapter 3, I tackle the third sub-question: what is the value of anger for women? To arrive at an insightful answer, I list some perceived disadvantages of anger and I show why they are not really disadvantageous to the emotion, and I further tilt the balance by introducing several advantages of anger. Both in the case of the disadvantages and that of the advantages, I try to show how they apply to women specifically. For the disadvantages, I first look at the retributivist critique that is often posed against anger, notably by Martha Nussbaum. I critique Nussbaum's conception of anger and I argue that anger is to be found on a scale, ranging from retributive to forward-looking, rather than being fundamentally retributive and incompatible with forward-looking thought. Next, I tackle the claim that

voicing a message angrily reduces its uptake. In this case, I argue that this is not the consequence of the anger itself, but rather of specific prejudices on the part of the receiver about the identity of the sender of the message. Thirdly, I investigate the issue of anger being used in political enemy building. Here, my conclusion is that anger is a neutral political tool that can be used for both good and bad ends, so its political use is not inherently disadvantageous. Lastly, I turn to anger among women, where I show that this type of anger actually carries important information and should not be dismissed as being divisive. In striving for unity and not allowing internal anger to be expressed, feminists lose out on a crucial source of knowledge. After that, I turn to the advantages of anger. In the following order, I look at anger's motivational force, its power in working against oppression, the way it can assist in political revolution, its community building assets, its inherent creativity, and lastly its epistemic value. In closing, this chapter shows a positive image of anger, attempting to counter the common discourse of anger management with a more encouraging approach.

After that positively orientated chapter, some qualifying is needed. In the fourth chapter, I answer the last sub-question: which considerations should be kept in mind when utilising anger, or when spurring others towards the use of anger? I do not want to be read as unequivocally advocating the use of anger, so this chapter is where I add some issues to be aware of when utilising anger. Firstly, I examine the stereotype of the angry woman which will most likely be attributed to women expressing their anger. I also look at warnings given to women who want to express their anger, and why these warnings often do more harm than good. Next, I make a perspective shift with respect to the previous chapter. Whereas before, I looked at anger from a productivity standpoint, here I follow Amia Srinivasan (2018) in looking at the aptness of anger instead. This shift in perspective provides some interesting insights, along with new considerations to be taken into account when expressing anger. Thirdly, I turn my focus on the figure of the victim. The victim-focused approach of #MeToo appears to have been kept in the female rage movement, but this might not always be entirely positive. I distinguish between active and passive assignment of victimhood to solve this puzzle. After that, I ask the question of whether anger should be turned into a duty. My answer to this question is negative, and I enumerate some reasons why. Lastly, I stress the importance of evaluating our own anger, reflecting both on the way we see our own, feminist anger and on what to do when our anger does not achieve the results we hoped it

would. With all of these reflections in mind, and the baggage provided by the previous chapters, it is then possible to come to a conclusion, and to answer the overarching research question I asked at the beginning: can anger be a valuable communication tool for women?

In writing this thesis and constructing its arguments, I used a large number of non-scholarly sources, like newspaper articles and books aimed at a wider audience. These kinds of sources are where the anger turn is most clearly felt, though as I noted before, it is starting to take effect in academia as well. By interweaving these more popular sources with traditional academic sources, I attempted to 'elevate' the result to an academic standard in its entirety. Though the popular sources were my starting point, the academic ones provided a more rigorous theoretical framework, allowing me to deeply understand and analyse the movement of female rage. This means that this thesis is predominantly literature-based. The combination of both kinds of literature functions as the bare bones of this thesis, which was then further fleshed out by independent, critical thinking on my part. I also made the decision to write this thesis in English rather than my native Dutch. There were some practical reasons for this, but an important reason is the fact that the vast majority of the current conversation around female rage is happening in English. Both kinds of sources I used, popular and academic, were largely English-language. By writing in English, this thesis can hopefully aim to be a part of that conversation. As a welcome surplus, it also facilitates direct quotations. And, not unimportantly since ultimately this thesis is meant as a learning experience, it gave me the opportunity to practice my academic writing skills, which might prove useful in the future.

This thesis aims to accomplish three main goals.<sup>1</sup> The first one is to 'elevate' the discourse around female rage to an academic standard. At the point when I started my research, in late 2018, there was very little academic literature on female anger from a philosophical point of view. That is why with this thesis I wanted to use the tools of philosophy to better understand the phenomenon and to provide a solid theoretical framework to guide a critical philosophical analysis of female anger. Theory and more anecdotal evidence each provide an interesting perspective on the matter, but the most stimulating discourse arises when the two are combined. That is why this thesis tries to keep both sides intact, preserving links to

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<sup>1</sup> A fourth goal is of course that of personal development: it allowed me to exercise my academic skillset and to immerse myself in feminist philosophical literature, two experiences I will continue to build on in the future.

lived experience while also connecting these experiences to a rigorous theoretical framework. Secondly, what this thesis aims to accomplish is a (re)valuation of women's anger. As I have already mentioned, this gendered emotion is often suppressed, with the emphasis lying firmly on anger management rather than anger expression. While I do not wholeheartedly back the expression of anger in any and all cases, as will become clear in chapter 4, I do think anger gets a bad rap and deserves better. I will endeavour to show the productive potential of anger, and what can be gained if we become aware of the silencing of anger that we ourselves might be contributing to. In hearing others' anger, especially if that anger is coming from subordinated groups, we are able to access a new and vital source of information and power. Silencing anger fails to recognise the causes for that anger, and it takes away the voice of those groups for whom anger can provide a rare opportunity towards being heard. Thirdly, this thesis does not want to remain confined to the ivory walls of the academic world. It aims to take steps in the direction of providing an academically supported toolkit for angry feminists, answering questions about the validity and productivity of anger in a reasonably accessible yet rigorous academic manner. The insights provided in these pages can hopefully be of use to feminists doing the work at the grassroots level as well. The anger turn is still very recent, and not that much scholarly work has been done on it. To have a theoretical framework to structure one's thoughts and work with can be useful, and this is what this thesis aims to provide in a preliminary fashion.

The work this thesis does is limited in several ways. Firstly, there are limits in time and space. I do not pretend to have comprehensively grasped the entirety of female rage: my focus is limited to the current iteration of it as it started roughly in 2018, and as it played out mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world. A focus on other time periods or a historical perspective on the topic of female anger could also prove interesting. Equally, the geographical scope could have been moved or widened. I have not yet looked at any work on female rage in the non-Western world, although that would be a crucial topic to look at as well. This thesis is also limited in the perspective it takes. In trying to tell a coherent story, several interesting perspectives have not been developed as fully as they could have been. Examples of this are the psychological critique of anger, connected with the phenomenon of hysteria, or the interplay of the personal and the universal in the silencing of anger. Secondly, it is important to note that this thesis, though I tried to make it as inclusive as I could, cannot speak for



everyone. A vital dimension that I have not treated in depth is that of race. As a white woman, I felt this was not my place, and I wanted to leave this dimension to scholars of colour to explore more. I do want to note that I am aware of it and of its omission in these pages. It was a conscious choice that I hope is the right one. I also use binary gendered language throughout most of this thesis. I have tried to use more inclusive language as well, contrasting men not just with women but with non-males, or with women and non-binary people. However, the anger movement this thesis is a part of is focused strongly around *female* rage, so I felt it was justified to use the binary language of women versus men. I do want to note that I do not wish to exclude people who do not feel they fit at either end of the gender spectrum, and I welcome feedback on how I can make my language more inclusive in the future.



# 1. Setting the Scene

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*Who is it for me to bring all this unfolding into being?*

*- Sheila Heti, Motherhood*

This thesis started with two words: female rage. They kept popping up, in the online space but offline as well, and seemed to be a marker of an interesting new movement. Of course, women have presumably always been angry. They certainly have had reason to be. And while the expression of certain emotions can take on a gendered quality, the experience of emotions is not reserved for one gender or another. So even if the expression of women's anger has traditionally been repressed or discouraged, as many people believe (e.g. Chemaly, 2018; Traister, 2018), there have always been angry women. However, some things are new at present. Over the last couple of years, interest in women's anger has markedly increased, as evidenced by the publication of many books, articles, blog posts, and several other types of media on the topic.

There is of course an undeniable link between female rage and the #MeToo movement, including its international equivalents. Equally, the recent popularisation of feminism has played a large role as well. Within the informal movement of female rage, women are reclaiming their anger, an emotion which they feel has long been forbidden to them. It's unladylike, too loud, it gathers too much attention. Better throw some plates out the window (Chemaly, 2018, p. xxi) and get it over with: vocally expressing anger is just not done. But now, it seems like these attitudes are changing, and women are beginning to embrace their anger. This new, angry movement is chaotic, unorganised and decentralised. But it is powerful, and its power seems to lie exactly in the disorganised anger it expresses.

In this background chapter, I want to provide a sketch of the backdrop against which the resurgence of female rage and the rest of this thesis play out. To start with, I will attempt to grasp some of the expressions of female rage that exist in the online space. Next, I will sketch the background of the #MeToo movement which was so prominent in popular media around 2018. Then I will look at a few reasons women currently have to be angry, such as sexual harassment and other instances of misogyny. After that, I will turn to the recent popularisation of female anger and the links it has with the popularisation of feminism that

preceded it. Lastly, I will try to qualify who exactly is meant by the 'female' in 'female rage' or by the 'women' in 'women's anger'. In answering these questions, a suitable background will have been created to delve into more theoretical considerations in the further chapters.

### **1.1. The Anger Turn**

As I already touched upon in the introduction, the surge in female anger this thesis aims to analyse started roughly in 2018. The #MeToo movement, which started in 2017 (cf. *infra*), acted as a catalyst for it. Both are reactions to misogyny, and they are strongly intertwined: anger can be used as a means of expression in the #MeToo movement, and cases with the #MeToo label can cause anger in women. Interestingly, it seems like there is a lot more literature about women's anger than there are actual textual expressions of that anger. Rage is often expressed on social media like Twitter, where it is technically permanently available to the public but difficult to track down in the context of research. Women do not conveniently add a hashtag such as #femalerage or #angrywoman to their angry tweets so they can easily be found by researchers. For example, a quick scroll through my Twitter timeline provides several examples of women being angry about misogyny, but not in a way that is searchable or can easily be found later (e.g. Magliano, 2019; Valenti, 2019). In fact, when searching the internet for those terms, one is met with a discouraging amount of misogynistic memes made by men making fun of angry women. Moreover, Google search trends for 'female rage' and 'angry women' do not really seem to show a significant spike around the time the topic started to get more traction (Google, 2019a and 2019b). I think this shows that, while female rage was (and is) being talked about on a meta-level, the people on the ground actually being angry and doing the work do not necessarily call it by those terms, or by any terms. They just express their anger and are more concerned with the cause they are angry about than with meta-level discussions on the ways in which they express themselves.

When looking for textual evidence of this new wave of female anger, what *can* be found are opinion pieces on news websites. Here, women do get a platform to voice their anger, but at the same time they remain bound to the rules of that platform. Certain style guidelines have to be adhered to, which means that their anger by and large stays under the surface. There are no all caps or particularly strong terms, but it is nevertheless still clear that the articles

stem from a place of rage. Examples of this kind of subdued anger are Gay (2018), Manne (2017) and West (2017). In Roxane Gay's article, entitled *I Thought Men Might Do Better Than This* and published in The New York Times in October 2018, she confronts men accused of sexual crimes in relation to the #MeToo movement with their behaviour in reaction to those accusations. Too often, she states, they get access to a well-respected platform to publish essays lamenting how their lives are now ruined. As Gay writes, "the bar for a man's ruin is, apparently, quite low" (Gay, 2018). For of course it is not true that these men's lives are in ruins: judge Brett Kavanaugh, for example, was still able to join the US Supreme Court, regardless of the - very credible - accusations made against him. Notable in Gay's article is her own use of the term 'rage'. She only uses it with regard to the men she accuses, describing them as "[displaying] entitlement and *rage* and contempt for being seen for who they truly are", or about judge Kavanaugh, that "he was all *rage* and righteousness, ego and entitlement" (Gay, 2018, emphasis added). This can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, Gay's association of rage with these men might implicate a negative view of the emotion. In this case, the fact that Gay's own writing style remains sober and measured can be seen as a reluctance to associate herself with the emotion she sees as connected to bad men. Rage might be read as a negative means of expression, one to steer away from in order to produce a serious and honest message. Secondly, associating the term 'rage' with these men could be aiming to show that their rage is inappropriate. They express rage, yes, but they are not entitled to it. The rage should be on the part of the women they abused, not on that of the abusers.

Kate Manne, in her article *Good Girls: How Powerful Men Get Away With Sexual Predation* (2017), associates terminology of anger with the victim of assault. In her article, she argues – contra Martha Nussbaum – for mandatory reporting of sexual harassment accusations. She writes that for victims, "there is a paucity of ways to express an anger that was not in the end retributive" (Manne, 2017). I will get to Nussbaum and (non-)retributive anger in chapter 3, but it is already interesting to note that Manne, a victim of sexual harassment herself, explicitly states that her anger towards the man who harassed her was not retributive. For my purposes here, it is crucial that Manne connects anger to the victim, and not to the perpetrator as Gay does. This might suggest a more positive approach towards anger on the part of Manne - although she, too, keeps her writing style measured and

controlled, never yelling or aggressively expressing anger. The fact that both Manne and Gay treat the anger they must undoubtedly feel in this measured way might also have something to do with the fact that they are both academics, and therefore used to writing in a largely emotionless manner. Academics are institutionally conditioned to suppress open expressions of anger – but also of other emotions – in their writing in order to receive the desired uptake for their message. The relationship between anger and academic writing is an interesting topic in itself, but – due to lack of time and space – not one that can be discussed further within the pages of this thesis.

In her article in *The New York Times*, called *Brave Enough to Be Angry*, Lindy West firmly moves the emotion of anger to the part of the victim of sexual assault, in most cases women. She writes: “We are seething at how long we have been ignored, seething for the ones who were long ago punished for telling the truth, seething for being told all of our lives that we have no right to seethe” (West, 2017). In using “we” she firmly empathises with the angry women she writes about, situating herself as one of them, one of us. As suggested by the title of the article as well, which assumes bravery is needed in order to express anger, West has a positive view of the emotion. She acknowledges its power and its usefulness to victims (cf. *infra* for more discussion of these functions of anger), but she is equally aware of “the ways that female anger is received and weaponized against women” (West, 2017). She also recognises how “we don’t even have to be angry to be called angry” (West, 2017), a problem which is especially pertinent to black women. Like Gay and Manne, West herself does not use any explicitly angry language or punctuation. Her article contains a single exclamation point, no all caps, no shouting. And yet, she is angry, and she is advocating for other women’s right to express their anger. All three of the articles I have discussed here prove that it is possible to be fuelled by anger without straying into the territory of aggression, that it is possible to be filled with rage but still rational and argumentative. Used in this way, women’s anger is especially powerful. And in the words of Lindy West: “They suppress our anger for a reason. Let’s prove them right” (West, 2017).

## **1.2. The Background of #MeToo**

The feminist movement that would come to be known as #MeToo was sparked by a single tweet by the American actress Alyssa Milano. In October 2017, she wrote: “If you’ve been

sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (Milano, 2017). The tweet received thousands of replies, the response turning into an easily shareable hashtag, #MeToo, which had already been used more than 200.000 times by the next day (Sini, 2017). However, this tweet turned out not to be the origin of the phrase “me too” in connection with sexual assault or harassment. A very similar initiative was previously created by Tarana Burke in 2007, with the aim of amplifying the voices of victims in sexual assault cases (Garcia, 2017). The fact that Milano used the same phrase without giving credit to Burke, a black woman, turned into one of many instances where the #MeToo campaign was criticised for being appropriative and insufficiently intersectional (The Race Card, 2017), only focusing its attention on the struggles of white women and erasing those of women of other races, while in fact the origin of the campaign lay with a black woman. As it turned out, Milano was simply not aware of the previous existence of Burke’s campaign. She later corrected this and publicly credited Tarana Burke for starting the #MeToo movement a decade earlier (Garcia, 2017).

#MeToo was partly inspired by the sexual harassment accusations that were made against American film producer Harvey Weinstein through a series of articles in both *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* (Remnick, 2018). Weinstein’s fall from grace turned into the spark that spurred the movement to grow exponentially. It spread across all kinds of social media platforms, the hashtag being used widely and beyond the boundaries of Twitter, where it started. In this second iteration of #MeToo, Tarana Burke’s original focus on the victim was kept. Victims were telling their own story and keeping control over the narrative, choosing what, when, and how much they shared. Many abusive people were named publicly, but for once it was them, the perpetrators, to be confined to a two-dimensional role in the narrative controlled by their victims, who were able to keep their humanity and complexity intact. Focusing on their own status as victims, these women were able to shape the narrative from their own, historically induced subordinate point of view, which would be neglected in the dominant story of the perpetrator (Manne, 2018, p. 248). The scale of the movement was clearly unintentional, not only because the popularity it reached could hardly have been foreseen, but also because Milano did not actually create the hashtag herself: she merely asked for replies to a single tweet, which then turned into a hashtag, which went on to grow to an almost unimaginable scale.

The Weinstein case is what started it all, but many more cases followed, all over the world. It might be useful to step outside of the usual US-centric view of the #MeToo movement and focus on a couple of cases from other parts of the world. For Europe, and more specifically Belgium, an interesting case is that of Flemish TV personality Bart De Pauw. In 2017, anonymous allegations surfaced, accusing him of sexual harassment. The Flemish TV and radio company VRT took these allegations seriously and immediately ended all collaborations with De Pauw, stopping airings of a quiz show he presented and reconsidering further collaboration with his production company (De Morgen, 2017). Interestingly, De Pauw announced all this himself, in a video message uploaded to the internet. It seems as if he tried to flip the original, victim-focused dynamic of the #MeToo movement, making use of the fact that his accusers chose to remain anonymous to take control of the narrative himself. Because they chose to keep their anonymity, De Pauw was able to make use of his degree of fame and public sympathy to steer the narrative in a direction which would minimise damages to his image. This is not the only case where the focus moved from victim to perpetrator: we remember the names of several #MeToo offenders while their victims were quickly forgotten again. The fact that the offenders were often well-known to begin with, of course exacerbates this imbalance. This is a switch the women in question are well aware of, and another element to add fuel to their anger. It can also sometimes be made worse by the treatment of these cases in the mainstream media, who are inclined to frame male anger “as somehow more authentic than female anger,” because women being angry at men is portrayed as being so far out of the ordinary (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 605).

A few months later, at the beginning of 2018, #MeToo reached China as well. Academic Luo Qianqian accused her former supervisor Chen Xiaowu of sexual assault against her and several other students during their studies at Beihang University in Beijing. She made her accusations in a blog post on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, where she also created a Chinese equivalent of the #MeToo hashtag: #WoYeShi, meaning “me too.” Although Qianqian was living in the US at the time of the blog post, her contribution meant that the #MeToo movement crossed over to her native China. She writes about being directly inspired by the Weinstein case and wanting to come forward as well (Koetse, 2018). In this way, the #MeToo movement reached China too, though this is largely forgotten in Western popular media coverage.



Attempts to participate in the #MeToo movement were also made in the Middle East, in Iran for example. Women tried to spread a Farsi version of the popular hashtag, but it was prevented from reaching any sort of popularity by government censorship (Keynon, 2019). The Iranian #MeToo movement was further hindered from the government side by officials spreading the stance that simply wearing a hijab would prevent any kind of sexual harassment from taking place, notably in a video message by the ayatollah Khamenei (Dewitte, 2018). Apart from obviously being untrue and masking a widespread problem with an imagined simple solution, this message puts the blame for sexual harassment entirely on the victims and their religious habits and clothing choices. It further prevents any real solutions being enacted, and it sweeps pervasive misogynistic tendencies under the rug.

The list of cases goes on and on, but more examples are just a quick Google search away. They are what Sarah Banet-Weiser might call “feminist flashpoints”, moments when the light of #MeToo shone particularly brightly, inadvertently obscuring some of the nuance of the situation. The emotions they evoke are so strong and the speed of the news cycle is so fast that some of the detail is lost (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Instead of listing more of these flashpoints, it might be beneficial to look at a few reasons women have to be angry.

### **1.3. Reason Enough to Be Angry**

One thing is absolutely certain: women have more than enough reasons to be angry, and they always have done. It is important to be aware that the need for feminism and the need for feminist anger did not end with women getting the right to vote, anti-gender-discrimination laws or the popularisation of feminism. The anger of the suffragettes has not burned out, even though their objective has been reached. There are countless issues left to fight for, most often an urgent need for changes in attitude which cannot be fixed by simply introducing a new law.

As I mentioned before, the main issue that fuelled the anger of #MeToo was sexual harassment, mostly by men towards women. The women using the hashtag to share their story were leaning on their anger to find the courage to finally speak up (cf. for example Léa Seydoux in *The Guardian*, 2017) , even as they were being told it would ruin their career, or worse, that of the offender. Spurred on by pent up anger, they are telling their story, alongside so many others, and making their voices heard. And, finally, offenders are having

to face consequences for their behaviour. Still, unwanted behaviour is not the only problem #MeToo is rebelling against. The movement equally revolts against a more general culture of misogyny, as analysed by Kate Manne in her recent book *Down Girl* (2018). This misogyny is still extremely prevalent: in the workplace, in advertising, in the expectations we have of mothers (and not of fathers), in the beauty standards we are expected to conform to, even in the male resistance to appearing in any way feminine.

Importantly, this misogyny does not have to feel like misogyny to the people enacting it. Instead, it can simply feel like righteousness, like standing up for the “little guy” (Manne, 2018, p. 20). This dissonance between internal attitude and external effect can cause even more resistance towards the feminist anger trying to combat misogyny: because of their identification with the “little guy,” misogynists may more easily feel threatened when faced with female resistance. This can be seen in the countless protesting voices going up in reaction to #MeToo, claiming that the movement is undeservedly ruining these poor men’s careers or even their entire lives, that they cannot even look a woman in the eye anymore without being accused of harassment, that they barely dare to shake their female colleague’s hand. This is an extreme version of the flipping of perspective mentioned earlier: the offender taking on the role of the victim, presenting the victim as the offender, and trying to earn people’s pity at the same time.

A recent Belgian case can be used as an example of women’s anger against both misogynistic behaviour and a general culture of misogyny. On 4 May 2019, 23-year-old student Julie Van Espen was murdered by a man who tried to rape her while she was on her way to meet up with friends. Her murderer, Steve Bakelmans, was a convicted rapist who had received a four-year prison sentence two years before, but was still free after he had appealed his case and was waiting for it to go to court again. During his interrogation by the police, Bakelmans stated that he had wanted to rape Julie but she fought back, so he killed her (De Morgen, 2019). This case, of a convicted rapist being allowed to roam free until his next offence landed him in prison again, led to a collective outrage. A wave of reactions appeared, both online and offline in a range of media, from opinion pieces (e.g. Fraihi, 2019; Laterveer, 2019) to cartoons (e.g. Chrostin, 2019) to poetry (e.g. Van Heiningen, 2019). This outrage marked a clear difference with previous, similar cases. Women have had enough: enough of being unsafe, enough of rape prevention tips focusing on their behaviour instead of that of

the rapist, enough of victim blaming, enough of being unable to cycle to a friend's house in safety. Women have had enough, and they are no longer biting their tongues. Instead they are expressing their anger in any way they can, making their voices heard through the medium that suits them best.

#### **1.4. Popular(ised) Anger**

It seems like this resurgence in female anger was preceded by another tendency: a popularisation of feminism (Winderman, 2016). Where before, feminism was mostly associated with bra-burning and man-hating, in recent years it got a more easily digestible makeover. Countless companies started producing T-shirts, mugs, phone cases and other merchandise with the word "feminist" or empowering slogans printed on them in bold letters, allowing their customers to showcase their supposed feminist beliefs with a convenient purchase. Equally, companies used feminist marketing to sell their products to these new popular feminists. This kind of commercial feminism was widely criticised, often rightly so, for its emptiness (Gourley, 2018). If these "feminist" T-shirts are still being made by exploited female workers in developing countries who are working for a negligible wage in unsafe conditions, this is a hollow feminism. The many products showing up when searching for "feminist" on the website of Chinese retailer Aliexpress for example can hardly be ethically made. These companies were simply using the newfound popularity of feminism for their own profit without actually making any effort to embody its values and effect change for women, whether that be just their own employees or contracted workers, or women in a wider sense. Merely printing the word "feminist" or a catchy, empowering slogan on an unethically made T-shirt is not just empty, it is also dishonest. It falsely leads people to associate the brand with the values of the slogan, whether those align with the enacted values of the company or not. Moreover, it could be argued that the popularisation of the term "feminist" hollowed it out and robbed it of (some of) its meaning. Does simply wearing a T-shirt with an empowering slogan on it earn you the title of "feminist," or is something more required, like feminist values and/or actions? On the other hand, it can be argued that bringing awareness of feminism to a broad audience is valuable in itself. The popularisation and destigmatisation of the feminist movement does indeed spread awareness of women's rights issues beyond traditional activist circles, but in my opinion it is

only desirable insofar as it can succeed in safeguarding its core message and its action-oriented character.

In recent times, with the popularisation of female anger, it seems like feminism has got its edge back. It is partly moving away from the easily palatable pink tones of corporate feminism and embracing a furious red instead. This does not mean that feminism has been re-confined to its previous stereotypical man-hating and bra-burning niche: angry feminism still has a wide and popular appeal. A large part of the female anger movement is situated in the online space, as we previously saw with the overwhelming ‘success’ of hashtags like #MeToo and its international equivalents. An important new characteristic of this wave of angry feminism is its use of social media. These online communication platforms were unavailable to previous generations of feminists, and now that they do exist, they are being embraced widely, not in the least because misogyny is so prevalent there (Lenz, 2016). In a way, they might be democratising feminism: everyone with access to an internet connection can potentially reach a global audience to talk about causes like feminism, and inversely, anyone with an internet connection can be reached by the feminist message. Of course, such a view of social media use is highly idealistic, and the online space is not actually that democratic, affording equal chances to each of its users. Certain people reach wider audiences than others, and it seems like those people are often white and privileged in other ways. Moreover, not all internet users are equally likely to be reached by certain messages, especially with the growing prevalence of algorithms curating what you see to conform to your existing interests and beliefs. Another issue for women especially is the prevalence of online hate, spread by so-called “trolls” who respond to a woman’s online presence with an avalanche of misogyny and sexism.

Online organising also led to a number of offline events, like the women’s marches that took place all over the world following Donald Trump’s election as president of the United States (Forsdike and Staunton, 2017) and were repeated in 2019 (Polveledo et al., 2019), and the pussy hat movement that led to women worldwide knitting and crocheting bright pink hats to protest against Trump’s disgusting “grab them by the pussy” comments (MacKenzie, 2018). The pussy hat movement is especially remarkable because of the medium it uses. Crafting is a traditionally feminine-coded activity, often seen as useless and of little value, whereas the same kinds of activities are valued and called art when done by men. The fact

that the organisers of the pussy hat movement managed to re-appropriate the very activities that were often seen as a useless time killer for bored housewives and turn them into a powerful protest weapon is symbolically quite striking.

The social media movement of female anger also branched out into more traditional ways of publishing, with various books and articles being written to embrace and examine women's anger (which could then be reintroduced into the digital space in the shape of various listicles curating the essential reading on female rage). These publications did what corporate feminism could not do: they brought feminism to a broad audience without sacrificing the message at its core. Many of these publications combine an accessible and action-oriented nature with a strongly researched foundation. Examples are Soraya Chemaly's *Rage Becomes Her* (2018), Rebecca Traister's *Good And Mad* (2018), or the series of articles on female rage that were published by online platforms like *Bitch Media* (e.g. Zeisler, 2018) and *Electric Literature* (e.g. Harding, 2018). These publications are not aimed at a specialist audience, but they do not let their wide appeal take away from the substance of their message. They are inclusive and open, and aim to show that this new angry movement is open to all women equally.

### **1.5. Including Anger**

The terms "female rage" and "women's anger" have two elements: an emotion, anger, and a subject, which appears to be women. But do these terms and the movement associated with them really include all women equally? Popular feminism, but angry feminism as well, has been criticised for being insufficiently intersectional and focusing above all on white women. This is symbolised by the fact that the #MeToo movement was originally started by a black woman, Tarana Burke, but then (albeit unintentionally) taken over and popularised by a white woman, Alyssa Milano, and many predominantly white women after that. The same criticism was often raised with regard to the women's marches (Haumesser, 2019). Black women have been angry for so long, they said, and now suddenly all these white women come along and take over our anger. White women were accused of diverting attention away from black women and not paying attention to their specific issues, even though the movement originated with them. In this way, the marches were seen as white women appropriating anger which black women had been feeling and expressing for a long time,

and then not inviting black women to be a part of the new movement. Equally, feminism often has a very Western focus. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie recounts the anecdote of a Nigerian woman telling her that feminism is “un-African” (Adichie, 2014, p. 10). This highlights the issue of feminism being perceived as exclusive and exclusionary by many minority groups who do not fit the image of the white, able-bodied feminist carrying a witty sign at a women’s march. It is important that, in practicing feminism, we make sure to equally include people who do not look like that and/or who have a different background. The #MeToo movement for example can be very US-centric, just like the resurgence of female rage.

Apart from the race issue, there is also a gender issue at play. It is useful to ask: is this just about women? On the one hand, many men and non-binary people experience sexual harassment as well, but they are typically not (equally) included in initiatives like #MeToo. In this way, these perceived women’s problems, like sexual harassment, misogyny, inequality of education, wage gaps... are actually societal problems. They have a negative impact on people of all genders, and they should be addressed as such. It is not right to leave problems that concern mostly women to be solved by women alone. However, feminists are often asked: why ‘feminism’? Why not ‘humanism’? Here, the focus on one gender does not mean that other genders’ rights and issues are seen as less important. Feminism does not in any way or form believe women to be above other genders, and it does not want them to become dominant in the way men are now. As Adichie puts it, “to choose the vague expression *human rights* is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender” (Adichie, 2014, p. 41, emphasis in original). So while feminism is aimed towards women’s issues especially, it does not aim to exclude people of other genders. On the contrary: while recognising the strongly gendered character of these issues, it is still possible to see that they are not focused on a single gender, and that they can include others as well. Feminism should, above all, aim to be inclusive, both of diversity within women and of different genders.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to provide a backdrop for the rest of the thesis. In talking about the phenomenon of female rage, it is crucial to first get a grip on the context this newfound

anger is situated in. In the preceding pages, I first looked at the way female rage has been expressed within the context of the recent 'anger turn'. Then, I turned to the #MeToo movement which acted as a catalyst for female rage. I showed how this movement played out, provided some international examples of it, and discussed a few of the issues it has around intersectionality. Next, I zoomed out to look at the more general context of misogyny and sexual harassment that provides women with more than enough reasons to be angry. Here, I used Kate Manne's (2018) analysis of misogyny and the Belgian case of Julie Van Espen served as an example. Fourthly, I turned to the popularisation of feminism and how this change interplayed with a kind of commercial feminism. I also showed how angry feminism spread its wings in both the online and the offline space, with a large number of publications as a result. Lastly, I looked at the inclusivity of the #MeToo movement and feminism more generally. I briefly focused on the criticisms raised against feminists for not including a diverse enough set of women and for not including other genders, and I concluded that despite these objections, the term 'feminism' is still a suitable name for the movement.





## 2. Testimonial Injustice

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*What exactly is lost to us when words are wasted?*

- Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*

So far, when thinking about female rage, I have focused largely on the practical side of things, looking at the facts and the way they impacted the recent resurgence of female anger. With this background in mind, it is now possible to try to develop a more theoretical framework to help us think about female rage in a more structured way. In this chapter, I will examine Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of 'testimonial injustice', and I will further develop its applications in the case of anger, specifically women's anger. The topic of anger is a very broad one, so in looking at it from a philosophical point of view it was necessary to pick a lens to look through. With the choice of testimonial injustice, I am basing myself on a feminist epistemological tradition, as embodied by many of the people cited below, like Jaggar, Bailey, and Fricker herself. Within the limited scope of this thesis, there was no space to fully consider this tradition and all of its nuances. My focus lies elsewhere, and I am more interested in applying the concept of testimonial injustice than in fully developing it. However, the idea of testimonial injustice provided me with the lens I needed to see anger clearly, and for that I am both indebted and thankful to the feminist epistemologists that developed it before me.

In this chapter, I will start by providing a short introduction to the concept of testimonial injustice and the "unlevel knowing field" (Bailey, 2018) it creates. I will look at the role of power and that of stereotypes, and the way testimonial injustice can turn into a vicious cycle. Next, I will examine a number of factors and their role in creating testimonial injustice. First up are gender roles. The way they contribute to the stereotypes that lie at the base of testimonial injustice is crucial. Moreover, they make it so that certain emotions are deemed off-limits for certain genders, like anger can be for women. The second factor I will look at is that of class. Here, anger can be used as a means for higher classes to distinguish themselves from lower classes, whether the hierarchy be societal or gender-based. Thirdly, I will turn to the issue of rationality and the way it relates to the body. The dichotomy between rationality and emotion returns under many guises, but this might be its most fundamental form. Next, I will consider power inequalities. These inequalities have a significant effect on the

expression and reception of anger, but equally anger can have an effect on power inequalities. Lastly, I will make a few remarks on the relationship between women and the personal, and how this relationship affects the way women's words are received.

## 2.1. What Is Testimonial Injustice?

While most people have the capacity to express themselves in some way, not all of those people will find an equally charitable reception for this self-expression. In the words of Alison Bailey, "all testimonial exchanges take place on an *unlevel knowing field*" (Bailey, 2018, p. 94). Whenever testimony is exchanged between knowers, the uptake this testimony receives varies depending on a multitude of factors, both on the side of the sender and that of the receiver.<sup>2</sup> Miranda Fricker calls this phenomenon "testimonial injustice," and defines it as occurring "when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker, 2007, p. 1).

At the core of this "unlevel knowing field" lies social power, and more specifically the differences in various types of power on behalf of the sender and the receiver. Gerald Marsh differentiates between role-power and identity-power (this second term he borrows from Fricker): power with respect to the social role you play and the social identity you possess respectively (Marsh, 2011, p. 280). This social power is strongly linked with the concept of credibility, which lies at the core of testimonial injustice. Fricker (2007) sees testimonial injustice as arising "due to systematic biases in the "economy of credibility"" (Manne, 2018, p. 52). Marsh (2011, p. 281) calls credibility "a kind of social power", although I argue this goes both ways: your social power affords you more credibility, but equally a larger amount of credibility can increase your social power. Credibility can both be accounted for by identity power, for example when a white, cis-gender male is afforded more than a black, transgender woman, and by role power, for example when a professor is afforded more than an undergraduate student (Marsh, 2011, p. 281). In this way, members of certain social groups are systematically afforded less credibility, and less social power, than members of other groups with better social standing, which only serves to perpetuate this imbalance. As

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<sup>2</sup> I use the terminology of "sender" and "receiver" rather than the usual "speaker" and "audience" because I feel it is broader and less restricted to vocal speech. A message can be sent in more ways than through spoken words, and I feel that this terminology reflects that diversity better. Moreover, the term "audience" has a theatrical quality to it that I do not like. "Sender" and "receiver" have a more neutral feel, so I am more comfortable using them.

Kate Manne writes, “testimonial injustice then paradigmatically consists in subordinate group members tending to be regarded as less credible when they make claims about certain matters, or against certain people, hence being denied the epistemic status of knowers, in a way that is explained by their subordinate group membership” (Manne, 2018, p. 186).

Rachel McKinnon calls this requirement for credibility the “reliability condition.” On her view, “the speaker must be *credible* and the hearer must make a credibility judgment about the speaker and her claim” (McKinnon, 2016, p. 437). According to Fricker, credibility judgments are made on the basis of stereotypes. She uses the term ‘stereotype’ neutrally, without value judgement, to mean simply “*widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes*” (Fricker, 2007, p. 30, emphasis in original). A problem arises when the stereotypes we base our judgements on are informed by prejudice. Basing ourselves on stereotypes in our credibility judgments is by no means epistemically ideal, but it is unfortunately inevitable. In the absence of detailed knowledge about the sender of a certain message, we have to base our judgement on the limited and often biased information we do have available, and use it to draw a number of inferences about that person’s credibility (Fricker, 2007, p. 32). In other words, we are linking certain social characteristics of a person with the attribute of credibility, which conforms to Fricker’s definition of a stereotype as cited above. The stereotypes we use in our credibility judgments are largely based on social and historical concepts. Therefore, the dominance and subordinacy represented in society and throughout history are reproduced in the epistemic landscape, in the form of testimonial injustice. The same social groups who are subordinate in terms of societal power will receive a “credibility deficit,” and those who are societally dominant will receive a “credibility excess” (McKinnon, 2016).

The mechanism of testimonial injustice can go into effect in two opposite directions. Either the receiver does not grant uptake to the sender’s message, or the sender modifies their message in order to get increased uptake from the receiver. Kristie Dotson coins two terms for these different directions of testimonial injustice. “When an audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower,” she calls this “testimonial quieting” (Dotson, 2011, p. 242). Whereas the opposite direction, “the truncating of one’s own testimony” to make it more palatable to a receiver, is called “testimonial smothering” (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). In this second case,

Dotson posits that the receiver does not demonstrate “testimonial competence” with regard to the contents of the sender’s message. I take it that both directions, the sender assessing the testimonial competence of the receiver and the receiver assessing that of the sender, rely on Fricker’s notion of stereotypes, which in turn are entrenched in the common ground (i.e. the things we take for granted as background to a conversation (Stalnaker, 2002, p. 701)).

One way of influencing the common ground is through the use of generics. As Sally Haslanger (2011) points out, however, this is not a one way road. Especially when using categories which, as Haslanger notes, Ian Hacking would call “interactive kinds,” the use of generics carries with it a remarkable circular motion. Particular problematic generics of this sort “describe the world as if it is, by its nature, how we have interpreted it, and from there caused it, to be” (Haslanger, 2011, p. 26). Our personal perspective and interpretations of the world influence the categories we apply to it, but those to whom a certain category is applied, influence that category in their turn as well. When certain people are grouped together under the umbrella of a social category, this influences the way they are seen, their social power and therefore their credibility. But often these categories are interactive kinds, in which case the application of a category to a group of people creates a feedback loop, which means they are able to influence the meaning of the label applied to them. It might therefore also be possible for these people to influence the credibility they are afforded, though of course this still depends on the judgment of knowers outside of their group, on which their influence might be so small as to be neglectable. Still, Haslanger’s insight shows again that the credibility economy is not a one way road, and that it can be influenced in multiple directions, not only from the position of the most socially powerful knowers.

Testimonial injustice interacts with many other factors, several of which will be developed in more depth in the following sections. Important to note, however, especially in the context of this thesis, is that it both makes people angry and makes it more difficult for them to find uptake for their anger. The silence of a person whose testimony is not heard is “saturated with anger because injustice is painful” (Bailey, 2018, p. 96). This creates a “vicious cycle of testimonial injustice” (McKinnon, 2016, p. 440). Not being heard makes people angry, which makes them less likely to be heard, which makes them even angrier, et cetera. Sara Ahmed

(2010) talks about this issue in particular in relation to the anger experienced and expressed by women of colour. She writes:

[T]he anger of feminists of color is attributed. So you might be angry about how racism and sexism diminish life choices for women of color. Your anger is a judgement that something is wrong. But in being heard as angry, your speech is read as motivated by anger. Your anger is read as unattributed, as if you are against x because you are angry, rather than being angry because you are against x. You become angry at the injustice of being heard as motivated by anger, which makes it harder to separate yourself from the object of anger. You become entangled with what you are angry about because you are angry about how they have entangled you in your anger. In becoming angry about that entanglement, you confirm their commitment to your anger as the truth 'behind' your speech, which is what blocks your anger, stops it getting through. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 68)

Ahmed touches on several elements of the issue of testimonial injustice here. First, there is the fact that a message is in fact being transmitted by means of the anger ("your anger is a judgement that something is wrong"), but that this message does not receive uptake ("your anger is read as unattributed"). Here, this is presented as an issue for feminists of colour. I would suggest that this same issue affects white women as well, though undoubtedly to a lesser extent than it affects women of colour, for they have an extra 'complicating factor' to deal with that distinguishes them from the ideal of the white, heterosexual male. This means that they have to live in a society in which the cards are stacked against them with respect to both race and gender. Ahmed also points out the cyclical nature of attributed anger, with the misattribution of one's anger fuelling the original anger even further. This issue, combined with the other factors that will be discussed, makes testimonial injustice an especially poignant problem for the angry woman.

## **2.2. Gender Roles**

As alluded to before, one of the societal factors which have an insurmountable influence on a person's credibility through their effect on one's identity-power, is gender. In this society, whether someone identifies as a man, as a woman, or as non-binary will undoubtedly call upon "shared imaginative conceptions of social identity" (Fricker, 2007, p. 14). These

conceptions will in turn have an influence on the stereotypes associated with the person concerned, on which testimonial credibility is then based. Gender is an important factor in determining identity-power. This is the case for all genders, but the way in which it swings the balance varies strongly based on the gender in question. While gender is obviously not the only social identity factor to be considered, being male mostly contributes to a credibility excess, while being non-male contributes to a credibility deficit.

As Kate Manne puts it:

When it comes to a “he said”/”she said,” “her word against his” scenario, there are obvious reasons to give him testimonial priority, from the point of view of upholding patriarchal order. For what if she is right? Then he would stand to be proven wrong. She would have the power to take him down with her word, when she is the more credible. And that power does not tend to be granted to historically subordinate people vis-à-vis the dominant without a fight. Such flipping of gendered hierarchies is part of what misogyny is effectively meant to prevent from happening. (Manne, 2018, p. 52)

The fact that a male gender identity - or rather, a perceived male gender identity, as the time it takes to draw on a stereotype often does not permit the exchange of information about actual gender identity - is given testimonial priority, is not to be seen as disconnected from the rest of the world view that constitutes the common ground. This also means recognising that we live in a patriarchal society (Millett, 2016, p. 25), whose ideals and patterns are entrenched in our every way of thinking, whether that be knowingly or unknowingly. The “unlevel knowing field,” then, slants in the same way as the playing field of gender does: male at the top, non-male at the bottom. The mechanisms of testimonial injustice are one of many ways of keeping this imbalance in place. To afford a woman equal or more testimonial credibility would be to give her a voice, and a voice can be used to effect change, which would threaten the current patriarchal order of the world. Patriarchy is geared towards preserving itself in its position of power, and will not give dissenting voices much uptake. The very values that patriarchy is built on are among those that define what it means to have identity-power. The two are entwined so strongly that it becomes difficult to see one without the other.

Importantly, one way in which women try to use their voice in the face of testimonial injustice inspired by patriarchal values, is anger. And “to be angry, it has been argued, is to put oneself in the position of the judge, which for a woman in a patriarchal society means to be insubordinate” (Harris, 2001, p. 275). Anger is often about control, and gender strongly influences who gets to be in control and who does not. In a patriarchal society, men are in control, and women are not. Therefore, it is the men who get to use their anger, while the anger of women is delegitimised. This is not a new phenomenon: Harris (2001) describes how the stereotype of the angry woman served to ridicule women’s anger as early as Ancient Greece, reducing women’s feelings to a caricature in order to keep societal control firmly in the hands of men. By laughing at women’s anger, its power was effectively neutralised. Anger was seen as a female emotion, petty and weak, something rational men were expected to rise above (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 44). However, through controlled anger men were allowed and even expected to confirm their dominant societal position (Harris, 2001, p. 412)<sup>3</sup>. The judge’s gown comes in men’s sizes only, and women are ridiculed for rolling up their sleeves.

Still today, Western society has come to expect anger in men and to discourage it in women. The difference with Ancient Greece is that uncontrolled anger is no longer seen as the womanly emotion. Rather, women are supposed to be meek beings without anger, fully dependent on their male counterparts. Our gender norms “connect anger to power and authority” and therefore to masculinity. (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 44). Still according to Nussbaum, this connection between anger and masculine qualities is the reason why women feel like they should appropriate it for themselves as well. However, I think it is more apt to see anger as just a neutral emotion, and therefore a part of what it means to be fully human. Anger’s contingent connection to masculinity is a fact, but that does not mean that it is the only thing that enables its value. Rather than wanting to lay claim on anger to be equal to powerful men, maybe women just want the right to experience and express the full range of human emotions, including the ones traditionally seen as masculine.

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<sup>3</sup> Although not all schools of thought held this opinion: the Stoics for example argued for a complete elimination of anger in both men and women, believing that its negative consequences far outweighed any positive consequences (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 124).

Mary Holmes (2004, p. 213) brings attention to what she calls the “situ-relational character” of anger. The context in which anger is expressed has a large impact on the way it is received, and especially for women. While they might be allowed or even expected to express anger in the context of a kitchen, they are strongly discouraged from expressing it outside the home, in a political context for example. And while they are allowed to express anger on behalf of others, like a child or a family member, they are given disapproving looks when expressing anger on their own behalf. As long as women confine their anger to a traditionally feminine domain, their anger will be respected to a certain degree, but when they transgress into a masculine domain, they can no longer count on such respect. A mother’s anger will be met with understanding, but the same woman will be penalised for expressing anger in a different, more masculine context, like her workplace or a political context (Chemaly, 2018, p. xviii).

These types of emotions, which society deems unacceptable for certain people to experience and/or express, are what Alison Jaggar (1989) calls “outlaw emotions”. Coupled with Holmes’ situ-relational character, we can picture anger as being an outlaw emotion for certain people in certain contexts. For example, a woman expressing anger in her workplace, especially in the face of men, can be categorised in this way. These emotions have a strong subversive character, as we also saw Kate Manne note with regard to anger (Manne, 2018, p. 52). When a woman takes hold of an emotion which is traditionally forbidden terrain, like anger, the results can tilt the slope of the epistemic playing field and de-stigmatise female anger, especially if her voice gets heard and recognised in the public domain. In this way, anger can also become a feminist emotion. Still according to Jaggar, “emotions become feminist when they incorporate feminist perceptions and values, just as emotions are sexist or racist when they incorporate sexist or racist perceptions and values” (Jaggar, 1989, p. 166). Women can of course be angry for a full spectrum of reasons, just like men can. But when we look at the female rage movement that appeared coupled with #MeToo, the anger in these instances can be identified as strongly feminist according to Jaggar’s (1989) definition. In these cases, women are angry at the patriarchy, at the gender pay gap, at men getting away with sexual assault. They are angry because they want to be respected, and that wish is at the core of the feminist ideals. This kind of feminist anger also has a strong historical aspect to it. As Bailey (2018, p. 107) points out, “some angers are inherited.”



Female, feminist anger has this kind of history as well. Throughout history, women have been subordinated, relegated to an inferior position, however subtly, and this history is felt in the anger of women today. However, this does not have to mean that historically laden anger is necessarily retributive: even anger inspired by the past can be geared towards effecting future change, as I believe is the case with contemporary female anger.

### **2.3. Class**

Unfortunately, female anger is not necessarily or inevitably followed by emancipation. According to Holmes (2004, p. 215), this is “partly due to feminist ambivalence over the meaning and desirability of anger.” It is still often (implicitly) seen as more important to be ‘nice’ than it is to get a point across by any means necessary. A central issue at play here is class: often white, middle class feminists rely on ‘niceness’ to distinguish themselves from the working classes, who are seen as more prone to expressing anger. In Western society, anger is still often seen as ‘uncivilised’, an emotion a truly ‘civilised’ person should be above expressing freely. Anger is often presented as “evidence of a gulf between self-restrained, ‘modern’ subjects and impulsive, ‘pre-modern’ peoples who can only be restrained by force” (Linklater, 2014, p. 577). This gulf between civilised and uncivilised, between modern and pre-modern, is again coupled to one particular societal dimension: that of class. In this way, modern feminism and society in general are characterised by similar attitudes towards anger and class. Anger is associated with those lower on the social ladder, while those higher up are proud to distinguish themselves by means of self-restraint.

But what about those at the very top of the social ladder? As David Ost writes, “emotions have been presented as a problem that power has to deal with, not something with which power is itself intimately involved. [...] emotions are in this way relegated to ‘the masses’” (Ost, 2004, p. 229). The upper classes like to think of themselves as being above the petty matters of emotion. They are only concerned with keeping others’ emotions in check, those of the lower-ranked classes who do not have the same degree of self-restraint they do, while their own emotions are not recognised. This might be even more strongly so in the case of anger, an emotion which is often seen as diametrically opposed to self-restraint and rationality. Anger can be subversive and dangerous, but the elite do not need to be subversive: they are already at the top. Instead, they are concerned with keeping the

emotions and thereby the subversive powers of the lower classes in check (Ost, 2004, p. 236). However, as Ost argues, this is not a complete picture of the way emotions and class/power interact. Emotions like anger are crucial to those already in power as well. We will return to this issue later on. An interesting issue to touch upon now, is that of elites that pretend to be subordinated in order to earn people's sympathy, the way populist political parties tend to do. Even though they belong to the societal elite, they associate themselves with 'the little guy', while presenting social groups who are actually below them on the social ladder as if they were at the top.

This can also happen in the case of gender hierarchies: the male elite benefit from the suppression of female anger, and in a patriarchal society there is no doubting the fact that males are indeed socially ranked higher than non-males. However, subgroups of this male elite pretend to be subordinated, like the so-called 'incels' (involuntary celibates), thereby claiming their right to anger towards women. These deceptive tactics are dangerous, for they keep destructive power hierarchies intact by pretending to invert them. This inversion can be explained by Kate Manne, who points out the distinction between "feminine-coded goods and services" and "masculine-coded perks and privileges" (Manne, 2018, p. 130). Women are supposed to provide, men are allowed to take. Anger, in this case, falls under the "masculine-coded perks and privileges", so when women try to appropriate it for themselves, men feel victimised. In the case of the incels, the feminine-coded good that women fail to provide is sexual attention, making (some) men feel deprived and even justified in undertaking retributive action.

## **2.4. Rationality and the Body**

In talking about emotions, and anger especially, several dichotomies return over and over again. We have seen a few already: male versus female, civilised versus uncivilised, upper versus lower class. Another central dichotomy is that between rationality and emotion, and linked with it, the dichotomy between mind and body. David Ost (2004, p. 236) notices that emotion has historically got the shorter end of the stick, being valued less than rationality. He also points out that all previously mentioned dichotomies are really fundamentally related, and maybe even reflect the same dichotomy under different names. It depends on one's perspective which one of these dichotomies can be seen as fundamental to the others.

In my gendered project, male versus female might be a strong candidate, though its essentialism can be problematic and exclusionary of people who do not feel they fit in any one end of the gender scale. In this section, however, I will focus on two different forms of the dichotomy: mind versus body and rationality versus emotion.

Though anger is traditionally placed on the side of emotion and body, I would argue that it actually transcends these dichotomies. It is “usually felt as a sensation that engulfs body and mind,” (Holmes, 2004, p. 214), and it includes elements of both rationality and emotion. As Holmes also notes, throughout the Western tradition there are many examples of controlled anger being accepted or even asked for, though these situations are always linked with power: what is acceptable anger will be defined by and limited to those at the top of the social hierarchy. A criticism of expressing anger that Lyman (2004) calls the “psychological critique” fails to see that anger has the capacity to transcend these dichotomies. The psychological critique “is an ideology that justifies domination by silencing the voices of the oppressed, labelling anger as ‘loss of control’, as ‘emotionalism’, or as ‘neurotic’” (Lyman, 2004, p. 134). By storing subversive anger on the ‘wrong’ side of the dichotomy, its power is not recognised, and it does not receive uptake from those it is directed towards. Political power remains intact through this critique, and its efforts to “silence the anger of the powerless by de-politicizing it” (Lyman, 2004, p. 133). Losing control or expressing emotions is seen as diametrically opposed to the political sphere, so by reducing anger in those terms it is effectively de-weaponised as a political tool. Crucially, these are the attributes that fall on the female side of the fundamental dichotomy, while political power falls on the male side. By relegating the anger of the powerless to the side of the female, it is removed from the political sphere where it could have an influence. In a way, this is the same phenomenon Harris (2001) talked about, of how in Ancient Greece the stereotype of the angry woman was used to delegitimise women’s anger. We associate reason “with members of dominant political, social, and cultural groups and emotion with members of subordinate groups” (Jaggar, 1989, p. 163), and the psychological critique makes good use of that stereotype. By perpetuating it, those in power remain in power, because the potentially subversive anger of the powerless receives no uptake. As Srinivasan puts it, “thus the invocation of ‘rationality’ (like the invocation of ‘civility’) becomes an invocation of the status quo” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 141).

This pseudo-scientific rationalisation and naturalisation of power imbalances is also at work in the gender-form of the dichotomy. Kate Manne's distinction between sexism and misogyny shows exactly this. Where she takes misogyny to be the "law enforcement" branch of patriarchal order," sexism is defined as the "justificatory" branch of patriarchal order, which consists in ideology that has the overall function of *rationalizing* and *justifying* patriarchal social relations" (Manne, 2018, p. 78). Sexism thus follows the same type of mechanism for gender inequality as the psychological critique of anger does for emotional inequality. Both present pseudo-scientific reasons trying to rationalise and naturalise a type of world order which is in fact not rational at all, and very much susceptible to being changed. But through these justificatory techniques, the potential for change is obscured, and anyone who tries to lift the curtain is portrayed as irrational.

## 2.5. Power Inequalities

A recurring theme throughout the preceding paragraphs, and one which deserves to be considered on its own, is that of power and its influence on anger and testimonial injustice. Power relations and inequalities have an effect not only on who gets to express anger, but also on whose anger gets uptake and on the way individuals and groups experience their own anger. For example, as Baker Miller and Surrey mention, in hierarchical relationships, "anger in the subordinate member [can become] suppressed" (Baker Miller and Surrey, 1990, p. 4), manifesting itself in unexpected ways. Equally, the more powerful member of a hierarchical relationship needs to be aware of this position of power, for their anger can have particularly far-reaching effects. The anger of the powerful "serves to keep the less powerful person doing what the other wants, that is, complying and obeying the powerful person's rules and expectations" (Bernandez, 1987, p. 7). In a patriarchal society, the powerful and subordinate members of the relationship can be roughly equated with men and women respectively. Therefore, women's suppressed anger might be expressed in less straightforward ways (Wood, 2019, p. 610), while men should be aware of the disproportionate effects their anger might have on their less powerful counterparts. It is often thought that women's anger can be expressed through the more socially palatable emotion of sadness instead, or at least their expressions of anger are interpreted as such (Williams, 2018). On the other hand, even though (white) male anger might often stem from

fear (Zeisler, 2018), it can still have the effect of forcefully safeguarding the inequalities embedded in the status quo.

Holmes (2004) notes, citing Spelman (1989), that “it is oppressed groups in particular who have been encouraged to suppress their anger” (Holmes, 2004, p. 210). Even though, as discussed before, anger is often associated with groups who are positioned lower on the social ladder, these same groups are being discouraged from expressing it. Anger can be a powerful and subversive tool, so allowing it to the oppressed can have destabilising consequences. In this way, those in power get the best of both worlds: while the stigmatising parts of anger are associated with subordinate groups, these same groups are banned from making use of the productive parts of the emotion, which are instead reserved as the privilege of those in power. The powerful thereby attempt to reserve the use of anger for themselves, while transferring the stigma associated with it to those less powerful than them. This enforcement of social rules about emotions is what Hochschild calls ‘feeling rules’, which “are seen as the side of ideology that deals with emotion and feeling” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 551). These feeling rules constitute the social rulebook which determines who is allowed to express anger, when, where, and with regard to whom (Lyman, 2004, p. 136). Since they are a part of ideology, it is safe to say that they are ‘written’ by the same groups that profit from enforcing this ideology. And since the dominant ideology belongs to the socially powerful, it can also be said that the dominant feeling rules are written in the rulebook of the powerful.

In antiquity, it was perfectly socially permissible for those in power to respond angrily to socially inferior people who wronged them in some way, as long as they still exhibited appropriate self-control (Linklater, 2014, p. 575). This split is still evident today. In accordance with your social standing, the social rulebook determines whether you have a right to speak out about wrongs committed to you. The powerful do, the powerless do not. Moreover, depending on your social standing, an expression of anger will be interpreted differently. “Angry speech by the dominant is called ‘forceful’ or ‘authoritative’, while angry speech by the subordinate may be labelled impolite or rude at best, and, at worst, criminal or violent” (Lyman, 2004, p. 136). This, then, leads to a warning in the opposite direction than we came to before: not only do the powerful have to be careful about disproportionate effects of their anger on the powerless, but the powerless also have to be careful about their

anger being interpreted as an act of violence, and perhaps being met with such an act in return. The particular subgroup or minority one belongs to will impact on how one's anger is perceived or (mis)interpreted. A black man's anger will quickly be read as criminal violence, while a white woman's anger might be dismissed as rude or hysterical, and a black woman might be called angry without expressing any anger at all. Social identity largely determines anger uptake.

"To be angry is to make a claim on respect" (Bailey, 2018, p. 97). This explains why the robes of anger fit the powerful so well: they are used to being respected and using anger to demand it comes naturally. However, this also explains why the powerful are so concerned with keeping anger out of the hands of the powerless. When used properly and met with the uptake it deserves, anger can "make a claim on respect" for those who are not naturally respected as well. Though anger is "not inevitably emancipatory or simply motivational" (Holmes, 2004, p. 210), it does have the potential to be. And, importantly, the way the powerful interpret anger is not the only viable way. The powerless can interpret and know their own anger, as Bailey (2018) suggests with her term "knowing resistant anger" (cf. *infra*). The anger of the powerless has epistemic value, even if it does not get uptake from the powerful. It can be counted as what Jaggar calls "outlaw emotions", often experienced by "subordinated individuals who pay a disproportionately high price for maintaining the status quo" (Jaggar, 1989, p. 166). When these emotions are shared, Jaggar points out, a potentially subversive subculture can be formed. And if the outlaw emotion in question is anger, it seems as if this new subculture can make use of the emotion's claim on respect to try to climb the social ladder, one emotional rung at a time. In this way, even when it is deemed conventionally inappropriate, anger can serve to reinvent those very conventions and redraw the power structures embedded in the status quo.

## **2.6. Women and the Personal**

"The personal is political" is an important slogan of particularly second-wave feminism, and it is still very much relevant today. Often, personal experience provides the motivation for political anger, so trying to separate the two would not be a successful exercise (Baker Miller and Surrey, 1990, p. 7). And yet, when women express themselves through anger, this separation is often enforced regardless. As Bernandez notes, "we take anger as a private,

personal statement, as if the women don't share a collective experience very different than that of men" (Bernandez, 1987, p. 3). Women's personal experience, whether that be individual or collective, does not receive universal value or resonance. In the case of men, however, this universal value is attributed, since men are too often seen as the default person, especially white, heterosexual men. Women's anger is still *women's* anger, while men's anger is just anger. Talking about women and literature, Olivia Sudjic writes:

Female experience tells you that the personal is political while the world tells you there is something wrong with you personally and the system is fine. When (white, cis-gendered) men write, even about their personal experience, they write about the human condition and, like the erroneous beige of flesh-coloured tights, their perspective is deemed universal. Books written by women, about women, are not. That's Women's Fiction, for which category there is no male equivalent. (Sudjic, 2018, p. 102)

The world tells women that their personal experience has no political value. Women are made to feel like a niche category, a minority, deviant from the male norm. In a way, by focusing solely on female anger, this thesis could be seen as perpetuating that mechanism of alienation. I hope it is not, however. I hope it succeeds in also treating women's anger as just anger, like men's anger is just anger, and not a niche category to be shelved separately.

Moreover, when women write about personal, subjective experiences like that of anger, "it is not only men who feel sceptical, but readers in general who assume there is no craft, no rigour, no strategy which underpins it" (Sudjic, 2018, p. 88). Not only does women's personal testimony struggle to find uptake, it also is not seen as an intellectual exercise, let alone as academically viable.<sup>4</sup> Impersonality or universality seems to be respected more than personal accounts are, but at the same time this quality of universality is ascribed with much more ease to the work of men than it is to that of women. No work of fiction can ever be impersonal, and yet, personal fiction is a label stuck mostly to the work of women, even when this is far from appropriate. Kristen Roupenian, author of the viral short story *Cat Person* which was published in *The New Yorker* in December 2017, experienced how readers

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<sup>4</sup> For example in the case of Andrea Dworkin, whose academic work is often undervalued because of its angry mode of expression.

could not seem to separate her, the author, from the character in her story. It did not seem to matter that Roupenian was 36 and in a relationship with a woman, while main character Margot was 22 and dating a man (Roupenian, 2019). Separating the art from the artist seems to be an exercise people more readily partake in when the artist concerned is a man whose dubious sexual behaviour is made public, for example, than when the artist is a woman trying to keep herself (or: *her self*) out of the spotlight.

When the label of the personal is more easily attached to women's work and at the same time receives less recognition than work that is deemed to have universal value, it is easy to see why this, too, can fall under the umbrella of testimonial injustice. Both in cases where the message in question is not really personal, like in the case of Roupenian's *Cat Person*, and in cases where it is, the label is used to discredit both the meaning of and the artistry behind the testimony. And thus, once again, the playing field slopes away from those social groups who already have less social power. When the testimony of the angry women is dismissed as 'just' a personal account, it is denied the universal recognition it deserves. For one thing is certain: it is not only isolated women who are angry, but all women, waiting to be joined together in a collective. And maybe, when used correctly, anger can be utilised as a tool to bring this collective into being.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

In the preceding paragraphs, the application of the concept of testimonial injustice to the issue of anger, and female anger in particular, has helped me reach a few conclusions. In the first section, I introduced the concept of testimonial injustice and some of the tradition it is situated in. I showed that testimonial injustice can work in two different directions and that it can easily turn into a vicious cycle of silencing. Next, I looked at the way gender roles interact with testimonial injustice. Misogyny plays an important part in perpetuating testimonial injustice for women especially, and it still has a large influence because of the patriarchal culture we live in today. Thirdly, I turned to the issue of class. One's social position is crucial in determining how much epistemic value is ascribed to one's words, and it is of equal importance in determining the uptake one's anger gets. After that, I examined the fundamental dichotomy between rationality and emotion. This dichotomy is felt in pseudo-scientific critiques of anger like the psychological critique, delegitimising anger by situating it



on the emotion side of the dichotomy. Fifthly, I looked at power inequalities and the way subordinate group members are often encouraged to suppress their anger, which might then be expressed in unconventional ways. Lastly, I found that women's words and women's writing is often ascribed the 'personal' label as a means to discredit it and to take away its universal value. Overall, in this chapter I tried to show how several factors influence the workings of testimonial injustice. Societal factors, whether they be on the level of role power or identity power (Marsh, 2011), largely determine the way our words are received, and with that also the uptake our anger gets. Gender is one of these factors in itself, and it also strongly influences many of the other factors. For this reason, female rage is fundamentally different from male rage and deserves its own treatment.



# 3. Balancing Anger

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*I am afraid of being the disruptive woman. And of not being disruptive enough.*

*- Emilie Pine, Notes to Self*

In this chapter, I first aim to show some of the perceived disadvantages and then some of the advantages of the use of anger. For each of the disadvantages, I will try to prove that they either are no disadvantage at all, or that the disadvantage is not to be attributed to anger but rather to some other quality. The collection of advantages will help to build a positive picture of anger and the way it can be used, applied to the situation of angry women specifically. In doing this balancing exercise, a new kind of picture of anger will emerge. Whereas the emotion is traditionally coupled with more negative associations, like aggression, irrationality and antagonism, in this chapter I aim to provide a more positive – yet still nuanced – image. By the end of this chapter, after having reframed perceived disadvantages of anger and listed several advantages, it might seem like I unequivocally support the use of anger. While I do certainly want to assert the value of anger, I also want to retain the necessary nuance, so in chapter 4 I will reintroduce some constraints and considerations on the use of anger.

## 3.1. Disadvantages of Anger

In the first part of chapter 3 I will be listing and reframing four perceived disadvantages of the use of anger. The first of these disadvantages is the critique that anger is a fundamentally retributivist emotion, prominently voiced by Martha Nussbaum (2016). I will show that not all anger is retributivist, but that all instances of the emotion can be found on a scale, ranging from entirely retributivist to entirely forward-looking. Next, I will turn to the objection that an angry mode of expression reduces the uptake of one's message. While I grant that angry messages often do not get the uptake they deserve, I argue that this is not a consequence of the anger, but rather of some prejudice on the part of the receiver with regard to the person of the sender. Thirdly, I will look at the way anger can be used as a tool in political enemy building. I agree that this potential of anger is something to be vigilant of, but I do not think it is really a disadvantage of anger. In my opinion, anger in itself, without reference to the particular context in which it is expressed, is a neutral emotion. It can be

used in politics, for better or for worse, but it is not intrinsically good or bad in this way. Lastly, I consider the disruptive potential of anger among women. Here, I argue that this anger among women, or among feminists, is actually productive and should be listened to. In attempting to erase this type of anger, the diversity of perspectives within feminism is erased as well. When instead this anger is heard and worked with, this only works to strengthen the feminist collective.

### **3.1.1. Retributivism: a Critique of Martha Nussbaum**

One obvious argument against the use of anger in communication is that the emotion is intrinsically retributivist. On this view, anger is always a reaction to some kind of wrongdoing, aimed at making the actor or actors responsible for said wrongdoing suffer in some way. This is also the view that Martha Nussbaum holds. She argues that “anger is always normatively problematic, whether in the personal or in the public realm” (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 5), and this in one of two ways. Either the wronged, angry person takes the “road of payback”, attempting to do an equal wrong onto the wrongdoer. The problem here, Nussbaum argues, is that this second wrong does not undo the first wrong or the suffering of the wronged, so it is an ineffective strategy to take. Or, alternatively, the angry person takes the “road of status”, where they try to rise in social esteem by discrediting the wrongdoer. This might be effective, but the focus on relative status is normatively problematic in itself. Therefore, Nussbaum posits, all cases of pure anger are normatively problematic.

Fortunately, even on Nussbaum’s view, this is not where anger has to stop. After the stage of pure anger, it is possible for a next, more productive stage to follow. This is what Nussbaum calls the Transition: from pure, retributive anger to a more forward-looking way of thinking. In most cases, the stage of anger and the forward-looking stage are fully dissociated, linked only by the moment of the Transition. In some rare cases, however, the two can be combined. This is what Nussbaum calls Transition-Anger, characterised by a sentiment of “How outrageous. Something should be done about that” (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 6). This creates a third, forward-looking road out of anger. But while this Transition-Anger can occur, Nussbaum stresses that it only does so in a small minority of cases. In most cases anger is, at least partly, retributive in nature. Most of the time, the forward-looking aspect is limited to “a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender” (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 23).

I disagree with Nussbaum on two main points. First, a normative point: even if in a retributive society anger is almost always at least partly retributive, this does not mean that in a non-retributive society it should or will still be this way. Retributivism is problematic in many ways, not in the least from the point of view of a free will sceptic, and yet our society and justice system are still built around it (cf. e.g. Pereboom, 2014). If we were to work on changing that, and on moving towards a non-retributive system of justice, maybe we could reframe our concept of anger to see the non-retributive character of the emotion as well. Which brings me to my second point of disagreement with Nussbaum: I do not think that what she calls Transition-Anger only constitutes a small minority of cases. On the contrary, I think that many cases in which anger is felt or expressed actually carry at least an element of forward-looking thought inside them.

My disagreement with Nussbaum is not as fundamental as it may seem. Further on, she writes that “in a sane and not excessively anxious and status-focused person, anger’s idea of retribution or payback is a brief dream or cloud, soon dispelled by saner thoughts of personal and social welfare” (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 31). So for her, too, forward-looking thoughts are the natural consequence of anger. However, the difference between our views is that while for Nussbaum, the retributive, angry stage and the forward-looking stage succeed each other only once and are fully dissociated, I posit that they intermingle, and that it is possible for the subject to cycle back and forth between them. While on Nussbaum’s view, anger is intrinsically retributive but can lead to a next, forward-looking step, I believe that this next step can still be fuelled by anger. In this way, the two stages intermingle, and do not neatly follow one after the other. Crucially, this does not mean that I think most anger can be called Transition-Anger, for this would mean that most anger is entirely without the payback wish. Instead, I think anger is likely situated on a gradual scale, ranging from truly retributive anger to truly forward-looking anger, rather than being a dichotomy between intrinsically retributive anger and non-retributive Transition-Anger. Sara Ahmed articulates the forward-looking aspects of anger nicely:

[A]nger is not simply defined in relationship to a past, but as opening up the future. In other words, being against something does not end with ‘that which one is against’. Anger does not necessarily become ‘stuck’ on its object, although that object may

remain sticky and compelling. Being against something is also being for something, something that has yet to be articulated or is not yet. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 175)

This range of more forward-looking anger is, I think, what is at play in some of the more productive parts of the #MeToo movement as it was fuelled by the power of female rage. While for many of the women involved in the movement a certain degree of retributive desire was undoubtedly at play, it is equally undeniable that the movement was characterised by a wish for things to change for the better. The women were angry because of past (and present) wrongdoings, that is certain, but at the same time they were motivated by a strong desire to make things better in the future. By expressing their anger, they were also communicating the message that they had been wronged, and they were demanding for such moral wrongs not to be committed again in the future. By attempting to punish those who wronged them, they were most likely also attempting to dissuade potential future perpetrators from (re-)committing acts of, for example, sexual harassment. This recourse to the apparent forward-looking effects of punishment might be a weak justification of retributive action, yet it shows that there was more to the punishment than just a retributive wish: while seeing their attackers publicly shamed might have given the victims some meagre comfort, the hope that the future would now be different was definitely a large factor in motivating their actions, and behind the #MeToo movement in general. The particular type of anger that was at play here might not have been fully ideal. Often there was still a retributive wish involved, and the anger was not fully on the Transition-Anger side of the scale. However, it also would be wrong to posit that the type of anger involved in #MeToo and the female rage movement was fully retributive. For that reason, I support a scale of anger more than a dichotomy, and an oscillation rather than a one-way transition between the two extremes.

### **3.1.2. Reduced Uptake**

For various reasons, an angrily expressed message can receive less uptake than the same message would have if it had been expressed in a more emotionally neutral way. In a lot of these cases, however, it is actually an underlying stigma or prejudice which is preventing the uptake, rather than an inherent quality of the anger itself. When a receiver scolds a sender for expressing their anger, often it is not the anger which is the real problem, but rather some aspect of the identity of the sender. The anger might make that aspect more apparent,

or it might just be an excuse the receiver hides behind in order to be able to disregard the sender's message.

A frequently recurring issue in angry communication is that of misogyny. When feminist writer Lindy West was harassed by a so-called internet 'troll' - a term I find inadequate because it masks the seriousness of the threats these online harassers often spout<sup>5</sup> - she didn't follow the advice that women in similar situations often get, which is to stay quiet and let it pass. Instead, she tracked down the man in question and sat down with him for an interview, a transcription of which is available online (Glass, 2015). And, interestingly, when the issue of anger came up, it was on the side of the harasser first, not on West's side. Her writing, the harasser confessed, "kind of stoked that anger that [he] had." Reading what she wrote, it seems, made the man uncomfortable. He said the following about it:

You used a lot of all caps. You're just a very - you almost have no fear when you write. You know, it's like you stand on the desk and you say, "I'm Lindy West, and this is what I believe in. Fuck you if you don't agree with me." And even though you don't say those words exactly, I'm like, "Who is this bitch who thinks she knows everything?" (Glass, 2015)

And this, the harasser also admitted, was largely because West is a woman. Again with Kate Manne, this assertive, angry way of expressing oneself is seen as a masculine-coded privilege (Manne, 2018, p. 130). When a woman takes this for herself, men feel hurt, feel threatened. The harasser literally admitted to this feeling, saying: "and I think, for me, as well, it's threatening at first." So when a woman expresses herself in anger and fails to get uptake, is it really the anger that is the problem? I think not. Instead, we should be focusing on changing the underlying biases that permeate our society, one of which is the misogyny we can see at work in cases like that of Lindy West and the 'troll' who did not like her writing.

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<sup>5</sup> Not only does this terminology - reminiscent of fairy tales or fantasy stories - mask the seriousness of these cases, but it also has the consequence that victims (often women) are taken less seriously when they complain. After all, it's 'just a troll', so what are they worried about?

Another case of lack of uptake being misattributed to anger can be found in the case of Audre Lorde, “self-described ‘black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet’” (Lorde, 2018). In *Uses of Anger*, she gives the following example:<sup>6</sup>

I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says, ‘Tell me how you feel but don’t say it too harshly or I cannot hear you.’ But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change? (Lorde, 2018, p. 23)

Again, it seems like the anger might not be the real root of the problem here. Because in this case, the racial identity of the potential sender and receiver are not irrelevant. The woman positioning herself as receiver is white, and Lorde, the sender, is a black woman. When white points the finger at black’s anger, we cannot ignore the trope of the ‘angry black woman’ that persists throughout - particularly American - society. This is also reminiscent of what we saw in Sara Ahmed’s work (2010, p. 68): “The anger of feminists of color is [...] read as unattributed.” In Lorde’s case, this happens as well: the white woman tells Lorde to tone down her anger, as if her anger stands on itself and is unrelated to the message she is expressing. Instead, the anger is a vital part of her message, and should be heard as such. The fact that it does not receive the uptake it deserves is less a consequence of the anger itself, but more of the latent racism that is laced through society. Here, we see a mechanism at work that Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. calls “wilful hermeneutical ignorance”, (Pohlhaus Jr., 2012) by means of which members of dominant social groups refuse to recognise the hermeneutical tools of subordinate group members, thereby inhibiting the transfer of knowledge between them. Lorde knows very well that racism is at work underneath the white woman’s words, but the white woman does not recognise her in this knowledge, and instead remains wilfully ignorant towards Lorde’s epistemic capabilities.

### **3.1.3. Political Enemy Building**

In the political sphere, anger is most often associated with revolution, with the subordinated laying claim to their voice and their rights by utilising the emotion their subordinated position awakes in them. Anger is linked with disorder, with unrest, with the status quo being shaken up. However, this does not always have to be the case. As Peter Lyman states,

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<sup>6</sup> The use of which in this context I owe to Alison Bailey (2018).



“anger is not the opposite of order, for anger is domesticated by the dominant to serve order” (Lyman, 2004, p. 133). I think anger can be both, or rather, anger is neither but can be used for both purposes: anger is simply anger, an emotion which can be utilised both to support order and to disturb it. The same mechanism of domesticated anger that Lyman describes could already be seen in Ancient Greece (Harris, 2001), where controlling anger, both one’s own and that of others, was a way for the dominant to exercise their power. In much the same way, today’s politics cleverly use anger to their advantage to shape the political landscape to their liking. It is important to note that conflict is central to politics. Even in the most civil of elections, voters must choose a side, expressing a preference for one party’s views over those of the other options. This means, as David Ost points out, that “people must be mobilized to one side or the other, which means that the mobilization of emotions is central to *all* politics, not just protest” (Ost, 2004, p. 239). The elite that hold the power might appear “emotion-free” but, importantly, they have to maintain power as well as just hold it (Ost, 2004, p. 237). Further on, Ost writes:

Just like social movements, parties need to provide meaning and good feeling in order to thrive. They need to mobilize emotions to get people to the polls just like social movements need to tap emotions for their support [...]. In such a context, mainstream parties need to appeal to emotions every bit as much as movements do. So while the exercising of power lends itself to emotionless affectation, the pursuit of power requires an almost constant mobilization of emotion in order to solidify partisan identification among the electorate. (Ost, 2004, p. 237)

This supports the fact that anger is in se a neutral emotion that can be utilised to work for and against the power status quo. Anger can be used by both power and protest. The ways these different groups employ the emotion will of course vary, as will the reception they are met with, as we saw previously when discussing the interplay between testimonial injustice and power.

When anger is used to safeguard existing power structures rather than subvert them, this can have the effect of perpetuating inequalities and inhibiting social progress. One way for power to utilise anger is by creating a compelling enemy, “making them into a stereotyped ‘devil’ with whom marginalized groups cannot or should not negotiate” (Holmes, 2004, p. 221). The insight that there will always be rivalling sides in politics is vital to understanding

why there will also always be anger: mobilising people's emotions is the most efficient way to persuade them to join one's preferred side of the conflict, and anger is the best choice of emotion to try to mobilise, for it is perfectly suited to making people feel a sense of community in being bonded together against some Other. The construction of this Other makes politics a lot simpler for many people. Suddenly, there is a convenient scapegoat to blame for any and all inconveniences, a scapegoat that can be moulded to fit any shape needed. Revising one's own position is no longer required. Moreover, a peculiar kind of power 'inversion' can take place. We touched upon this briefly before, but in politics, a strategy the powerful can use to gain their followers' sympathy is to construct the image of powerlessness for themselves, associating themselves with the 'little guy'. In this case, a constructed Other is very useful to have, for it can be made into the more powerful Other to contrast with their self-image of powerlessness. As it turns out, however, the kinds of social groups that get lumped into this constructed Other are more often than not exactly those groups who do not have any power in society. The fact that they are being morphed into this constructed image of the powerful Other means that the little power they do have is further diminished, while those who are actually in power hide behind a mask of powerlessness to absorb even more power for themselves.

The preceding paragraphs sketch a less than ideal image of anger in politics, and its enemy-building capacities can very well be seen as a disadvantage of the use of the emotion. I grant that this potential is something to be aware of and to remain vigilant of, but this does not immediately have to mean that anger should not be used in politics at all. While the enemy-building potential is certainly present, anger equally has a potential towards fuelling protest and emancipation of subordinated groups (as will be discussed later on), and for this reason, I think, it should never be written off entirely. As Srinivasan states, "if a rational politics has no room for anger, then it has no room for one of the few weapons available to the oppressed" (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 141). A word of caution in using anger is not misplaced, but to inhibit its use entirely would not only be going too far, but would also go against the very essence of what politics is. Where there is politics, there is conflict, and where there is conflict, there is anger. This is inevitable. Therefore it is absolutely essential to allow protesting voices from the subordinated side access to this same tool of anger, to be used to counter the angry enemy-building of the powerful.

### 3.1.4. Anger Among Women

Another way anger can be a dangerous tool for the oppressed to use, and for feminists especially, is that it can be divisive. We saw this before, when talking about politics: anger is the perfect tool for enemy-building, for dividing the world into two neat categories of ‘friends’ and ‘foes’. This can be used for and against a cause, whether that cause is good or bad. However, problems arise when the divisiveness goes into effect within a group who are fighting for a cause. Take feminism. In theory, this should be a group effort, made up of all women and allies of other genders who support equal rights for all. The first issue is that this is not the case: many women do not want to call themselves feminists, either because they do not see the issue or because they do not feel welcomed by the movement. This second reason is the one I want to focus on: why is agreeing on a common, emancipatory goal not enough to unite people under the feminist flag?

The issue here seems to be that some people feel excluded. It might sound contradictory, but I argue this is largely because of misplaced efforts towards inclusion and unification. Some feminists, particularly of the older generations, are annoyed by what they might call ‘identity politics’<sup>7</sup> in feminism. They think that focusing on differences amongst feminists, like those concerning class, sexuality, race, etc., is divisive and counterproductive (Hofstede, 2018). Instead, they argue, we should focus on what unites us, and stand together as one homogenous group. If we do not waste our time dividing ourselves into ever smaller subgroups, we can find the power in our collectivism and with it our strength.

However, these efforts towards unification might in reality have a much more divisive effect than intended. For feminists are a diverse group, and refusing to notice those differences will not make them disappear. In order to be able to address the specific issues that someone is facing, we need to be prepared to listen to them and to recognise their specific situation, rather than covering every different kind of person under a ‘feminist’ blanket. As Audre Lorde writes, “what woman here is so enamoured of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman’s face?” (Lorde, 2018, p. 33). To rephrase:

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<sup>7</sup> This is a literal translation of the term used by a reader in an email to Bregje Hofstede. I am aware of the implications and history of this term, and because it is so laden with meaning I am hesitant to use it in this context myself. I have chosen to reproduce it anyway since it is the term Hofstede herself uses in her article, but I have kept it between brackets to signify that I am not entirely comfortable with its use here. In this context, I interpret it as a misnomer for ‘intersectionality’, or just for attempts to diversify feminism.

what woman is so concerned with unification towards a common goal that she cannot see the dividing effects it has? In trying to enforce one universal perspective, too often the perspective that gets chosen is that of those who are positioned the highest on the social ladder (Hofstede, 2018). By consequence, more marginalised perspectives get marginalised even further and lose all chances at emancipation. In this way, unification efforts are actually divisive, alienating those who do not fit the universalised perspective of those with the most identity-power and thereby excluding them from the movement.

Naturally, these alienating practices evoke anger in those being alienated. It is then unfortunate that the people who back these misguided universalising efforts will oppose this anger for the same reason: feminists should not be angry with each other, they should be angry with the patriarchy! As Mary Holmes writes, “once a feminist is angry with another feminist, she has come to the point where she has to say she will not agree. If she does not agree, she cannot be included in the constructed ‘we’ and she (or the group she represents) must leave the collective” (Holmes, 2004, p. 220). But by refusing to grant uptake to this anger, the collective breaks apart. Universalising and collectivising is not worth the cost of erasing any internal diversity. As Kay and Banet-Weiser point out, “rage is full of feminist possibility, but also of risk – and these risks of rage are not evenly shared by all women” (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 607). We need the so-called ‘identity politics’ so all members of the feminist collective feel welcome and can have their specific problems and issues recognised. As Hofstede writes, “identity politics is only an issue when we can’t imagine ever committing ourselves to the issues of another group - a group that we ourselves do not belong to” (Hofstede, 2018, my translation). Empathy can very well be possible across differences. It is certainly easier to feel empathy with people who are exactly like ourselves, but in the case of diverse feminists, it seems as if even with our differences there are still more than enough similarities to make this empathy possible. Additionally, a deeper level of empathy is possible when we try to make an effort to understand the specific struggle of a person who is not like us.

Therefore, it looks like we can conclude that in this last case as well, a seeming disadvantage of the use of anger is actually not a disadvantage at all. By looking closely at this anger instead of ironing out its wrinkles with the iron of conformity and listening to its message instead of silencing it, we can arrive at a richer, more inclusive, truly intersectional feminism.

Because it is certain that this anger does carry a message. It is a signal, one not to be ignored, of feminists who are not feeling included in feminism. And while certainly not all angers should be treated equally – so-called trans-exclusionary feminists or TERFs would probably describe themselves as angry as well, but their project can hardly be called feminist – some of these truly feminist angers can lead the way towards improving feminism and actually making it more inclusive. The way towards this inclusion lies in recognising differences, I think, and not in ironing them out.

And with that, the section on possible disadvantages on anger can be concluded. First, I showed that anger actually does not have to be as strongly retributive as Martha Nussbaum suggests. Then, I argued that the reduced uptake of an angry message is not actually to blame on the anger itself, but rather on some underlying stereotype or prejudice held by the receiver of the message. Thirdly, I looked at political enemy building, and I showed that the use of anger in this way is inevitable and it should not stop protest movements from utilising it as a resource as well. And lastly, I discussed anger amongst women, and I posited that this anger is actually an important signal and should be heard, not swept under the rug. There are undoubtedly more possible disadvantages to be thought of and discussed, but they fall beyond the scope of this limited thesis. Now, it is time to look at some possible advantages of the use of anger, and to see whether it can be a useful tool for feminist activism.

### 3.2. Advantages of Anger

While the apparent disadvantages of the use of anger can be neutralised, this does not yet prove that anger has enough positive qualities to warrant its use in communication and, in the context of this thesis, that anger is a valuable tool for women within the feminist project. In the following sections, I will go through a number of advantageous effects that the use of anger can have, particularly those applicable in the case of female rage. I will look at anger as a motivational force, as an impulse against oppression, as a positive political emotion, as a community building asset, as a creative force, as a deterrent, and as a messenger. In the end, I hope to have presented enough evidence to convince the reader that anger can be valuable and that productive cases of it should be valued, especially in the case of female rage. Of course, these reasons do not amount to a claim that any and all anger can or should be seen as valuable. Anger can equally be extremely destructive and dangerous. Rather, they simply want to alert the reader to the opposite side of the coin, where anger can definitely provide added value depending on the particular context.

A quick aside, though: in writing about anger in such a calculated way, listing advantages and disadvantages and weighing them against each other, a core fact about anger might easily be forgotten. For above all, anger is still an emotion, and describing it solely as a tool is missing part of its essence. Something we can't let ourselves forget is that anger will be felt, whether its expression is a smart strategic move or not. To take the example of women: as long as women are oppressed in any way, they will most likely be angry about it, and rightfully so. The emotional reaction to being wronged is often anger, and this is not a calculated decision but a fact of life. Regardless of the conclusion of this thesis then, whether the expression of anger should be seen as a valuable communication strategy or not, the fact of the matter is that people will always continue to be angry. For that reason, I want to make it clear that I am not in any way trying to police people's felt emotions, prescribing them to feel more anger or less. When treating anger as a tool, I am talking about its expression and the communicative value I think it can have depending on the situation in question. I am not talking about the felt emotion, or at least not in the first place. The two stages are of course closely connected; one has to feel anger to be able to express it. What concerns me, then, is not whether people feel anger, and not even really whether they express it or how. What I aim to explore in these pages is the potential value of the expression of anger,

communicative or other, and whether that value is duly recognised. If it is at all prescriptive, it is on a meta-level, urging towards recognising anger and what it has to offer to subordinate groups in particular. It would never, in any circumstance, deny those groups their felt anger, even if the added value turned out to be negligible.

### 3.2.1. Motivational Force

An often cited effect of anger in the context of the female rage movement is its motivational force. Anger riles people up, it makes their blood boil, and in doing those things it drives them towards action. This drive towards action has figured in definitions of anger as early as Ancient Greece, where Aristotle defined anger as “a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight, affecting a man himself or one of his friends, when such a slight is undeserved” (Aristotle, Rh. 2.2.1). There are several interesting parts to this definition. Konstan, for example, looks at the “accompanied by pain” part, and links it with Aristotle’s definition of *πάθη*: anger, among other emotions, is to be manipulated by the orator in the minds of his audience (Konstan, 2003, p. 100). Compare this with Ost’s analysis of anger in contemporary politics, and we will find that much the same strategy is still being used today. For my purposes however, a different part of the definition is important: “a longing [...] for real or apparent revenge,” and thus, for action.

While Aristotle’s action of “real or apparent revenge” can at first glance hardly be called an advantage of anger, I would argue that it can be read in a positive way as well. Linking back to my analysis of Martha Nussbaum’s account of anger in connection with the #MeToo movement, we can make a similar move here. With Nussbaum and #MeToo, we saw that while the actions of female rage might have been retributively motivated, this was not all there was to them. Next to and interwoven with the retributive wish of sexual assault victims for example, there was and is a desire for the future world to improve and to prevent further victimisation, for what happened to them not to happen again. The strategy of judicial action might not be the most efficient route towards that better world, but even if it is ill-chosen, it does have a forward-looking goal in mind. Therefore, I would argue that even retributive anger as in Aristotle’s definition carries a forward-looking element inside it.

However, I disagree with Aristotle that retributive anger is all there is. As I also mentioned in the paragraphs critiquing Nussbaum (cf. *supra*), I believe anger to be situated on a scale,

going from fully retributive to fully forward-looking. And when we look at angers on the more forward-looking end of the scale, we can find a strongly underutilised resource for motivation, whether that be in the political or the private sphere. As Soraya Chemaly writes, “anger has a bad rap, but it is actually one of the most hopeful and forward thinking of all our emotions. It begets transformation, manifesting our passion *and* keeping us invested in the world. It is a rational *and* emotional response to trespass, violation and moral disorder. It bridges the divide between what “is” and what “ought” to be, between a difficult past and an improved possibility” (Chemaly, 2018, p. xx). This view, of anger as a hopeful, forward-looking emotion, is the one I want to emphasise here. Certainly, not all anger is equally productive, but those cases that are, should be appreciated for it, and we should be aware of this productive potential of anger so we can utilise it when it fits our goals for the future. And, importantly, anger can take on this motivational role as itself. There is no need to transform it, to make it palatable, to manage it, in order to be able to reap its benefits (Traister, 2018, p. 209). The emotion of anger can spur on activism and protest and a drive towards change for the better entirely as itself.

### 3.2.2. Against Oppression

This motivational force that is intrinsic to anger can be applied in a multitude of different directions. One of those directions is protest. In this way, anger can provide the necessary drive to fuel unrest against oppression, and it can spur on change for the better. This oppression can be personal or political, it can be motivated by sexism, racism, ableism, whatever it might be. Anger does not discriminate; it provides its resources for all. As such, Lyman (1979) “contends that rage is fundamental to claim the reality of a past of oppression and to proceed to liberation” (Bernandez, 1987, p. 3).<sup>8</sup> This sentiment both recognises the historical elements of rage, which can be inherited, and the emotion’s driving force towards the future. Whoever has been or is oppressed has to tap into their rage first, to feel its burning power, in order to be able to proceed towards protest and liberation. To make this move, it is necessary to “transfer *private anger* into *collective anger*” (Bernandez, 1987, p. 3). A revolution of one can hardly make an impact, but a revolution of many will. By finding the collective nature in one’s private anger, it becomes possible to tap into the power of community, which is a necessary step towards effective protest. This community-building

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<sup>8</sup> I cite this through Bernandez because I cannot access the original.



aspect of anger will be treated in more depth later. For now, we can note its importance for anger's power in resisting oppression, a task which is not possible without a sense of community.

In order to efficiently resist oppression, not only do we need community, but also a particular type of anger. Not just any anger will do, because not just any anger is productive. Blind, wild rage might be cathartic, but it will not get one very far in organising a resistance movement. This unproductive anger can be called 'ressentiment' with Nietzsche's term, and it is a kind of "self-destructive righteousness" (Bernandez, 1987, p. 5) that can be experienced by the oppressed when they feel like they do not get a voice in the politics determining their circumstances. In order to get to the stage of productive anger, a transformation is needed. Wood introduces "a category of "irreverent rage" that might be politically productive in the current climate. Instead of turning the rage of regulatory pressure inwards to make it illegible, this rage turns outwards, precisely to publicly trouble regulatory power" (Wood, 2019, p. 611). Channelling existing rage in an outward direction, instead of the inward direction encouraged by societal powers, can turn it into a powerful and disruptive force that can challenge existing power structures. Another way of transforming one's anger into a productive power is suggested by Bernandez (1987), who writes: "the anger that liberates is the conscious response to an awareness of injustices suffered, of losses and grievances sustained and is the result of breaking away and defying the injunction to keep silent about it. The anger that liberates involves self-love and awareness of the responsibility of making choices. It is not concerned with making others suffer but with stopping the subject's own suffering" (Bernandez, 1987, p. 5). In this definition of liberating anger, Bernandez immediately stresses the non-retributive quality of the emotion. As I have argued (cf. supra), mixed cases of anger which has both retributive and forward-looking elements can be effective too, but I agree that revolutionary effectiveness increases with the forward-looking nature of the anger. Another important element of Bernandez' definition of liberatory anger is that it is a "conscious response" coupled with an "awareness of the responsibility of making choices." Again, blind rage will not get one very far; in order to be efficient this rage might need to be tempered in some ways. However, I do not think that this has to mean that the rage loses strength. On the contrary, when coupling rage with conscious strategy and responsibility, it might even

become more powerful, because it is given a clear direction on which to focus. Focusing rage by necessity means constraining some parts of it, but this only increases its power, transforming it from blind rage to forward-looking, goal-oriented rage. The need for this transformation is part of why Holmes stresses that “angriness [...] is not inevitably emancipatory” (Holmes, 2004, p. 223). Angriness can be read negatively in the case of oppressed groups, not because of the anger but because of underlying stereotypes, but whatever the reason, the fact that oppressed groups’ anger can easily be misread should not be ignored. Therefore, they unfortunately need to be extra careful in curating their anger, in controlling and focusing it and taking responsibility for it. For the stereotypes of ‘overly emotional people’ that threaten to be applied to them might not be truthful, and we might be able to see the anger-controlling mechanisms behind them (cf. supra), but that does not mean they are not still effective in convincing large parts of the population. This prejudice should not let anyone be discouraged from expressing and using their anger, but it is a difficult terrain to navigate.

In the case of feminism, women are one of these groups whose anger is easily dismissed as ‘overly emotional’, and who should not let this stop them. Because even within this toxic mentality, “women’s anger could subvert gendered patterns of domination and enact new relations” (Holmes, 2004, p. 224). Women’s anger is powerful, and powerful in its capabilities towards resistance (cf. also Bailey, 2018). As Audre Lorde formulates it:

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives. (Lorde, 2018, p. 26)

Another voice from the black feminist sphere, bell hooks, formulates a similar idea:

Confronting my rage, witnessing the way it moved me to grow and change, I understood intimately that it had the potential not only to destroy but also to construct. Then and now I understand rage to be a necessary aspect of resistance struggle. Rage can act as a catalyst inspiring courageous action. (hooks, 1995, p. 16)

Anger is rebellious, anger is “hard to handle” (Bailey, 2018), anger does not let itself be boxed in. The stereotype of the overly emotional woman tries to discourage women from using their anger to their advantage, but when women see through this farce and carefully navigate this space, they can access a new, powerful and unexpected resource. This is what is happening with the female rage movement, and what will hopefully continue to happen in the future. Women are discovering the resistant qualities of anger. With this new power at their disposal, who knows what they will do next?

### **3.2.3. Political Revolution**

One of the ways the resistant, anti-oppression qualities of anger can be utilised is by employing them in the political sphere. In the ‘disadvantages’ section, we already looked at the ways in which those in power use anger to their advantage to keep their power secure in their hands (cf. Lyman (2004), Ost (2004)). However, we also remarked that this relationship between anger and politics is not the one most people will think of first: the most obvious association between the two is that of anger being used to fuel revolution, unrest, changes in the political landscape rather than securing existing power. In se, this too is a neutral quality of anger: depending on who starts an angry revolution and with which goals in mind, revolution can be helpful or harmful. But by putting my paragraphs on political revolution in the ‘advantages’ section, I want to focus on those revolutions that really are for the better, that aim to give a voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless. This editorial decision is also founded on the fact that this is a thesis on female rage, and the particular kind of revolution that this rage fuels is, in my opinion, strongly positive. While women’s anger has been the driving force behind many more movements than just those towards women’s rights - for example, Andi Zeisler argues that it has “fuelled every political movement in the United States, from suffrage to Civil Rights to #MeToo” (Zeisler, 2018) -, those feminist movements are the ones I want to focus on, and they are of course positive developments. In a patriarchal society like the one we live in, women are a subordinate group, and their anger can give them a voice and motivate them to use it.

The fact that powerful elites are so eager to keep the tools of anger away from the masses can most likely be interpreted to mean that they are aware of its power and that they do not want to share it. Anger gatekeeping strategies (cf. what Lyman (2004) calls “domesticating anger”) can take multiple different forms, from stereotyping to psychologising to silencing

(cf. supra for more discussion of these). Another way this anger gatekeeping can be explained is by reference to Norbert Elias' civilisation theory. For according to Elias, "over approximately five centuries, European peoples came to exercise greater control over emotions that were deemed to clash with their 'civilized' self-images. Emotion management in increasingly-pacified societies included the suppression of open displays of anger that were seen to 'heighten risk-taking' behaviour that could lead to violence" (Linklater, 2014, p. 574). There are many things here that warrant further discussion, but I want to focus on two. First, the fact that according to Elias, Europeans increasingly tried to get their "'civilized' self-images" to match their outward emotional behaviour. The terminology of 'civilisation theory' makes this sound like a positive development (at least from the perspective of the civilised societies themselves, not from that of the 'barbarians' they contrast themselves with), but it might not be entirely so. For by necessity, I would argue that this self-image is connected to and informed by the existing power structures in the society these people live in. If they are attempting to civilise themselves to fit with this image informed by power, then, they are conforming themselves to the image of an ideal citizen that those in power would like them to conform to. In the case of emotions and anger in particular, this then means that when people suppress their anger - or the outward expression of it at least - to fit with this "'civilized' self-image", this is playing into the hand of the powerful (and male), who want to keep the tools of anger for their own use. Self-civilising, it seems, is actually more like being civilised. What Elias calls "the increasing tendency of people to observe themselves and others" (Elias, 1994, p. 63) is not entirely self-motivated. This then connects to the second point of Linklater's quote I want to focus on, namely that this civilising process led to less "risk-taking behaviour." This again sounds like a positive development, until one makes the connection with revolutionary movements, which can definitely be categorised as taking risks. By suppressing anger the revolution loses its fuel, and by minimising the taking of risks, the execution of any kind of unrest is made impossible. The civilising process, then, might also be a power consolidation process.

It is in this context that we need to see the importance of anger. The fact that powerful elites are so interested in suppressing anger in subordinate groups should be a signal in itself. However, another mechanism Elias describes needs to be taken into account here, called the 'royal mechanism'. This amounts to the fact that "if social conditions are not bad

enough for any one group to risk the loss of their current position, and power is distributed so evenly that every group is fearful of any other group gaining the slightest advantage, ‘they tie each other’s hands’ and ‘this gives the central authority better chances than any other constellation within society’” (Van Krieken, 1998, p. 97). Again, this means that those in power remain in power. I believe that the liberation of anger could be one way of untying the hands, both of those in power and those not in power, and shaking up the status quo. If the tool of anger gets taken into the right hands, this could have significant emancipatory consequences. When the anger of the subordinate grows larger than their fear, when their impulse towards change for the better grows larger than their wariness of change for the worse, they can use this anger as a powerful motivator. The same could be said of those in power, but because they have more to lose and less to gain, I believe their fear will be more likely to stay larger than their anger, so they will not be inclined to upset the status quo. Therefore, anger is a potent tool for the subordinate especially. It can help to transform their more precarious position into a strength, and when channelled correctly, it can be the fuel towards improvement of that position.

#### **3.2.4. Community Building**

As mentioned before, individual, unorganised anger is not very effective, but collective, organised anger is. Luckily, anger lends itself well to being collectivised. While emotions are fundamentally an individual experience, at least in an individualist society like this one, they can also provide a means towards connection with other people experiencing instances of the same emotion. In forming this connection, it is of vital importance to have a name for the emotion one is experiencing. Simply by being able to say “I am angry, and this is why”, people can make valuable connections with others who are experiencing the same emotion for similar reasons. Without this name, without a conceptual framework to categorise one’s experiences, one is stuck in oneself and reaching out becomes much more difficult. Without a mutual term to connect individual lived experiences to, community building becomes virtually impossible. For some people, concepts like ‘sexual harassment’ or ‘misogyny’ are out of reach, and they are not able to place their lived experiences into those boxes. The boxes provided by emotions, then, are much more accessible.<sup>9</sup> To be able to name one’s

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<sup>9</sup> This is a connection I was able to make thanks to an unpublished draft of an article by Lara Jost, “Microaggressions and indignation: how our emotions help us track injustice”.

emotions and group similar emotions together is less demanding than to conceptualise the root cause of different lived experiences. It is for that reason that anger serves so well as the glue for communities, which can then turn into movements by utilising anger's motivational force. In the case of the female rage movement, for example, this communal power of anger was tapped into. By alerting women to their anger and forming a community around it, a powerful movement was able to get off the ground. By utilising the universality of anger and linking it back to the almost equally universal experiences of misogyny and sexual harassment that women have, the female rage movement had the potential to connect almost universally. For other reasons, like those discussed in the section about anger amongst women (cf. supra), this potential sadly was not always realised.

The universality of the angry experience can thus be utilised to unite people behind a cause. As Bailey writes, "anger at injustice unites us because, in our moving, we come to realize that we are not alone in our anger. What first feels like an isolated subordinated anger is really part of a larger collective resistant angry experience" (Bailey, 2018, p. 113). While anger is at its base always an individually felt emotion, it can be used to unite people feeling it into a resistant collective. Bailey also introduces the concept of a "knowing resistant anger." Knowing, because of its epistemic value (cf. infra), and resistant, because of its power in resisting oppression (cf. supra). This type of anger is then "an essential ingredient in the creation and sustenance of resistant epistemic communities" (Bailey, 2018, p.113). This is the same type of shift that Bernandez talks about when she argues that anger can only be liberating once one can "transfer *private anger* into *collective anger*" (Bernandez, 1987, p. 3). The experience of anger is particularly suited to this transfer because it provides a shared name for a shared experience.

Anger does not only provide a way to connect different people's experiences in the present, but also through time. "Some angers are inherited" (Bailey, 2018, p. 107), and in experiencing them one is connected to generations before who felt them as well. As pointed out before, women's anger is one of these angers with a history. The subordinate position of women in society is not new, and though this subordinacy has varied in intensity over time, full gender equality has not yet been achieved. By allowing women to place themselves in a tradition, anger provides added meaning and significance to the modern-day female rage movement, and gives it a perspective towards a future as well. Importantly, this future

perspective does not have to imply that inequality and therefore female anger are eternal. Instead, the perspective can be one of hope, for this can be found in the historical perspective as well. Progress has been made, standards have been raised, and those are good things. By consciously tapping into the resources anger provides, current-day feminists can advance this tradition even further.

### 3.2.5. Creativity

In the public perception, the more obvious association would probably be between anger and destruction, rather than between anger and creativity. However, the association should really be between aggression and destruction, not between anger and destruction. Anger is a more neutral emotion, and while it can be expressed through aggression and thereby cause destruction, it is equally possible for it to be expressed through creativity. Moreover, “the equation of anger with solely destructive emotions in our culture further discourages the freedom necessary to discriminate between aggressive-destructive and assertive-constructive anger” (Bernandez, 1987, p. 2). Discriminating between these different types of anger is essential in order to fully recognise the creative value it can have. This creative power of anger is an often unrecognised and underutilised advantage of the use of the emotion. In rewiring the common associations that people have with regard to anger, a new appreciation of it can be found.

As Chemaly writes, “there is creativity in anger and much anger in creativity” (Chemaly, 2018, p. 285). This means there is a bidirectional relationship, maybe even an interdependency between the two. While it would be wrong to claim that all anger is creative or that all creativity is (partly) fuelled by anger, there are many cases where this is true, and recognising these cases is an important step towards properly valuing anger. In the cases of anger that are situated more towards the forward-looking end of the scale, this creativity is apparent: wanting to work towards a better future involves creating that future in whatever way possible. In this way, creativity is broader than the creation of art - though it does of course include this as well. It can include the creation of a community, a supportive environment, or a different mentality. Bailey mentions that her knowing resistant anger “can be a creative force for change” (Bailey, 2018, p. 112) as well, and this is the core of this first aspect of creativity that anger fuels: forward-looking change towards an improved future. Combining previously discussed advantages of the emotion, like

motivational force and community building, anger can therefore be creative in a socio-political way, providing fuel for movements that work towards change.

While this socio-political creativity is one aspect of the creativity in anger, it is not the only aspect. A second part of anger's creativity is the more conventional sense of the term, creativity as it is seen in connection with the creation of artwork. This sense of angry creativity was seen strongly in the female rage movement. The women's marches that were organised all over the world following Donald Trump's election as president of the United States showed several examples of this creativity. Many artists made artwork inspired by feminism and the women's rights (and rage) movement, and even non-artists tried their hand at creative work in creating powerful or witty signs to carry with them to the marches. Also in connection with the women's marches, we saw the pussy hat movement that had thousands of women knitting or crocheting bright pink "pussy hats" to protest Donald Trump's "grab them by the pussy" comments. This re-appropriating of the stuffy image crafts have into powerful - but peaceful - weapons of protest was again a testament to the inherent creativity of anger. In creative expression, one's anger can be sublimated into a productive and peaceful end result, not intending to harm but instead to harness the power of anger in a work of art. This link between anger and creativity shows not only the productive aspect of anger, but also the fact that it can be expressed peacefully, and that it has the capability to bring positive change and even beauty into the world, all the more reason to recognise its value.

### **3.2.6. Epistemic Value**

As a logical consequence of the possibility of testimonial injustice, we can infer that anger has some epistemic value: for that epistemic value to be able to be unrightfully denied, it has to exist. This epistemic value of anger might be its most important advantage, and yet it is often not recognised. Anger is explained away through all sorts of tactics (cf. for example Lyman (2004) about the psychological critique of anger). The goal of these tactics is to deny marginalised people access to their anger, and thereby to deny them access to all of its advantages, epistemic value being prime among them. But, in the words of Audre Lorde, "when we turn from anger we turn from insight, saying we will accept only the designs already known, deadly and safely familiar" (Lorde, 2018, p. 31). The very fact that anger is an unexpected and underutilised resource increases its value. From it, we can gain insights that



we would not have been able to gain anywhere else on more familiar terrain. By striving to recognise the epistemic value of anger, an entirely new resource opens up, providing insight into the struggles of subordinate groups especially, for it is those groups whose anger has been suppressed and ignored the most.

Baker Miller and Surrey define anger as “an emotion which arises when something is wrong or something hurts and needs changing” (Baker Miller and Surrey, 1990, p. 2). Audre Lorde says that “anger is loaded with information and energy” (Lorde, 2018, p. 27). And Bailey (2018) specifies certain kinds of anger as “knowing resistant anger.” What all these accounts of anger have in common is, clearly, their emphasis on the epistemic value of the emotion. Anger contains a message or sends a signal. This signal seems to be largely negative in nature, about a wrong or a hurt or a misgiving. Moreover, the message anger carries can be overlooked when one focuses solely on the mode of expression, and uses that to discount the speaker and what they have to say (Lyman, 2004). However, I would hesitate to say that there is *an* angry mode of expression. Rather, one’s anger can be expressed in a multitude of ways, ranging from tearful to aggressive to silent. Of course, not all angers carry the same straightforward epistemic value. Some angers can be illegitimate. In examining the epistemic value of anger, we should remember that anger is by no means a shortcut to truth and it should not be used as such. The fact that someone is angry does not mean that they are correct in the reasons for their anger or that they are entitled to any or all means of restitution. However, this surface-level mistake does not mean that illegitimate angers do not have epistemic value at all. Even if the subjective reasons for anger are illegitimate, there will still be some other, objective causes of this anger, and the anger carries this information as well. Anger will still be a signal that something is going awry, whether that something is what the angry person is subjectively expressing or something else.

The epistemic value of anger is especially poignant in the case of subordinate groups in society. As Lyman writes, “the anger of the powerless is an essential voice in politics, not least because angry speech contains a claim that an injustice has been committed. When anger is taken seriously as a communication, rather than as psychological disorder or uncivil behavior, a spirited but ultimately constructive public dialogue about the justice of the dominant political order is possible” (Lyman, 2004, p. 133). As mentioned before, testimonial injustice disproportionately affects less powerful groups in society. By not recognising the

epistemic value of their anger in particular, these societal inequalities are only exacerbated. Lyman (2004, p. 134) also characterises anger as “a form of political speech,” and rightly so. The anger of the subordinated is again a case of ‘the personal is political’, a slogan which is not only applicable to the women’s rights movement but to all kinds of groups who are in some way subordinated. These groups’ voices are not being heard when they are calm, which makes them angry, which ensures that their message gets even less uptake. Additionally, not only are their voices not being heard, but they are actively being silenced. This again causes more anger, which causes more silencing, etc.

Importantly, even when a knower is reduced to silence, this does not remove their epistemic capabilities nor their anger. In the words of Bailey, “silence is saturated with anger because injustice is painful” (Bailey, 2018, p. 96). Even though “silence suggests the acceptance of the injuries of domination, [...] some kinds of silence are accompanied by indirect forms of speech” (Lyman, 2004, p. 138). Words are not the only means of expressing anger, and their absence does not imply the absence of anger either. Taking the mythological example of Penelope, who unravelled her weaving work each night to keep suitors at bay while she waited for her husband to return, we can see that actions can convey anger even when words do not. Her calm exterior and even her outward actions conveyed nothing about her anger, which is hidden from view by her sly plan. In the same way, subordinated groups’ outward compliance can hide the anger within. Silence, then, can be a form of political speech as much as anger can. Hearing it is only a matter of listening and allowing the subordinated their right to speech.

In response to silencing - whether that be through gaslighting or other tactics - it is possible to cultivate a ‘knowing resistant anger’ (Bailey, 2018). This type of anger is “not an automatic response” to silencing but is something that must be consciously worked on. An understanding of the origins of one’s anger is crucial here, for without it “resistant anger feels muddy-headed” (Bailey, 2018, p. 103). So, in order to gain knowledge from one’s anger, it is necessary to get to know one’s anger. This means that anger not only has epistemic value for a receiver, but also for the angry people themselves. This self-reflective epistemic value of anger can then be utilised to clarify one’s anger to outside observers, and to convey its message in a clearer way. In that way, the inward and outward epistemic value of anger are related. Both should be valued and both should be paid attention to. But, for readers of

this thesis - who, by the pure fact of their access to it, benefit from several privileges - the outward epistemic value should be paid the most attention to, especially in groups who are less privileged than themselves. The anger of the subordinated has just as much epistemic value as that of the powerful, and yet this value is often not recognised. Working towards change on this front is of extreme importance, for silencing practices perpetuate existing power inequalities in the social world and inhibit social change.

For less privileged, subordinate people especially, the inward epistemic value of anger is most poignant. The fact that anger is a felt emotion means that it can be experienced regardless of whether the subject has a conceptual framework to categorise those experiences in.<sup>10</sup> Members of less privileged communities might not have access to the knowledge, resources or education required to build a conceptual framework for themselves. Terms like 'feminism' or 'sexual harassment' or 'misogyny' might remain abstract concepts to them, unable to be applied to their lived experiences. In situations like these, the felt experience of anger can provide a stepping stone towards a conceptual framework, or it can be enough in itself. About feminism, Sara Ahmed (2017) writes:

Feminism often begins with intensity: you are aroused by what you come up against. You register something in the sharpness of an impression. Something can be sharp without being clear what the point is. Over time, with experience, you sense that something is wrong or you have a feeling of being wronged. You sense an injustice. You might not have used that word for it; you might not have the words for it; you might not be able to put your finger on it. (Ahmed, 2017, p. 22)

This quote exemplifies the gradual way the epistemic value of emotion can work. An unnamed experience of anger can turn into a named experience of anger, which can be collected with other similarly named experiences, which can in turn lead to a more conceptually structured framework, like that offered by feminism for example. In this way, the inward epistemic value of anger can be of special value to women as well. In allowing for a categorisation of certain experiences by way of lived and felt experience rather than (immediately) by way of a shared conceptual framework, it can either be a stepping stone

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<sup>10</sup> My thanks to Lara Jost for allowing me to read a draft of her article, "Microaggressions and indignation: how our emotions help us track injustice," and inspiring these comments on conceptual frameworks.

towards or a replacement for such a conceptual framework. Similar situations where a woman was made to feel angry can lead her on the way to feminism. But, equally, they can be enough in themselves, grouped together by means of the shared emotion.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

In the preceding paragraphs, I have aimed to sketch a nuanced picture of anger which nevertheless leans towards the positive side of things. I have considered four perceived disadvantages and six advantages of anger. For the disadvantages, I looked at claims that anger is intrinsically retributivist, that it reduces uptake, that it is used for political enemy building, and that anger among women is disruptive. I attempted to prove that the retributivist stance takes things too far, that the uptake objection is misattributed, that anger is politically neutral, and that anger among women can actually be productive. On the side of the advantages, I considered in turn anger's motivational force, its powers against oppression, its usefulness in political revolution, its capacity for community building, its tendency towards creativity, and its epistemic value.

Having considered all this, it might be tempting to conclude that anger is unequivocally a good idea. After all, I just showed that some major perceived disadvantages of anger actually are not disadvantages of the emotion at all, and then I proceeded to look at a few significant advantages. Such a positive picture may then lead one to conclude that one *should* be angry, or that one should encourage others to be angry. While in this chapter I did aim to provide a positively skewed picture of anger, I want to retain a degree of nuance. Anger has many positive sides, but as I mentioned above, there is reason to urge towards caution as well. In the next chapter, I will be going into more depth on this nuance, and going over a few factors which complicate a normative stance with regard to anger. Even though anger has many advantages, urging people towards anger can be problematic in many ways, as are other aspects connected with nurturing the emotion.

## 4. Issues with Normativity

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*There is no guarantee that in struggling for justice we ourselves will be just.*

*- Sara Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life*

In the preceding chapters, I have already come to a few conclusions. I have showed that women are angry and why, that their anger often is not heard properly, and that anger, when given the attention it deserves, can be an extremely valuable tool. It is clear that women's anger exists. It is also clear that it is not going anywhere. Then, as Jilly Boyce Kay (2019) asks, "perhaps the question now is not so much how to *summon* our anger, but what to do with all this anger now that we have it. How can we channel and harness this rage?" (Kay, 2019, p. 593). How can this anger, for women specifically, be put to good use? When do we need to exercise caution in exercising our anger, or in encouraging the anger of others? What do we need to be aware of when using our anger? "Which angers [do we] wish to nurture and develop" (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 604), and which angers are we better off without? In this chapter, I will try to come to some explorative answers to more normative questions like these, figuring out some caveats and issues to be aware of when feeling and expressing our anger and when handling the anger of others.

As Andi Zeisler states, "it's past time to stop treating female anger as something that happens to men" (Zeisler, 2018). Connected to that sentiment, it is also important to note that women's anger is in many ways fundamentally different to men's anger, both in its causes and in the way it is received. We cannot read women's anger according to the same rule book we use for men's anger, "that is, as the ugly but inevitable product of modernity's failures to deliver on its promises of autonomy and equality - because women were simply never made those same promises" (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 604). While men's anger is often spurred on by a sense of entitlement (cf. also Manne, 2018), women's anger cannot be said to have the same cause. To the contrary, the recent female rage movement was and is spurred on by the realisation that women have for so long been deprived of this entitlement which seems so natural to men. Women do not take the promises of modernity for granted. They know they weren't promised to them, and now that they are realising this injustice, they are prepared to fight for the right to those promises. And, as we are seeing now, anger is a valuable weapon in this fight. Moreover, not only are the causes of women's

anger different to those of men's anger, its reception is also vastly different. In several cultures, like American culture for example, male rage is "sanctioned and rewarded" (Gerard, 2017), and culture "bends itself" to make room for it. One of the elements that have to give way is female rage, which will then inevitably end up being repressed. Male rage is "portrayed as this beautiful power" (Gerard, 2017), a privilege which is in no way afforded to female rage, which is stereotyped and ridiculed instead.

In the following sections, a few more questions will be given preliminary answers. First, I will look at the popular image of the angry woman. What does it mean for a woman to be angry, and what are the stereotypical images angry women are often readily associated with? Are those stereotypes harmless, or should we be careful with them? Then I will make a perspective shift with regard to the preceding chapters, which have focused on the productivity of anger, to look at the aptness of anger instead, as suggested by Amia Srinivasan (2018). I will step out of the counter-productivity debate and look at a different, new set of normative issues. Thirdly, I will examine whether one can be said to have a duty of anger. Is it morally right to encourage people's anger, and on whose shoulders should the burden of anger fall? Do women have a duty to embrace anger? Does anyone? After that, I will look at the connections between anger and the status of the victim. Does anger help to focus the perspective on the victim rather than on the perpetrator, or does it actually contribute to victim blaming? Lastly, I will take the time to urge women towards evaluating their own anger and to be critical of it, and to ask themselves what to do in the event that their anger is not successful. In the end, I will have built a more nuanced image of women's anger, and I will have all the elements that are needed to come to a conclusion.

#### **4.1. The Angry Woman**

In the preceding chapters, we have already seen that women, and angry women in particular, are often the subject of stereotyping. This can happen both in an outwardly malicious way and in a seemingly benevolent way, but in either case the effect is harmful. By reducing real women and their valid anger to a two-dimensional stereotype, women are not taken seriously and the issues the anger is based on are forgotten entirely. We first saw this happening as early as Ancient Greece, where the stereotype of the angry woman "represents an attempt at the thorough denigration, indeed deligitimization, of female

anger” (Harris, 2001, p. 247). Women were not allowed to be angry at free men, but not at each other or at slaves either. Because the emotion was deemed too subversive and unpredictable by the male, powerful elite, this elite stereotyped it, and effectively took away its sting.

That same move is still made today. Women are advised not to get angry, given warnings against expressing the emotion, no matter how strongly they might feel it. Anger involves upsetting the status quo, its epistemic value carrying a message that those in power would rather not have to hear, its expression necessitating that women break free of their patriarchal, silent moulds. In a way, anger can be characterised as a kind of complaint. After all, it can be described as “an emotion which arises when something is wrong or something hurts and needs changing” (Baker Miller and Surrey, 1990, p. 2). The epistemic value of anger gives it the power to point out what is wrong and what needs to be changed. When seeing anger as a type of complaint, I can follow Sara Ahmed’s (2018) analysis of that phenomenon. She writes that “warnings about the cost of complaint often evoke the figure of the complainer as who you do not want to become; to become a complainer is to be slowed by how you are known” (Ahmed, 2018). The same can without a doubt be said about anger. Nobody wants to be known as an ‘angry person’, let alone an ‘angry woman’, yet when expressing their anger this outcome seems inevitable for women. The stereotype is sticky and it will slow them down. Once a woman is branded as an ‘angry woman’, her anger will no longer receive uptake, now being misattributed to her character instead of to the very real reasons that actually brought it into being.

‘Don’t get angry’, women are told, ‘it will do you more harm than good!’ Frustratingly and deceptively, “often such counsel is issued in a spirit [...] of at least putative sympathy for the victims of injustice” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 125). In this advice, the supposed counter-productivity of anger is used as an argument not to get angry. Whether the anger would actually be counterproductive or not, this supposedly well-intended counsel is harmful. Firstly, if the anger actually would be counterproductive that is not necessarily a sufficient reason not to voice it, as Srinivasan (2018) argues (cf. *infra*). Secondly, if the anger would not be counterproductive, the counter-productivity counsel is definitely misguided. Productive anger should not be silenced. It can have substantial beneficial effects on the position of subordinate groups, on the condition that it receives sufficient uptake. And yet this counsel

is still given, even in cases where the advice-giver is perfectly aware that the anger would not harm the subject's goals. This is simply because anger has a tendency to upset the status quo, and those who benefit from the status quo do not like to see it threatened. It is those same people, then, who disguise their fear of women's anger with the seemingly benevolent counter-productivity counsel. When a woman gets angry, she voices a complaint, and "a complainer becomes by fault and default the one who does not know the rules of the game" (Ahmed, 2018). The angry woman is seen as deviant, as different from the norm. She refuses to play by the rules, and this is not accepted by those who benefit from those rules being upheld.

It is this rule-breaking or rule-bending quality that is part of the power of anger. It is also what makes it a dangerous emotion to voice, both for the angry person herself and for those at whom her anger is directed. As Sara Ahmed writes, "we learn from the mere fact that would-be-complainers are warned about complaining that complaints are deemed dangerous. Simply put, complaints are anticipated to compromise the health, safety or happiness of those who make them" (Ahmed, 2018). If complaints, and therefore anger, are dangerous to the complainer or the angry person, I would argue that is only the case because they are dangerous to those being complained about. The act of angrily voicing a complaint is not harmful in itself. It is the reactions to that complaint from those being complained about that make it such a dangerous step to take. In this perspective, the counter-productivity counsel can actually be given in a benevolent way. 'Look after yourself, getting angry can be dangerous!' Those who feel threatened by a potential complaint will be strongly inclined to punish complainers when they can, whether it be through open violence or through less outright means.

In this way, one of the most dangerous consequences of complaining through anger is being labelled pejoratively. This is also a weapon that can be utilised by those who do not want the complaint to be voiced. Moreover, this strategy is not openly violent or harmful, so its danger is not as apparent. However, carelessness with pejorative labelling is unjustified. It has several potential negative consequences. One I have already mentioned: it causes the anger to be attributed to the angry person's character instead of to the reasons they have for their anger. These "rhetorical strategies [...] shift the explanatory context for the subject's anger from the space of reasons to the space of causes" (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 128).



By dismissing a woman as simply ‘an angry woman’ or “calling her shrill or strident”, she herself and her character become the focus and an explanation for her anger is sought there: “she is only angry because she’s a shrill bitch” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 128). A second consequence of pejorative labelling is that it can lead to fatalism. Because anger is not taken seriously and instead ridiculed or denigrated behind a pejorative label, victims do not feel like their angry complaints will ever receive uptake. Sara Ahmed (2018) distinguishes two types of fatalism: “procedural fatalism”, that nothing will happen no matter how good your evidence might be, and “institutional fatalism”, that this is just how these institutions work and it’s no use trying to change them through complaining. These types of fatalism can for example be felt when addressing cases of sexual harassment in academia, as in the examples Ahmed uses. This fatalism gives the angry person “a sense that what will happen, will happen; the past can be used like an arrow that points to a miserable outcome” (Ahmed, 2018). And lastly, a third consequence of pejorative labelling is one that can be seen in the work of Kate Manne, when she writes that “women are often treated as interchangeable and representative of a certain type of woman. Because of this, women can be singled out and treated as representative targets, then standing in imaginatively for a large swathe of others” (Manne, 2018, p. 58). When certain women are being labelled ‘angry women’ or ‘shrill bitches’, this can provide men with ill intentions with a template to harm other women. In the same way that ‘incels’ see all women as representative of those that refuse to give them sexual attention, it then becomes possible to see all women as ‘shrill bitches’, thereby denying the entire gender uptake to their anger whenever it arises. For these three reasons, the stereotype of the angry woman is more harmful than it might at first sight appear, and it should always be treated with caution.

## **4.2. Stepping Out of the Counter-Productivity Critique**

In the previous paragraphs, I alluded to the fact that anger being counterproductive is not necessarily a sufficient reason not to voice it. This insight was provided by Amia Srinivasan (2018), who shows an entirely new perspective on the debate around anger as we have seen it so far, and as I have presented it in the preceding chapters. When listing advantages and disadvantages of expressing anger, as I have done, the underlying reasoning is one and the same: will this anger be productive? Will it have beneficial consequences, or will it cause harm? However, both people who claim that anger is advantageous and those who claim

that it is not forget one thing. As Srinivasan writes, “for any instance of counterproductive anger we might still ask: is it the fitting response to the way the world is? Is the anger, however unproductive, nonetheless *apt*?” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 126). This question seems to be forgotten in the academic discourse around anger. We focus on consequences only, like utilitarians of anger, forgetting a very crucial question in thinking about anger: is it the ‘apt’ response, given the situation the angry person finds herself in?

Interestingly, this omission seems to be limited to academic discourse only. “In ordinary conversation,” Srinivasan points out, “we can and do talk about whether anger, independent of its effects, is the *apt* response to how things are; whether how things are provides one *reason* to be angry; whether one’s anger is a *fitting* response to how things are. We talk, I want to say, as if anger exists within the space of *intrinsic reasons*, as opposed to merely instrumental reasons” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 127). On top of that, in ordinary situations we would find a shift to instrumental reasons, of the kind we habitually make in academic discourse, “a non sequitur (at best) and morally obtuse (at worst)” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 128). This points to a significant dissonance between everyday conversation about anger and the way the emotion is treated in academic conversation. It is important to be aware of this dissonance, because it might be an indication that a similar dissonance can be found in the conclusions reached by those respective conversations. If in an academic context we weigh the advantages and disadvantages of anger - as I have done - and we find that the scale tips to the side of the advantages, we should be cautious of taking the step towards advising people in ordinary life to express their anger more fully. Similarly, if we find that the scale tips to the side of the disadvantages, we cannot simply jump to dissuading anger in ordinary life. Aptness is an important dimension to consider, and it is one that is of chief importance in ordinary conversations about anger.

Contrary to the usual counter-productivity discourse, the aptness of anger does not depend on the consequences of expressing it. “Plausibly, this is especially true for victims of systematic injustice, whose apt anger at their oppression may well invite further violence and retrenchment” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 131). Even with harmful consequences, anger can nonetheless be apt. This is reminiscent of Sara Ahmed’s work on complaints (as quoted before), where she points out that “we learn from the mere fact that would-be-complainers are warned about complaining that complaints are deemed dangerous. Simply put,

complaints are *anticipated* to compromise the health, safety or happiness of those who make them” (Ahmed, 2018). Complaining can be dangerous, just like expressing anger can be dangerous. However, in both cases this does not have to mean that the complaint or the anger should not be expressed. This is a normative decision that has to be made by the angry person herself, but it is not one which is currently being recognised in the academic discourse.

If the aptness of anger does not depend on the consequences of expressing it, what does it depend on? Srinivasan outlines some conditions: the anger must be “directed at a genuine normative violation”, the reason for the anger must be a personal reason for the angry subject, and the angry subject needs to be actually motivated towards anger by that personal reason (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 130). The first condition seems unproblematic: for anger to be apt, there needs to be a sufficient reason for it. The third condition is also acceptable: the reason not only needs to be sufficient, but it also has to be the actual reason why the subject is angry. The second condition, however, is more complicated. When requiring the reason to be a personal reason for the subject, this condition “can shade into a troubling moral parochialism” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 130). For what constitutes a personal reason? I think it would be worrying if we could only be aptly angry about issues that personally concern us. In a desirable world, our circle of empathy would definitely be larger than that. And what of the anger women felt - and continue to feel - in connection to the female rage movement? Surely these women are not only angry about issues affecting them personally, but also about those that other women are dealing with. This also links back to the point I made in chapter 3, in connection to Bregje Hofstede (2018) and anger among women: feminism needs to be diverse enough to allow support of women who are different to oneself. The “moral parochialism” Srinivasan warns about is something like the trap the older generation feminists might fall into, of wanting unity so badly that they erase all perspectives which are different to their own. If anger can only be aptly expressed in response to issues affecting oneself or someone exactly like oneself, this seriously hinders the development of empathy. Instead, we should practice expanding our moral circle to include perspectives unlike our own, and issues we ourselves do not face. This is the only way that our anger will be truly productive. Otherwise we will all be shouting about our own issues and the perspective of the loudest voices will drown out that of subordinated people

in disadvantaged positions. This proximity condition, then, is a dangerous one, and not one I think is necessary for anger to be apt. A more empathetic version of it might be that one must feel a personal connection to the anger for it to be apt, rather than to necessitate that connection actually existing. It is a fine distinction, but one that can make the expansion of one's moral circle possible. In this way, apt anger can be stretched as far as a person's empathy can be stretched. This means that in exercising our empathy we can enlarge our capacity for apt anger, thus allowing ourselves to employ our anger in support of a broader variety of causes.

When considering the aptness as well as the counter-productivity of one's anger, the subject finds herself in a normative dilemma: which of the two factors should receive priority? This situation is what Srinivasan calls "*affective injustice*: the injustice of having to negotiate between one's apt emotional response to the injustice of one's situation and one's desire to better the one's situation" (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 135). The apt response is anger, but by acting on that response one's situation might get worse instead of better. This injustice is separate to that of testimonial injustice, but it is connected to it. For one of the counter-productive consequences that helps constitute the affective injustice might be produced by instances of testimonial injustice. If one's apt anger fails to receive uptake and is, for example, misattributed to one's character, this is a damaging effect of that anger. It is part of testimonial injustice, and it makes up affective injustice. In this way, the two types of injustices are able to intertwine.

### **4.3. Focus on the Victim**

One of the defining characteristics of the #MeToo movement was its focus on the victim rather than the perpetrator. As we saw in chapter 1, this focus was important from the start. It was stressed by Tarana Burke, who founded the movement originally (Garcia, 2017), and it was kept on board even after #MeToo grew exponentially and sprouted counterparts all over the world. That same focus on the victim can be found in the female rage movement, which originated alongside and intertwined with #MeToo. This focus can for instance be found in the previously quoted words of Andi Zeisler, who states that "it's past time to stop treating female anger as something that happens to men" (Zeisler, 2018). Instead, the focus of the female rage movement lies firmly on the women themselves, the victims of

harassment and misogyny and discrimination and abuse. Even though popular media coverage tends to focus on the people (in this case often men) committing the crimes, this new angry wave of feminism was and is concerned with changing the perspective. Women are angry and they want their own voices to be heard, not the voices of the men they are angry at. This perspective shift is one that can be achieved by maintaining a focus on the victim, and it is one of the reasons why such a focus is often advocated.

However, there are also more problematic aspects to focusing solely on the victim's side. For one thing, a focus on the victim might be what Orgad and Gill (2019) call a "safety valve" ensuring that legitimate anger is not heard. By focusing on what the individual can do with their own anger rather than on systemic, larger-scale solutions, the onus of change is put entirely on the victim's shoulders. Even though such a focus seems to be concerned with the well-being of the victim above all else, of women in the case of #MeToo, it still "locate[s] the responsibility to change in women alone" (Orgad and Gill, 2019, p. 5). A restrictive focus on the victim and her anger runs the risk of drowning out other responsible parties. It stops us from enlarging our moral circles to include the wronged person, because we are so focused on her and her story that we do not see how it affects us, too. The personal connection which is needed for apt anger to develop is more difficult to form when we only look at a victim, her anger, and the way she can use her anger. We can encourage the victim to nurture her anger and to speak out, but we neglect our own role as bystanders. Focusing on the victim's story is important, but only insofar as we recognise that the responsibility for improving her situation is not only hers. In endeavouring to enlarge our moral circle, a first step can be to listen to the victim, but in a second stage we should not forget our own involvement either.

Additionally, one's being a victim might be the very reason why anger is not - or is not recognised as - an option. In her work on complaint, Sara Ahmed writes: "you might decide not to go through with a complaint not despite but because of what happened to you. Being harassed or bullied is already painful and difficult and can leave you with a sense that you do not have the resources you need to take a complaint forward. This is why: the experiences that lead you to complaint are often the same experiences that stop you from making a complaint" (Ahmed, 2018). Carrying forward my previously made analogy between anger and complaining, we can see that this applies for anger - especially apt counterproductive

anger - as well. The very reasons for one's anger, whether that be harassment, misogyny, or some other harm, can often be the same reasons why one does not feel safe or able to express that anger. This is the opposite movement to anger fuelling more anger. In these cases, the experiences that made someone feel angry also make her feel unable to express that anger, whether because of its unproductivity, her own safety, or the safety of others. Moreover, often this is not just a feeling but a fact: when one is made to feel angry because they have been silenced, that same act of silencing is what prevents her from voicing and getting uptake for her anger.

In the same vein, bell hooks believes victimisation and rage to be incompatible. "When we embrace victimization," she writes, "we surrender our rage. My rage intensifies because I am not a victim. It bums in my psyche with an intensity that creates clarity. It is a constructive healing rage" (hooks, 1995, p. 18). Seeing oneself as a victim, to her, means giving up, both on rage and on the hope that things might improve. The position of the victim is one of passivity, diametrically opposed to the active fighting back that anger allows.

An opposing opinion, however, can be found in the work of Kate Manne. She writes that "claiming victimhood effectively involves placing oneself at the center of the story" (Manne, 2018, p. 225). This is an unusual move for women to make, and it is one that tends to upset the patriarchal status quo. She goes on:

It may be that an attempt to level the playing field where moral victims are concerned, that is, such that women in particular come forward or "speak out," throws off the default assumption about who belongs in the moral spotlight. If women are supposed to give their sympathetic attention and moral focus to dominant men, rather than ask for it on their own behalf, then women's claims to having been victimized may be especially salient, and attract jealousy or envy. (Manne, 2018, p. 229)

For these reasons, men often do not like it when women claim the position of the victim for themselves. It involves women asking for a kind of attention which is normally only afforded to men, a shift which gives those men the idea that they are being deprived of something which is naturally theirs. This is not true, of course: the fact that attention is traditionally mostly focused on men only means that the distribution of attention in a patriarchal society is skewed. No claims about natural dues can be derived from this situation. In claiming the

status of victim, women are asserting that they are entitled to the same level of attention, and in doing so through anger they are trying to divert the “moral spotlight” to themselves. This is also one reason why warnings against counterproductive anger are often difficult to accept. These types of counsel “[suggest] that the moral violation is not so bad, just a practical problem to be solved, rather than a wrongdoing to which its victim must bear witness. It suggests that the primary locus of responsibility for fixing the problem lies with the victim rather than the perpetrator” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 133). Refusing the victim the position and attention she deserves, amounts to putting the onus for improvement on her shoulders again. This is why it is so important, and so subversive, for women to lay claim to their victimhood, and with it their anger. By labelling oneself as the victim, one is able to find the power in the position, whereas it can be a stifling label when applied by others. Claiming victimhood is claiming the “moral spotlight”, but assigning victimhood often also means assigning responsibility. In handling our own anger and in correctly appreciating the anger of other - particularly less privileged - people, this distinction is important to keep in mind. The way in which the label of victim is either actively or passively acquired, can completely change the effect it has. For the conscious angry person, then, this is a crucial element of the anger discourse.

#### **4.4. A Duty of Anger?**

In the camp of those rallying against the counter-productivity critique, of people who believe anger can be productive and should therefore be valued, a common thread can be found. These proponents of anger often emphasise the positive qualities of anger, like the ones that I listed in chapter 3. They stress that anger, and in particular women’s anger, is creative, powerful, resistant, that it has epistemic value, etc. Equally, these voices state that the newly discovered female rage should not be contained or repressed. Women should be allowed to express their anger and to reap its benefits, to shout it from the rooftops if they so please. Women’s anger has been silenced for far too long. It is time for change, time for a new angry era, in which women have full, unlimited access to all the benefits that anger can provide them. However, from these voices continually emphasising the positive, productive value of anger, another inference could be made. If there is a certain action one can undertake that would have mostly good consequences for oneself and one’s broader community, one should undertake this action, right? If by embracing and expressing their

anger, women can improve their own situation and that of other women like them, they should express their anger, right? Take Soraya Chemaly, who writes that “for women, healthy anger management does not require us to exert more control but, rather, less” (Chemaly, 2018, p. 260), or Peter Lyman who states that “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” (Lyman, 2004, p. 133). In hearing voices like these, it seems natural to make the jump from ‘good’ to ‘should’. If anger can provide so much added value, surely it should be embraced as much as possible. If this is the case, should anger be thought of as a duty?

In these paragraphs, I want to argue that it shouldn’t be. While anger can be encouraged in women and other subordinated groups, I think this should always be done with caution, and the jump to enforcing anger should never be made. I see three main reasons why a duty of anger is a dangerous path to take. Firstly, I believe that an emotion like apt anger cannot be artificially made to appear in a person. Therefore, it is difficult to tell women to express anger even in cases when they do not naturally feel it. Remembering Srinivasan’s conditions for apt anger, the third condition was that the subject needs to be actually motivated by the reason that is provided. No matter how good the reason, no matter how much of a personal connection the subject has with it, if she does not organically feel motivated by it, apt anger is impossible. If a duty of anger were to exist, this would be the case regardless of how the subject actually felt. Different reactions to injustice are possible, like sadness or fear, and anger is just one of them. If a woman reacts differently to a situation, telling her to feel angry instead is both unproductive and hurtful. People who feel the ‘wrong’ emotion in reaction to a situation are what Ahmed (2017) calls “affect aliens”: alienated from their community by their deviant emotional response. It is not helpful to make people feel like they are in the wrong when they do not get angry but have other emotional responses instead. Different responses can be worked with as well, and they can inspire productive results too. Equally, a merely rational and unemotional approach can also be productive. By turning anger into a duty, we would be fruitlessly trying to make people feel an emotion they do not naturally feel, and thereby discrediting their true emotional responses. This is not a desirable outcome at all, and it discredits the benefits that naturally occurring anger can have by attempting to make the emotion mandatory.



Secondly, we should ask ourselves: where would such a duty stop? Who should be obliged to express anger, and for which reasons? There are three possible strengths of duty here. On the first level, only people who naturally feel apt anger should be strongly encouraged to express it. Immediately we run into problems, for this anger could be both productive and counterproductive. The issue of affective injustice that Srinivasan (2018) points out cannot be bypassed by simply enforcing the option to always express apt anger. This is not only insensitive to the potentially very harmful effects of counterproductive anger, but it is equally insensitive to the situation of the victim, an issue I will discuss in more depth as my third reason (cf. *infra*). On a second level, every person who is personally affected by the issue at hand should express anger, whether they naturally feel it or not. Here we run into the issues discussed as my first reason, that artificially making someone feel anger is not desirable or really possible, and expressing anger without feeling it is empty and not productive. The expression of anger without the feeling behind it would in my opinion amount to instrumental aggression, which is often counterproductive and carries none of the benefits that true anger has. If a personal connection to the issue is not enough for anger to naturally arise, anger should not be expected regardless. On a third level, it can be asked that everyone feel anger, regardless of whether they are personally affected by the issue at hand or not, regardless of whether they naturally feel it or not, regardless of whether their circle of empathy extends to include those affected. This level is confronted by all of the previously discussed issues as well as a new normative problem: for which issues could this kind of universal anger be expected? If people's natural reaction is no longer a deciding factor - after all, this anger would be expected regardless of the fact if anyone naturally felt it at all -, then what is?

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, as alluded to before, a duty of anger is undesirable from the perspective of the victim. As Srinivasan writes, "there is also something morally troubling about the opposing rallying cry: 'nurture your anger!' In this we might hear a lack of care for the suffering agent herself; we might detect a threat that she will be instrumentalised for a political cause" (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 134). This short quote touches on two important elements of the victim-argument against a duty of anger. Firstly, such a duty would show "a lack of care for the suffering agent". In immediately jumping to solution-oriented action, we forget that a harm has taken place and that the victim is suffering.

Encouraging anger might be helpful to come to a solution, but the first step should be to take care of the victim, not to immediately spur her on towards action. Forgetting to care for the victim first is also part of the second element Srinivasan points towards, namely that the victim might be “instrumentalised for a political cause.” Forgetting care and immediately jumping towards goal-oriented thinking makes the victim just a cog in the machinery of social change. A cog with a special position, maybe, because the victim has special epistemic access to the harm and special access to anger, but still a cog. In this way of thinking the special position of the victim simply becomes of instrumental value. The effects this position has on the individual victim are ignored. Moreover, as discussed before, to require the victim to express her anger in order to effect social change is to put the onus of that change entirely on her shoulders. When writing about complaint, Sara Ahmed concludes in a way that is equally apt in the case of anger:

However it is given these difficulties that it is important not to turn complaint into a duty. To make a complaint a duty would be to perform another injustice - it would be to require those who have experienced bullying and harassment to do the work of trying to change the institutions that enable bullying and harassment in the first place.

We know that the costs of complaint are higher for those who are most precarious.

We know that those who most need to complain are often those who can least afford to complain.

We have to work to distribute the costs of complaint.

We do the work because there is work to do. (Ahmed, 2018)

In the same way, we have to distribute the costs of anger. In the same way, this task will require a considerable effort. In the same way, we have to get to work.

#### **4.5. Evaluating Our Anger**

Before concluding this chapter, I want to pause for a moment and make two more reflective points. First I want to stress the importance of self-reflection in feminist anger, and after that I will consider how we can reflect on the success of our anger and what to do when it does not work like we wanted it to.

To start with, it is important to reflect on our own anger, no matter how well-meaning it may be. There are a number of questions we should ask ourselves when experiencing apt anger as a reaction to some kind of injustice. Firstly, we should ask ourselves: who is the victim in this situation? Is it us, or is it someone else? When we have identified the victim, we can ask if they are receiving the appropriate help and support, and if not, what we can do to provide this to them. Moreover, are we distributing the burden of anger - and with it responsibility for social change - correctly? Are we not putting the onus entirely on the victim, or in case we are the victim, on ourselves? Secondly, we should ask: who else is angry? Are we listening to anger unlike our own, to the anger of voiceless people, to the anger of silenced people? If not, how can we help to make their anger heard? Or, on the contrary, is our anger being heard sufficiently? Does our anger receive the uptake it deserves? Who do we need to listen to us, and who can help us get that attention? These are all important questions to ask ourselves in the event of anger, both to ascertain that our own anger is being heard and that our anger is not drowning out the anger of people in less privileged positions. In asking questions like these, our anger can become more empathetic, more considered, and ultimately more effective.

We also should examine the anger of others who are like us, or who label themselves in the same way we do. In the case of female rage, Jilly Boyce Kay writes: "this must also involve a recognition that not all angers are morally equal, and that there are many manifestations of "women's anger" that are profoundly anti-feminist, including the increasing numbers of women operating within far-right parties, or the strategic, conservative outrage of commentators such as Katie Hopkins or Sarah Vine. Furthermore, anger that identifies itself as "feminist" - such as that which is directed towards trans-women in the name of "gender critical" feminism - should alert us to the fact that we cannot simply valorise all manifestations of "feminist" rage" (Kay, 2019, p. 594). Kay identifies two types of female rage to watch out for. First, there is rage by women who oppose the feminist goals of other women. This is unfortunate, and definitely something to be aware of when glorifying or encouraging female rage: not all rage by women has good intentions. Secondly there is rage by women who pretend to be feminist but really are not. This is trickier. The first type of dangerous rage was at least clearly recognisable; there is a very slim chance that a woman on the far right would label herself a feminist and pretend that her anger is in line with that

of feminists. The anger by these pretend feminists, however, does lay claim to the feminist label. For anyone with some knowledge of the feminist movement, I would hope it is obvious that TERFs - the label of "gender critical" feminism that Kay uses is far too euphemistic for my liking so I do not use it - do not work under the feminist flag. However, they definitely pretend to, so it is important to both not fall for their pretence and to alert others of it. Awareness of groups like these, who pretend to be concerned with feminism but are really opposed to it, is crucial. Apart from Kay's two types of anger to watch out for, I would like to add a third: well-meaning but overpowering anger. This is part of what I already talked about previously, but here I want to add that we need to be aware of this type of anger not only in ourselves, but also in other people. This is the type of anger that wants to unite feminists under a common goal but inadvertently ends up taking the most dominant perspective as that common goal. If we can be aware of this happening, it is our duty to use our own privilege to point out this injustice, and to give a voice to the perspectives not being recognised in this artificial unity.

Another point of reflection that we have to make is how we react if our anger does not get the results we hoped for. When #MeToo was at its highest point and the female rage movement was just getting started, the feeling was positive, and the hopes were high. But at the time of writing, in 2019, #MeToo is past its prime and the hype around rage in popular culture seems to have lessened as well (though it is only just starting in an academic context). And what are the results? The public awareness of misogyny and sexual harassment has certainly been increased, and though I expect this awareness to lessen again in the coming years, I do not believe that it will lessen to the low level it was at previously. On that front, something has been gained. Moreover, some men have faced consequences for their actions of harassment, and some women have felt and still feel more comfortable speaking out. This is also positive. However, as much as there has been gained, there is still a very long way to go, in all parts of the world. The culture we live in is still strongly patriarchal, and misogyny still has profound effects on every woman. The president of the United States has been repeatedly accused of rape and almost nobody seems to care (Mahdawi, 2019). Laura Bates' Everyday Sexism project continues to receive testimonies from all kinds of women, venting about sexist comments and actions from their professors, their colleagues, their friends (Bates, 2019). When reading about things like these, it

becomes difficult to be optimistic about the power of female rage. Women were angry, so angry, and they still are, but what did it accomplish? Not much, it sometimes seems. At times like these, when yet another powerful man goes on freely harassing women, when yet another guy makes a sexist comment, the only viable option can seem to be despair.

Kay and Banet-Weiser (2019) recognise that this is the conclusion one might come to. However, they do not think that this should mean the end of hope. “If we are living in a moment when the depth, reach and power of misogyny have become horrifyingly clear,” they write, “then despair need not point towards a political defeatism, but rather to a politically necessary illumination. After all, if we are truly to struggle against patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism, it is of primary importance that we confront the scale of that which we are faced with” (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 607). It is only in reaching the point of despair, they claim, that we can truly grasp the issues we are confronted with. Therefore, despair should not be an end point, but a beginning. To articulate this feeling, they unearth a forgotten word: respair. This 15th century term “means fresh hope; a recovery from despair. It speaks to the inextricability of hope and despair: it is not only that one might follow after the other, but also that they often simultaneously co-exist, are entangled and mutually dependent” (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 607). Respair teaches us that hope and despair are entangled, that one needs the other to exist. Only having hope would amount to mindless optimism, which gets us nowhere because we do not see the problem. Similarly, only having despair means a state of depression, black and sticky and difficult to get out of. It is of prime importance, then, to recognise the “inextricability” of the two emotional states, to know that when one exists, the other is never far away. When existing in one extreme, it is helpful to be aware that transitioning more towards the other end of the scale is a possibility. And while anger and despair are both traditionally devalued emotional states, if we learn to appreciate them and to “[recognise] them as legitimate aspects of our politics - [...] we can hope for genuine, transformative change” (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 5). We need our traditionally negative emotions, too, if we are to grasp the full scale of the problem and if we are to utilise all of the tools that are available to us. In this way, respair can be a starting point towards working with our anger, and effecting lasting social change after all.

## 4.6. Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs, I endeavoured to answer a few more questions concerning the normative power of women's anger. The first paragraph centred on the stereotype of the angry woman. I showed how this stereotype is enacted, the effect it has on the epistemic value of anger, and how it can be used as a weapon to silence women. This led me to the danger of anger, and equally the danger of the stereotype that often comes along with it for women. In the second paragraph, I looked at Amia Srinivasan's (2018) refreshing take on the anger debate. In her footsteps I left the parallel paths of productivity and counter-productivity, and instead I turned to consider the aptness of anger, studying both its meaning and its consequences. Thirdly, I shifted my focus to the victim. I saw how the #MeToo movement's original focus on the victim was kept intact, but also how it can have nefarious effects, such as locating the responsibility for change entirely with the victim. I considered whether rage and self-identifying as a victim are compatible, and I found that they can be, but only when the label of 'victim' is actively applied to oneself and not passively received. After that, I turned to the question of whether anger should be considered a duty, and I found that it should not be. The main reasons for this conclusion were the unsuitability of artificial anger, the difficulties in delineating a duty of anger, and the risk of instrumentalising victims. Lastly, I paused to stress the importance of evaluating our own anger and of considering what to do if our anger has not had the beneficial consequences we hoped it would have. We learned to be cautious in handling anger and privilege, and to turn to the concept of 'respair' to find a way out of a seemingly desperate situation.

To come back to the questions asked in the introduction, I can now assert that not all angers, and not even all feminist angers, should be developed and encouraged equally. We need to be careful with others' anger and with our own anger, aware of power inequalities and the role of our own privilege. Silencing people's voices is not productive, and it is important to give a voice to those who do not naturally get one. When seeing our own anger being turned into stereotypes, we need to be careful not to do the same to the anger of others who are less privileged than we are. When judging anger, whether that be our own or other people's, we need to be aware of the difficult normative choice between apt but unproductive anger and the safety of silence. When dealing with victims of injustice of their anger, we need to

refrain from labelling them as victims, but rather let them appropriate the label for themselves if they wish to do so. We cannot force anyone to be angry, not even ourselves, and we need to respect people's natural reaction to injustice, whether that be anger or another emotion. We need to be cautious with our anger. And lastly, when our heartfelt anger seems to not be effecting any positive change, we can know that despair is a natural part of progress, and that its close links to hope might spur us onward again.





# Conclusion

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In the preceding pages, quite some ground has been covered. In each of the four chapters, one of the research questions raised in the introduction has been answered. I now want to utilise the remaining space of this conclusion to explicitly formulate answers to them, and to tie everything together by summarising the overall answer to my main research question: can anger be a valuable communication tool for women, especially in the context of feminist activism?

In chapter 1, I asked: what is the background this ‘anger turn’ is situated against? In order to answer this question, I first tried to get a grasp on the anger turn itself, by analysing some parts of it that are available online. I specifically looked at three opinion pieces by feminist writers who each used anger in a different way, from negative to positive. I then moved on to discussing the way the #MeToo movement originated, a story which is strongly connected to that of the anger turn. I found that women today still have plenty of reasons to be angry, most notably misogyny, and that this misogyny does not necessarily feel like misogyny to the people enacting it. I also turned to the popularisation of feminism which can be said to have preceded that of anger, and I looked at why commercial feminism can easily become dishonest. To close off the chapter, I investigated who exactly is included in the movement of female rage. Overall, this chapter sketched a picture of the anger turn as a feminist reaction to misogyny, enabled by the #MeToo movement and the feminist movements that came before it. It provided the information needed to be able to put the chapters that follow it into context.

Moving on to chapter 2, I asked: why and how is women’s anger silenced? My answer to this question was structured around Miranda Fricker’s (2007) epistemological concept of ‘testimonial injustice’. I started by defining testimonial injustice as the force that makes the knowing field “unlevel” (Bailey, 2018). I looked at credibility and the role of stereotypes in perpetuating testimonial injustice, and how the common ground can be influenced by generics. Next, I showed how the factors of gender and class both influence testimonial injustice. Not being male and being from a lower social class will have nefarious consequences in terms of testimonial injustice. I also talked about the dichotomy between

rationality and emotion, and linked with it, the dichotomy between mind and body, and concluded that anger might be a way to rise above these dichotomies. I examined the role of power inequalities in testimonial injustice and found that these, too, contribute to the silencing of women's angry voices. Lastly, I turned to the connection between women's messages and the label of 'personal' which is often used to discredit them. Over the entirety of this chapter, an answer to the question from the introduction emerged. Some factors contributing to silencing were discussed, and the method of silencing was framed in terms of testimonial injustice. Of course, when talking specifically about why women's anger is silenced, the overarching answer lies in the factor of gender. But that certainly does not mean that other factors are not at play. Connected to this factor of gender, each of the other factors discussed in this chapter – along with several others I did not have the space or the authority<sup>11</sup> to discuss – also strongly contributes to the testimonial injustice women have to face. It is the combination of all those factors that makes up the final picture.

Next, in chapter 3, I turned to my third question: what is the value of anger for women? After having established in chapter 2 that women's anger is being suppressed and denied uptake, it was interesting to figure out what the value of this anger could be, what women are missing out on. In the first part of this chapter, I looked at a number of perceived disadvantages of anger, and I showed why they are not necessarily disadvantages of anger after all. The first of these counterpoints was prominently raised by Martha Nussbaum, who argued that anger is inherently retributive. I countered this argument and substituted a gradual scale of anger, ranging from entirely retributive to entirely forward-looking, on which each expression of anger can find its place. Secondly I turned to the objection that anger reduces uptake. Here, I found that it is not anger which reduces the uptake of a message, but rather prejudices on the part of the receiver, who entertains ill-informed stereotypes about the identity of the sender. The third disadvantage of anger was its suitability to political enemy building. I argued that, while it is true that anger is suited to be politically used in this way, it is equally suited to being used positively in politics. Anger is fundamentally a neutral political tool, and it can be used for better or for worse. Lastly, I looked at anger among women. I found that this anger can actually be very productive and a

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<sup>11</sup> An example of a factor I feel I do not have the authority to discuss is that of race. Other factors might include age, (dis)ability, and conformity to conventional beauty standards.

valuable source of information, and that suppressing it under a blanket of unity means excluding different perspectives and losing out on much epistemic value. In the second part of chapter 3, I listed some advantages of anger and looked specifically at how these advantages can be utilised by women. I argued for anger's motivational force, its power in countering oppression, its usefulness in the context of political revolution, its suitability to community building, its inherent creativity, and the epistemic value the emotion carries. In the end, the picture of anger that was constructed by this chapter was overwhelmingly positive. First its perceived disadvantages were neutralised, and then a list of advantages was provided, hopefully enough to persuade the more sceptical reader of the potential value of anger, especially the value it can provide to women.

In chapter 4, I wanted to qualify that positive picture slightly. My central question there was: which considerations should be kept in mind when utilising anger, or when spurring others towards the use of anger? I made five more points to be kept in mind when using anger. Firstly, I looked at the stereotype of the angry woman, and how this stereotype can be used to delegitimise women's anger. In connection to this, I considered warnings against expressing anger, using Sara Ahmed's (2018) work on complaint as a guide. I found that those warnings might sound benevolent, but they can actually be a silencing tactic. Next, I followed Amia Srinivasan (2018) in stepping out of the (counter)productivity framework of looking at anger and considering the factor of aptness instead. This introduces a new moral dilemma, between apt but counterproductive anger and silence. Thirdly, I shifted my focus to the victim. This focus is an important part of the #MeToo movement and also central to the anger turn, but it can have nefarious effects. I found that the way the status of victim is assigned matters: when this happens actively, it can be empowering, but when it happens passively, the label can have negative effects. After that, I investigated whether a duty of care can be desirable. I found that it is not. I argued that artificial anger is undesirable, that it is unclear what the boundaries of such a duty would be, and that a duty of anger is undesirable from the perspective of the victim. Lastly, I stressed the importance of self-reflection when it comes to anger. Reflecting both on the aptness of our own anger and on what to do when our anger does not have the desired effects is vital in the productive use of anger. To sum up this chapter, I can argue that caution is definitely needed when utilising anger, especially on the fronts mentioned in the pages of chapter 4. When using anger, it is

of vital importance to be aware of its powers, and of the way these powers can – often inadvertently – cause harm.

To finally tie this thesis together, then, I can now give an answer to my main research question: can anger be a valuable communication tool for women, especially in the context of feminist activism? I can now assert with confidence that the answer to this question is affirmative. Although anger is often silenced, its advantages are many, and it would be a shame to neglect to make use of those advantages. One of the advantages of anger that I discussed was its epistemic value, which answers the question if anger can be used as a valuable communication tool. Concerning feminist activism, the other advantages also come into play. Combined, they can empower and enrich feminist activism, fuelling it, inspiring it and holding it together. The question of whether anger *should* be used as a tool in feminism is a different matter. Here, too, I would answer affirmatively, but with the qualifications raised in chapter 4 in mind.

Of course, there still are many directions left open that this thesis couldn't take. It is a work of limited time and limited word count, so several themes are still left to be investigated by further research. Some themes I didn't tackle because I didn't feel I had the authority to do so. Examples of this are the racial dimension of the silencing of women's anger, a topic I would prefer to see treated by scholars of colour, and other dimensions like age, disability, or conformity to societal beauty standards. Another interesting path would be to look in more depth at the psychological critique of anger, and to study its relationship with the concept of hysteria as it has been historically attributed to women. The idea of motherhood is also an interesting one, the expectations and stereotypes attached to it, and how the image of the ideal mother by definition seems to exclude anger. Equally, more research could be done into the concrete expressions of anger as they happened and are happening in the online space, and the way this online space has influenced the resurgence in anger that inspired this thesis. The field of feminist anger studies, if I can call it that, is a very young and dynamic one, and it certainly has a lot of potential for future research. This thesis is just a beginning; more research can definitely be done.

From this thesis, we can also learn that there is still much work to do. Anger is a valuable tool, yes, but its powers are often being denied to subordinated groups of people through

mechanisms of silencing. Therefore it is imperative that those who are situated in more privileged positions use those privileges to combat silencing and to give a voice to subordinated groups and their anger. Only wanting to listen to people when they express themselves calmly and free of emotion is a form of silencing. It is crucial to be aware of this and not to value rationality over emotion to the point where emotional speech is not heard. It is also crucial not to silence our own anger. Rage can be a valuable tool in what Sara Ahmed (2017) calls a “feminist toolkit”, although we might sometimes feel as if we need a “permission note” to use it. I hope this thesis can function as that permission note. There is much work to do and there are many improvements to be made. To end with the words of Kate Manne (2018, p. 26): “I include myself in the class of those who can, must do better.”



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