



Dancing between anger and love: Reflections on feminist activism

Ana María Munar

abstract

Do we need anger to advance an agenda of gender equity? Is love the appropriate emotion or a misplaced emotional reaction in the face of injustice? In this paper I begin by reflecting on the interlinkages between activism and anger, I then apply the thesis presented by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum to examine a series of personal experiences of gender and feminist activism. In her book, Nussbaum (2016) discusses the nature of anger and claims that anger is both a sign of deficient rationality and morally wrong. She defends that if we aim at developing a more just society that contributes to human flourishing we should reject anger and instead encourage a speedy form of transition-anger followed by a further emotional change into love. I enter into dialogue with Nussbaum's main thesis by examining a number of activist examples that go from the personal and intimate spheres to those of work environments and institutional settings and further to the level of scholarly global networks. This essay finalizes by reflecting on the bumpy emotional dance that links anger and love.

Injustice should be greeted with protest and careful, courageous strategic action. But the end goal must remain always in view: as King said so simply: "A world where men and women can live together." Building such a world takes intelligence, control, and a spirit of generosity. That spirit has many names: Greek *philophrosunè*, Roman *humanitas*, biblical *agapè*, African *ubuntu* – a patient and forbearing disposition to see and seek the good rather than to harp obsessively on the bad (Nussbaum, 2016: 249-250)

Openly activist and anger

If there is one experience that gender activists can often recognize it is the one of anger. I have been a declared feminist activist for the last eight years. If you wonder about my use of the word 'declared' there is a reason for it. I have had feminist convictions much longer than this, already from my first years of studying political science in the early eighties. However, for any activist there is a before and after a public declaration in a relevant forum about being pro- a cause. Here both the aspects of public and of relevance are important. What I mean by relevant is that some form of pronouncement has to happen among significant others – people whose opinion we deeply care about or who have some form of power over our future possibilities and not only for example in an obscure online forum using an anonymous identity. And with regards to the public dimension, it is not the same to go for drinks with a close friend and declare feminist beliefs than to give a public speech at a conference or to actively contribute by writing opinion pieces in mass media, etc.

I have plenty of friends whom I love and admire that have stated to care for gender equality and who have never made any public declaration of support to a feminist agenda for change. It does not seem to be so much a problem of 'consciousness raising' as it was termed by the socialist/radical wave of feminism (Nakray, 2014) as a problem of seeing feminism as a core identity or as an existential passion. The most typical case of non-activist sympathizers is the many that over the years have responded with private expressions of support to some of my contributions in global email lists or to campaigns in social media, while confessing that they do not feel capable of arguing for this publically. There are many reasons for why such a position can be defensible and even reasonable, some have to do with the political or social situation of the countries and institutions they live in – an open declaration is simply not safe or the cost of such act will be extremely high. Others relate to specific biographical circumstances or personality dispositions such as being more or less afraid of conflict. It is much easier to jump into the water if one knows how to swim.

An interesting case is the people who have feminist beliefs, but do not feel they can provide the arguments to support them. They simply lack feminist literacy and have not been trained into feminist thought; and here again also there is a difference between 'liking' a feminist slogan on social media or even joining a public women's march and feeling knowledgeable. The later takes time and effort and gaining such knowledge is not always desired enough or available. And then there is the weighting of the stereotype. Extensive research on implicit prejudice (Hardin and Banaji, 2013) shows we are not only impacted by culture,

we *are* culture and the word ‘feminist’ comes loaded with feelings and historical understandings:

The study by Fiske et al. (2002) shows that people identify “feminists” as being “competent”, but also “cold” (i.e. disliked) and that this identity elicits hostile sexism. [...] The overall scheme that links women who demonstrate “competence” to “coldness” (i.e. being less liked) translates into multiple aspects of our life, like sexuality. Popular culture depicts feminists as dangerous vamps, but not bimbos. When it comes to parenthood, feminists can be mothers but may be perceived as the “cold” kind of matriarch.

This pattern places women academics in a “double bind” situation of experiencing competing demands without a clear resolution (Jenkins, 2014, p. 162). Research on gender bias shows how the agency and skills often attributed to female leaders or to feminists, such as assertiveness and being authoritative, imply that they are perceived as unfriendly (Rudman & Glick, 2001). In comparison, a 2006 study found that “many people think that feminists are ugly, uptight, angry, aggressive, harsh, strident, demanding, dogmatic, man-hating lesbians” (cited in Weiss, 2015). It seems that the price of believing that “women are human” is a high one to pay. That is why (to paraphrase Adichie, 2014), as soon as one declares oneself to be a feminist, it is necessary to add a “but”: “Hey look, I am a feminist, but I am not angry... I am the smiling feminist”; “I am a feminist, but I love babies and my grandmother”; “I am a feminist, but I love my husband and I do not hate men” or “I am a feminist, but I like lipstick, party dresses and stilettos”. (Munar, 2017: 516)

And while these past years we have witnessed famous cultural personalities or political leaders embracing the word ‘feminist’ such as Beyoncé, President Obama or Prime Minister Trudeau, I wonder if these declarations, however positive and commendable, are not the privilege of those that can take a feminist tag without suffering the backlash of stereotyping which follows with it. What if the one putting the ‘I am a feminist’ t-shirt on was the maid at the hotel, the family mother in a conservative traditional culture or the female factory worker?

Members of the LGTBQI community use the expression living as ‘openly gay’. I think for all feminists, there is also a before and after the ‘openly’. Such an event is often easy to remember. In some cases it is a sense of conviction and belief that has made them go into activism, like the transformation that happens through reading feminist literature, seeing one report after another of gender inequality, or attending courses on diversity or gender studies, but in many others it is the anger felt during a lived injustice what has sparked in them a need to actively do something about this. Far from what one would believe by reading feminist history not all the sparks come from major social injustices, often what it takes is a quite trivial anecdote. I clearly remember my ‘opening’ moment. It was a simple announcement sent to a large email list-serv for a men-only academic job position at a university in the Middle East. A female colleague replied with a one single sentence email that said ‘This is wrong’. After which

there were a few responses of senior academics attacking her position, responses that in their tone I felt were filled with contempt. That first debate touched upon something that is still a major and unresolved issue in feminist activism and scholarship, the paradoxical tension between believing in the dignity of all cultures and ways of life, and the non-superiority of specific societies (as opposed to the belief of a hierarchical structure of the world cultures with the West or the global north at the top and the rest lacking behind) while at the same time advocating the normative superiority (i.e. the goodness) of universal values of equality, freedom and dignity for all and of care for our planet. However intellectually stimulating this dilemma was, it was not the intellectual puzzle what pushed me into activism, but the attitude of the participants in that email conversation – I could not take the contempt towards feminism that was pouring out of many of those answers. I remember being at the kitchen table writing a long email answer and feeling so angry that I would forget to eat breakfast and post-poner all other duties. This seems now a common pattern in my activist life something that could be called the ‘activist diet’.

Anger is not only an emotional reaction towards what is perceived as a historical wrongdoing regarding gender equality, but also often an answer to what can be considered a lack of solidarity in our social circles or work environments. Because while I can relate to the reasons behind the lack of public support to feminist activism, still it is not always easy to be the one at the front receiving the criticism while seeing what appears to be the passivity in many others. We need to make a reflexive pause here because at this point is very easy to become judgmental or self-righteous or simply angry. However, there is no better way to check ones self-righteous mind than to turn the light into oneself because how many are the causes that one sympathizes with but that one does not feel prepared to engage in public debate for? Two such causes for me are the Palestina-Israeli conflict and climate change. While I have no problem declaring my opinion in private and also try to act according to my beliefs (sometimes more successfully than others), I feel far from ready to give a keynote or to engage in extensive political debates about two topics of which I only have limited knowledge about. In these cases I am the one sending private emails of gratitude to people that are able to enlighten public opinion and take a stand while dealing with a sense of not living up to my own (unrealistic?) standards. As expressed in the greeting card’s quote of a compassionate friend: ‘You must remember this ...a fish is just a fish’... Indeed, and ‘a human is just a human’. How often do we tend to forget this in states of exasperation?

As my activism has been evolving I have reflected on a common backlash of anger – the sense of ridicule and sometimes shame that often follows an angry episode. I have become increasingly engaged in the ‘what can be done?’ after an

angry reaction, but also noticed that it takes more to make me angry, that anger has been replaced by a sense of recognition. The feeling is more like a ‘here we go again ... let’s see what this time we can do about it’ than an ‘I am furious about this’. Eight years down the road of activism, it was in search of a personal enlightenment that I turned to the work of Martha Nussbaum *Anger and forgiveness: Resentment, generosity, justice* (2016). I read this book during a summer holiday, as a way of finding some new insights into a personal existential dilemma. It is through my own biographical experience of anger that I have become more and more concerned about what such an emotion does to me and to us and to the advancing of feminism because – do we need anger to advance an agenda of gender equity? Or is love a more appropriate emotional reaction in the face of injustice? Here, I am not aiming at conveying the fullest complexity of the analytical explanation of Nussbaum. Instead, this is a reflection on what I consider to be the essence of her argument and its relevance for feminist activism exemplified through a series of personal memories and anecdotes. Kellee Caton in her beautiful work on humanism introduces a new word ‘biogratized’ to refer to ‘the individual and personal equivalent to ‘historicized’ (2016: 49). What the following sections present is a ‘biogratized’ essayistic reflection in the hope to start a conversation about the role of anger and love in feminist activism.

Understanding and questioning anger

In her book Nussbaum begins by examining what is anger. She introduces us to the understanding of anger of Hellenistic philosophers, especially Aristotle, of modern psychological literature (e.g. the work of Richard Lazarus) and of her own extensive scholarship. It is worth noticing how her own understanding of anger has been evolving and in several occasions she announces how the arguments that we are presented with represent a break from her previous position. She appears especially concerned with the right delimitation and understanding of the term. Chapter two and three appendixes are all devoted to this conceptualization effort.

The Aristotelian understanding of anger maintains that anger is an emotion that involves (1) slighting or down-ranking (2) of the self or people close to the self (3) wrongfully or inappropriately done (4) accompanied by pain and (5) involving a desire for retribution. While overall recognizing the value of this understanding, Nussbaum departs from Aristotle in that she believes his scope of anger is too narrow in two accounts.

First, she argues that the focus on the self or ‘people close to the self’ is too limited. She emphasizes how the idea of ‘oneself’ or ‘one’s own’, can be understood as ‘ones circle of concern’ including those instances of wrongdoing that affect ones core values of the self, and agrees with Adam Smith’s view on anger by stating that if the concern ceases so does the emotion. We can feel an injury to causes or principles that we believe to be important without having a sense of loss of personal status. Going back to the anecdote of how I entered into feminist activism, while I did not think that the scholars on that email list defending gender segregated higher education systems and only-men academic positions were consciously aiming at injuring women academics, still I felt anger at them as representatives of a system where there are major inequities in the treatment and career opportunities of women versus men. I was not angry at the agent which I could not even visualize, I did not know any of the professors protagonists in that online conversation and I cannot recall their names. I was angry at the act. Pressing ‘sent’ felt like shouting to the whole unknown world – we have had enough! In such moments I simply cannot stay silent, it does not feel like an option. Another example could be the anger felt while witnessing xenophobic or racist acts against refugees although nor I or any of my closest ones share that identity and I do not feel such unethical acts result in a low ranking of my personal social status.

Secondly, the scope of anger should be broadened to include cases in which people unconsciously act in denigrating ways. We may understand a specific denigrating behavior as caused by a pattern of prejudice or bias in a society or organization (not consciously decided by the person) and still feel anger. Other examples of activism come to mind here: my public disapproval to the appointments of yet another male Dean of Education to the leadership team of my university when the other two academic leaders (i.e. the President and the Dean of Research are men) and of another male co-editor-in-chief for a relevant research journal in my field, which has already another male co-editor-in-chief. In both cases I found the appointed men to be competent and highly capable of doing a good job. I also know them personally and I consider them to be really nice people, but as I commented on an online post about this issue:

[I]t’s not about an individual. It’s a reproduction of a biased system again and again and again. So yes thinking diversity in all major appointments is a duty for all journals and all universities. We have to keep at this. And we can also be against a decision-making process which is biased without being against a person... it’s a reproduction of inequity.

Therefore, Nussbaum’s further expansion of the classical Aristotelian view on anger seems especially relevant for feminism. To fight against the slighting or

down-ranking of people on the basis of their gender is a cause/principle. Also 'anger is in a way a cultural universal, since in all societies people react to wrongful damages and wish for payback; but specific forms of anger are strongly shaped by social norms regarding what an insult is, what honor is, what manliness is, and so forth' (Nussbaum, 2016: 254). And, as the implicit bias literature amply demonstrates, relationships and policies about gender are highly impacted by cultural patterns of belief and conduct.

Anger is a complex emotion that involves both pain and pleasure, and requires casual thinking. The payback wish (the desire of retribution (5)) is the positive expectation of a future good. There is a target to anger (usually a person) and a focus (the act that we believe to be the wrongful damage). Nussbaum mentions how the focus that anger has on down-grading (what she calls 'status-injury') has a flavor of narcissism attached to it, because the focus is moved from the wrongfulness of the act itself to the relative social standing of the injured person vis-à-vis others. This is one of the most profound but also most difficult insights that appeared from this reading. It is an invitation to me and to other activists in general to question if the root to our anger is the injustice of an action or if the hurt is because we feel a loss in status. 'Am I an activist-narcissist?' I found myself reflecting on my own behavior during some of the heated debates I have been engaged in during these past years and the answer was 'sometimes yes, sometimes not'. In some specific occasions clearly there was a narcissistic element to my activism. It will be easier to exemplify this with a concrete case.

A couple of years ago an important international conference in my field of research was announced with a lineup of seven male invited speakers. As it had already become customary for me at the time, I sent the organizers an email where I noticed the gender imbalance, pointing out the consequences that this kind of practice had for the career opportunities of female academics and inviting them to reconsider their decision. I received several reactions to my email going from the very common ones of 'we did not do this on purpose' to the 'it is not our fault ...what can we do if all the editors are men?' At this point I had grown so accustomed to the varied portfolio of excuses that they did not bother me anymore, but there was one reply especially hurtful which stated that 'women' were not really the issue and that there were so many more forms of inequality that were more relevant in academia and that should be prioritized. This is the classical strategy of putting up the 'all diversities matter' card every time one sees a demand for gender equity. That response also came from someone that I knew personally and that had a reputation of being 'progressive' in our academic circles. I fired up in anger to that reply.

On the spot, I simply wrote an answer with the clear intention of exposing the patronizing sexism of that email and of humiliating both the argument and the sender. It was not a kind answer, and clearly not something I am proud of looking back to. Was there an element of justice in that? Yes, clearly, but also of narcissism. I was feeling that by accusing the feminist cause of selfishness and lack of generosity towards other non-privileged groups this colleague was downgrading a cause that is important in my life and injuring others whom I loved, but also that by being categorized as 'narrow-minded' feminist I was being downgraded in my academic and social status. The result after sending that 'here I am winning the argument-email' was that I had a five minutes 'pay back' satisfaction and a much longer feeling of distress that follows me even today when I think back to that conversation. Up to this day I find myself avoiding any contact with that scholar whenever possible not because I have come to agree with his position (because I have not) but because I am ashamed of how I acted towards that person in that specific situation. And this brings us to Nussbaum main points which are that anger is both (1) a sign of deficient rationality and (2) morally wrong.

Why is anger rationally deficient? The focus of critique here is on the desire for retribution that is a core aspect of the emotion of anger. First, we have to recognize that many times we may have misinterpreted the wrongdoing and that our 'rational' judgement may be flawed (we are also full of biases and prejudices). 'Anger always contains a cognitive appraisal, even if stored deeply in the psyche and not fully formulated' (Nussbaum, 2016: 263). There are situations where anger is based on false judgement and therefore deficient. To put this in a feminist context if a colleague gives me a comment which I first perceive as being a form of paternalist sexist (e.g. 'let me help you with that difficult issue'), but which later I recognize as being founded in genuine care for my wellbeing (e.g. this colleague was not questioning my competence but knew of my overbooked work schedule), my feelings of anger will be transformed into feelings of gratitude towards that person. But even in cases where anger is justified and grounded in rightful judgement, it is still deficient. This is because no matter the punishment or retribution that we may inflict on those that have wronged us or anyone/anything in our circle of care, the past remains unchangeable. A belief in punishment as the right way of changing past offences is according to Nussbaum a form of 'fantasy', a superstition that our societies and popular culture tends to indulge in. If we consider that nothing of what we may do will ever change the past, the only rational response to a wrongdoing appears to be future oriented; a different form of emotional reaction that Martha calls 'transition anger'. In a state of transition anger, we may still recognize the wrongdoing and have a sense of outrage. However, we would not dwell on it or

fuel payback fantasies, instead very quickly our efforts will be directed towards creating better conditions to avoid or minimize wrongdoing in the future.

There is however a case where the retribution of anger is efficient and rational, the one where we believe that the wrongful act has resulted in a downgrading of our perceived status. By punishing, slighting or down-ranking those that made us angry (as well as the ideas or values that they represent) we may obtain a rise in relative status (and this may refer not only to our individual status but to the status of a group or our center of concern). Why is it that I reacted so strongly to several of the many debates on gender inequality that I have been engaged in over the years? What part of my reaction has to do with promoting the wellbeing and the flourishing of other human beings or myself and what part with humiliating the 'other' as to regain the perceived loss in status? To me this is one of the most accurate insights presented by Nussbaum's analysis and one that links closely to the description of anger's narcissistic dimensions, but to comprehend this we need to turn to the second question on the moral and normative dimensions of anger.

Why is anger morally wrong? If we agree with Nussbaum's analysis that anger appears to be efficient only as either a narcissistic tool or as the means to restore relative status, then the question is if regaining or improving relative status in a social context is a good end in itself. And here I fully agree with her analysis. In feminist activism there is a major difference between fighting patriarchy or inequality as the means to achieve a society that enhances human flourishing or to foster a dream of revenge aiming at downgrading 'men' or 'the elite' etc. This status logic is based on a zero-sum game (Wright, 1999), an ideology that sees the world through the lenses of a limited amount of power (if some get it others cannot) instead of that of abundance where there can be wellbeing and flourishing for all. In this worldview society resembles a status pyramid where there is always someone at the bottom. This logic tends to reproduce the injustice of patriarchy this time with new victims and new villains. Additionally, and this is something Nussbaum herself does not engage so extensively in, the status strategy is also essentialist. The problem of essentialism being that it sees the human only as part of a fixed collective identity this being class, nationality, gender, or sexuality, etc. in this way elevating a 'fixed' collective identity and eradicating the possibilities of individual freedom and exploration. As the existentialist philosophers remind us of, it is also possible to think and advocate for the contrary position; that existence precedes essence, that humans are more free than what they dare to recognize, including the freedom to rethink the whole status system while claiming the messiness and ambiguity inherent to trying to make sense of oneself and the world.

So how is Martha Nussbaum inviting me to contemplate my feminist anger? I imagine her bright courageous self saying to me: 'Ana, I get you are angry, and this may even be for all the right reasons (this was a sexist/discriminatory/unjust act or situation or system), but remember to put a question mark to your primary judgement and causal chain of thought, make sure that even when you conclude that the outrage was rationally justified, you try to avoid falling into the trap of wishing the suffering of the other as this cannot change the past and will not lay out the foundation for a more hopeful future, and finally check your narcissism, try not to use this as an excuse to engage in the morally dubious status game'.

Instead she will invite me to embrace the state of 'transition anger' and to dance into love. Transition anger includes all the features from anger (from 1 to 4) but one, the desire for retribution (5); the payback wish is absent. Looking back at the experience of activism, I remain less convinced of Martha's analysis at this point. Let me explain. The state she refers to as 'transition anger' is the moment where anger gets transformed into hopeful strategic activism. Personally, I have felt this as a form of metamorphosis, not as a complete different emotional state to anger. Like the butterfly is also the worm, activism hope has also activism anger in its DNA; the same causal chain of thought on why a wrongdoing was made is still central. There is not such a clear cut as Nussbaum's work seems to suggest between these two states. The difference is that the expectation of a future good which is also inherent to anger is changing its nature. It is not anymore following a zero-sum logic (punishment and retribution), instead this future good includes also the agent of the wrongdoing, a future of good for all. Nussbaum seems so focused on rejecting payback-anger (a position I very much sympathize with when considering how the glorification of retribution and punishment of contemporary cultural and political systems is at the root of much of human suffering) that she minimizes the role that anger plays as a seed to action, a seed which also includes hope and not only a sadistic enjoyment based on the imagination of the other being hurt or down-graded. To be angry instead of for example only being sad is rooted in a form of self-love, the belief in one's capabilities, the appreciation of self-efficacy (we/I can do something about this) and in a belief on human dignity (we/I do not deserve this wrongdoing). Because it is true that an aspect to an angry emotional reaction is narcissistic, but equally there can be an element of altruism and hopefulness in that same emotion, a form of altruistic anger which main focus is the wish of justice through collective transformation.

Taking a look back at my two previous biographical examples; the public debates and my angry feelings towards 'all male panels' at conferences and gender inequity in top-positions in academia (or what is more broadly considered the leaking pipeline), it is easy for me to recognize the moments where the need for

payback or humiliation was transformed into creative policy action. The experiences of outrage that I felt through multiple occasions these past eight years were the seeds that got transformed into a series of activist workshops, performances, task-forces, on-line communities and documents such as statistical reports on the gender gap in academia (Munar et al., 2015), gender and leadership practices at universities (Munar and Villesseche, 2016), guidelines for gender equality at conferences and in publishing, special issues, letter templates, handbooks, posters and memes to protest all-male lineups of speakers.¹ These initiatives were created through collective efforts and the conversations that lead to and permeated these actions did not follow a clear emotional template where first was anger and then after a sharp cut there was love or hope. Instead we were angry at turns or on different levels and also hopeful and loving at turns and on different levels.



Figure 1: Collective mandala on activism. Source: Author's photo.

A way to grasp this emotional complexity is to explore contemplative and meditative practices on being and becoming an activist. The experimental freedom of the workshop 'Feminism, Activism, Writing!' (20-21 November 2017, Copenhagen) provided a creative and trustful space where it was possible to

¹ Some of these documents can be accessed here <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Jbny3yv5EfsF1XfNnpL6EZp4Y4DFPxb-?usp=sharing>

engage in this type of reflection. At the workshop I lead a collective activity which consisted on drawing a mandala while contemplating the lived experience of 'activism'. Mandala drawing is an ancient tradition that can be found in different cultures and that aims at reaching a contemplative state. I began using mandalas as a personal meditative technique and later on decided to apply it to my academic practices. The beauty about this activity is that it can help us to move away from the 'winning the argument' type of communication, which so often characterizes knowledge sharing in academia. Instead there are no wrong and rights mandalas. The drawings are a personal or collective (if it is a group of persons drawing together) expression of a lived experience. It is an activity that engages the creative and emotional part of our brain and it has the potential to bring us closer to understanding the phenomenology of feminist activism. Mandalas are not argumentative explanations of what activism means but instead an artistic expression of how does feminist activism feels, how it is embodied and experienced in daily life. I have chosen two of the mandalas (see figures 1 and 2) that exemplify the emotional fluidity between anger and love.

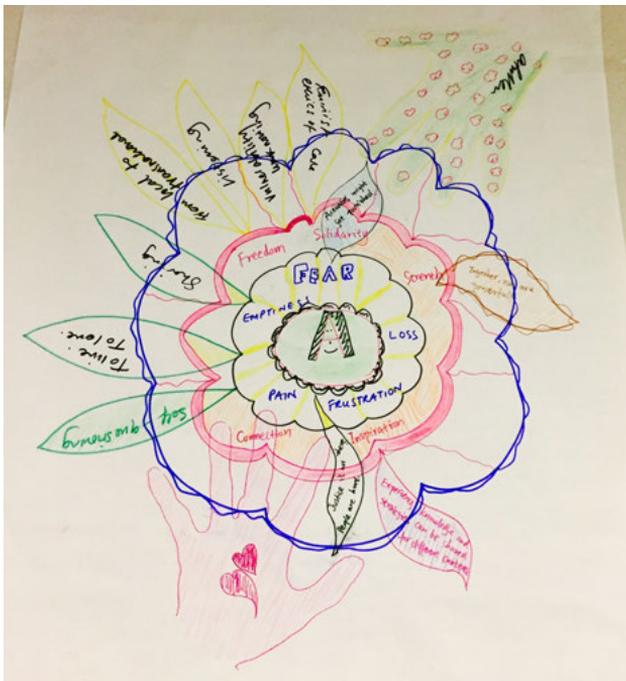


Figure 2: Collective mandala on activism. Source: Author's photo.

As the previous examples show we can be angry at a situation and loving so much that we dare to put extensive time and care into activism, risking both reputations and likeability; loving to be able to do something about gender

inequity, loving how friendships could blossom through activism. But is this kind of political activism, love?

If love is the answer, then what love?

While Martha Nussbaum's insight and detailed explanation of anger is extraordinary, her utilization of the word 'love' and the emotion of 'love' is much more fuzzy. She tells us that this is the emotion that will bring us justice and wellbeing; however, she never sets up to conceptualize this properly. She exemplifies what she means by love with speeches and historical events taken from the lives of three impressive political leaders: Gandhi, Mandela and King. The descriptions of how these three personalities in their own ways approached injustice are deeply inspiring, but personally I was left with the impression that while I had received some very well-structured arguments to support the rejection of anger and practical examples of how to overcome such a 'trap', I had not received a clear analysis of what is love and how are we to nurture love. Instead love seems to be an amalgam that includes hope, compassion, empathy, courage, cooperation, friendship, generosity, lightheartedness, kindness, humor and humility among other aspects. This resembles mostly a list of how to be a good human being – a mix of virtues and emotional states – more than a clear analysis of the emotion of love.

While I considered myself quite illiterate on the topic of anger (partly one of the reasons why I bought Martha Nussbaum's book to start with) this is not the case with love. The emotion of love is one of my passionate interests and I have been fortunate to engage with different authors that have analyzed the nature of love such Alain Badiou, Søren Kierkegaard, Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Fisher, Esther Perel, Simon May, Octavio Paz among others. To this I should add dozens of works of literature or art that deal with love and have had a deep influence in my understanding of this emotion: the short stories of Alice Munro, the novels of Elena Ferrante, Gabriel García Márquez, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood; the poetry of Neruda; the films of Kieslowski, Fellini or Almodovar; the songs of Leonard Cohen, Nina Simone, U2, Amy Winehouse, Joaquín Sabina, Silvio Rodríguez; the installations of Sophie Calle or Louise Bourgeois to name a few. And then there are the readings related to spirituality or faith where love is also a core element from the Bible to Sufi poetry. If we add them all in a complex mix do we get the answer to anger and the right recipe of how to conduct feminist activism? Unfortunately, that is not the case. Precisely what makes art and literature such compelling means to interpret the emotion of love is that they are able to address its paradoxical and complex nature in a more effective and

convincing way than most of the conceptual essays or self-help handbooks would ever do.

So, what is the problem that I have with Nussbaum's general call to love? While morally seductive, this answer appears to lack the necessary sophistication of analysis to become useful and operational. I am left with an open invitation to love and without a guide about how to go about this besides the examples of three political personalities (and I can confess here that it bothers me that they are all men and that, while recognizing their amazing public courage and leadership, love seems to have divided their actions in public and private lives. And isn't that somehow a classical masculine version of what love is supposed to look like? A taken for granted superiority of the public sphere versus the private? There is a lot to be learned here from feminist ethics of care). But most importantly, Nussbaum's analysis lacks the insight into the more complex and morally problematic sides of love. Like is the case with anger, love also has features that can be questioned both rationally and normatively, such as the love to nation, country, religion and tribe which can be at the expense of others, the love of a specific individual which can erase any former promise of 'loving forever' that we could have made to former or current partners, the love to a job or a vocation which can be at the expense of family or communal responsibilities. Fear, submission and possession are core features of love. Love can be obsessive or get hijacked by power games and manipulations just to mention only a few of its problematic aspects.

A major insight of this intellectual and artistic mix is that love takes different modes; erotic-love, parental-love, love for neighbor, and friendship-love just to mention a few classic ones. In Simon Bay's *Love: A history* (2011) we get an insightful overview on the understanding of love in Western history. His main thesis being that

[L]ove is the rapture that we feel for people and things that inspire us in the hope of an indestructible grounding for our life [...] [I]f we all have a need to love, it is because we all need to feel at home in the world: to root our life in the here and now; to give our existence solidity and validity ... [L]ove is what allows us to deepen/intensify the being. (Bay, 2011: 6)

So, what can we wish for the future of feminist activism? I wish that we may embrace Martha Nussbaum's major teaching on anger as an alarm bell for injustice and as an emotion to connect with the principle of basic human dignity and self-worth while dancing away from hateful retributive payback fantasies.

'I want a Sunday kind of love. A love to last past Saturday night' sings Etta James. Like her, I wish a dance with and towards love but not all kinds of love. I wish a

mode of love that will have as one of its core principles kindness and self-compassion so we can learn to see, but also to accept the shame and ridicule that often follows on the steps of anger without self-loathing and with hope. Love as a way of being in the world which allows us to experience our existence on the basis of difference. I want a solidarity kind of love, a kind of love that will see the freedom of all as the freedom of each one of us.

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the author

Ana María Munar is Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Leisure and Culture Services at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. With research interests in epistemology, higher education, gender, and digital technologies her latest publications focus on postdisciplinarity, social media and gender in academia. Over the years, Ana has served on several national and international boards and networks such as the Diversity and Inclusion Council and the Diversity and Difference Platform at CBS, the Critical Tourism Studies Network, Women Academics in Tourism and several academic journals. Ana has delivered numerous conference presentations and keynote addresses in her research areas.

Email: anm.mpp@cbs.dk