



## A Brief Chronic(a)le of Anger

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*This brief memoir is a feminist of colour meditation on anger that draws from postcolonial psychoanalysis and feminist phenomenology. By situating feminist anger as a response to an excessively violent modernity, with its modes of inferiorization, I examine the coloniality of everyday sexism through my own recollections of anger. Moreover, by placing my formative anger experiences in conversation with postcolonial and feminist theories, I trace the psychological disorientation of gendering. My narrative, however, concludes hopefully in the feminist counter-modern by looking at the bonds between women in families, the bonds between friends, and then the bonds between women in the community.*

### Introduction

I first began thinking about anger about ten years ago when I started to translate my workplace conflicts into scholarship, specifically postcolonial theory. In more recent years, I have thought about anger in relationship to my family. As Sara Ahmed says, “the personal is structural” (2017, 30). My family is the reason I studied postcolonial theory. In graduate school, I started to understand how much of my life and the lives of my family were formed by the colonial experience. Postcolonial theory is the philosophical tradition I use to reflect on my life. For example, I come from a long line of vegetarians who survived the Pakistan/India Partition and became refugees in their homelands—Britain’s fault. The Partition is the largest mass migration recorded in history with approximately 15 million displaced, and somewhere between half a million to 2 million killed in the violence (Satia and Shashkevich 2019). My parents were children when it happened. Their families fled and left behind their homes, land, and means of living, later leading some to migrate to the United States and England. My mom and her siblings (seven in total) are or were beset with high-blood pressure, which I attribute to the Partition. My mom and Masiji (mother’s sister—she was the eldest), the only women among their siblings, died from brain aneurysms. My mother and her sister died well before their mother did (on my father’s side, three of his older sisters—who I never even met—and one brother died in their adult years well before their mother did). My mom was forty-five years old when she died. One of my maternal cousin-sisters and I both have high blood pressure, and we are scared of dying the way my mom and Masiji did. The traces of colonial violence are embedded in our bodies like ticking time bombs. The personal is structural.

My family is also the reason I’m a feminist because patriarchy is the oppressive structure that has made me the angriest. In resisting patriarchy, I learned vital lessons about anger. Anger contests subordination to survive. Anger makes demands on humanness, but its expression can ironically lessen its claim. An angry woman of colour is unhinged, excessive, has lost control. This is familiar feminist terrain. As Sara Ahmed states, “feminism itself can be understood as an affective inheritance; how our own struggles to make sense of realities that are difficult to grasp become part of a wider struggle, a struggle to be, to make sense of being”



(2017, 20). Anger is part and parcel of that affective inheritance. The basis of this inheritance is violence—psychic, corporeal, and material. Most women can recall times when they were made to feel inferior, when they had their bodies accosted, and/or when they faced economic insecurity—and so can most people of colour. There is the violence of gendering, the violence your physical body is subjected to, and the violence of your dignity being stripped away. Who wouldn't get angry at that? Women of colour are supposed to accept this because if they don't, their sanity or racial loyalty is questioned. But, if you don't get angry about it every so often, then you will cease to be.

I turn to Marxist and postcolonial feminist theory as a coping tool to remember that it hasn't always been this way:

This process required the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the workforce. Most of all, it required the destruction of the power of women which, in Europe [...], was achieved through the extermination of the “witches.” (Federici 2004, 63)

In eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, class, race, and sexual inequalities acted in concert with one another generating a repressive imperial ideology that was to be reflected in all aspects of colonial, legal, and administrative treatment of the subject peoples. This was to have particular implications for gender relations rendering African women more vulnerable to the violence emanating from both European and African sources. (Mama 2001, 255)

Some of the changes under colonial rule that continued the oppression of women include the introduction of models of companionate marriage with its homophobic heterosexual norms, as in English society [...] In matrilineal areas of South India, female claims to maintenance under joint family ownership were replaced by new revenue settlements and laws that gave male heads of household sole property rights. (Grewal 1996, 53)

... the colonial process, as it advanced, brought the women of the colonized people progressively down from a former high position of relative power and independence to that of 'beastly' and degraded 'nature.' (Mies 1986, 95)

Everyday sexism, along with other forms of oppression, is a system of violences that has been normalized and naturalized since the dawn of modern Europe with its colonial conquests. The psychic effects of these violences form the core of Frantz Fanon's work—very likely the most cited author in postcolonial theory, and widely used by feminist scholars, artists, and activists.

One feminist scholar who uses Fanon's work within the context of anger is Julia Lesage. Lesage's, “Women's Rage” (1988) is a treatise on the affective conditions that must be met before an organized feminist revolutionary movement can be developed. She states,

Within such a context, women need to work on another, intermediate level, both to shape our revolutionary consciousness and to empower us to act on our own strategic demands. That is, we need to promote self-conscious, collectively supported, and politically clear articulations of our anger and rage. (Lesage 1988, 420)

However, according to Lesage, feminist solidarity can only be built when women recognize the material and affective differences in how anger is articulated intersectionally and postcolonially. She argues that women must undergo a process of psychic decolonization, which



brings her to a discussion of Fanon. By gendering Fanon's text and replacing keywords, she reveals how his psychoanalytic theories regarding racial decolonization apply to sexual decolonization as well (Lesage 1988, 428). Using Lesage's method, I concentrate on passages from Fanon that center on inferiority, and what it starts to look like when you overcome it. Drawing on Fanon, but replacing his language, as follows, can be constructive using Lesage's method:

The [*woman*] enslaved by [*her*] inferiority, the [...] man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation. (Fanon 1986, 60)

It is the [*sexist*] who creates the inferiorized. (Fanon 1986, 93)

As soon as the [*woman*] comes to an understanding of [*herself*], and understands the rest of the world differently, when [*she*] gives birth to hope and forces back the [*sexist*] universe, it is clear that [*her*] trumpet sounds more clearly and [*her*] voice less hoarsely. (Fanon 1963, 243)

In other words, when women realize they live in a sexist world that systematically humiliates them, their anger becomes more expressive, more precise, and their resistance grows. Lesage's method reveals how Fanon's psychological insights on decolonization apply to all modern forms of oppression and marginalization, providing us with a psychic roadmap to decolonization. Feminist anger then gives us a collective pathway outside of psychic inferiority, giving us a glimpse of what it means to feel human with ourselves and others. This is the experience of love. It is an experience you would fight for. That is revolutionary.

Thinking through feminist anger by way of Fanon and postcolonial, Marxist, phenomenological, and women of color feminisms, demonstrates how it is historically and structurally produced through coloniality and capitalism, illustrating its psychological and cultural manifestations and giving us the blueprints for laying the affective groundwork needed to fuel collective resistance. It is against this backdrop that I relay my own brief history of anger. It's a story that moves between the patriarchy of the home, the neighbourhood, the workplace, and then back home again. My story concludes, however, in the hopeful and humanizing space of feminist community, or rather the feminist counter-modern.

In recollecting my anger, I hope to trace one dimension of a feminist counter-modernity. I take the concept of counter-modernity from Paul Gilroy (1993) who observes that, alongside an emerging European modernity, there also existed a counter-modernity. He argues that if modern Europe developed a rich culture, then so did enslaved Africans. Gilroy explains:

the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance *and* between that group and its erstwhile oppressors [...] This is not a counterdiscourse but a counterculture that defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own. (Gilroy 1993, 37–38)

When you belong to a subjugated culture, there are shared ways of being and understanding that reflect and embody a critique of dominant culture; part of that is a shared anger. That anger is expressed through knowing glances, secret meetings and outbursts. Every subjugated group has a culture of anger that makes up the counter-modernity. Audre Lorde describes the feminist counter-modern, and anger's role in 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, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile and feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives. (Lorde 2007, 127)

In other words, anger is the precursor to resistance and revolution. Feminist anger has a history, culture, and politics that informs an emotional economy with excess, deficiencies, and imbalances. Feminist anger works to achieve balance by righting wrongs, which takes love. Feminist anger is devoted to the decolonization of gender, sexuality, and race. Feminist anger creates new socio-political, cultural, and economic configurations that defy heteropatriarchal logics. And feminist anger demands that all people's humanity be upheld.

#### Before I Start: A Note on Modernity, Anger and Excess

The philosopher Michel de Montaigne recalled meeting three Brazilian Tupinamba in 1562, at the court of King Charles IX, where the Tupinamba asked provocative questions about French society; they wondered why tall adults could bow down to a small child (the regent) and why some people ate well, and others ate barely at all and why those who barely ate did not strangle those who were eating well. (Shohat and Stam 2012, 7)

Even the most subjected person has moments of rage and resentment so intense that they respond, they act against. There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion, however short-lived. It may be only momentary but it takes place. That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains. (hooks 2015, 29)

The Tupinamba's observations on early modern European society reveal that it's a society based on human degradation of the mind, body, and spirit. Who wouldn't get angry about that? In fact, it's a wonder that people aren't angrier and do not respond more violently to dispossession than they do. This was the focus of Frantz Fanon's work. As a Black colonial subject, a practicing psychoanalyst in French-occupied Algeria, and a key figure in the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), Fanon studied the complex ways humans cope individually and collectively with dehumanization and the sustained inferiority wrought by colonization. His major contribution to the field of psychoanalysis was demonstrating the pathological nature of modern western civilization and its effects on colonized peoples. By revealing the psychic, material, and corporeal violence inflicted by the colonizers onto the colonized, Fanon demonstrated how the persistent trauma of an undignified life finds its roots in the machinations of an excessively cruel European modernity, making it pathological. Modern institutions are pathological, not the people who are subjected to them. Fanon argues that the only recourse for the colonized is to restore their humanity, even if by violent means (Fanon 1963, 1965, 1986).

I've always understood Fanonian violence to be principled and entailing collective purpose, so when I recently found out that Fanon was physically abusive to his white wife, I was disheartened. According to his friends and colleagues, he publicly hit her and then claimed he had "avenged himself" (Appiah 2022, n.p.). The point of Fanonian violence is to purge



humiliation, not produce it; you can't emancipate yourself or cope with racism by using the forms of subjection introduced by the colonizer, like modern sexism and heterosexism. In fact, Fanon warns against the colonizer's facility for manipulating the colonized's anger. He says:

The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism [...] The native's muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosions—in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs, and in quarrels between individuals. (Fanon 1963, 54)

Here, Fanon points to the role of displaced anger in furthering the colonial project—an insight which he does not apply to his own personal behavior (because what else is colonialism but a relationship of dominance through violence?). The aim of Fanonian violence is to bring an end to relationships of dominance through violence, not create or further entrench them. Dominance works by diverting anger back into the subjected group and fracturing that anger enough that the subjected group cannot mount an effective resistance. In this way, anger is divisive. This is a point Selma James makes, using Fanon, when discussing women's rivalries as an impediment to feminist movements. She says, "The colonized, he says, when they do not attack their oppressors, attack each other" (James 2012, 57).

Conversely, though, anger can be healing. In a re-working of *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Julia Lesage states, "At the level of individuals, anger is a cleansing force. It frees the woman from her inferiority complex and from despair and inaction; it makes her fearless and restores her self-respect" (1988, 428). Fanon originally used "native" instead of "woman" and "violence" instead of "anger" to make decolonial revolution a matter of reclaiming humanness (Fanon 2004, 94). Lesage, on the other hand, is not issuing a call to arms, but rather illuminates anger's emancipatory capacities. Anger, then, is neither good nor bad, although its specific effects can be assessed; as Audre Lorde says, "Anger is loaded with information and energy" (2007, 127). Anger can be internalized, directed, and/or delayed. Feigned anger is a sign of entitlement, and displaced anger can lead to abuse. Anger is expressed through a web of relations that can be destructive, instructive, constructive, and/or restorative. Anger is a vital tool for, again in Lorde's words, "survival" (2007, 132)—"and survival is the greatest gift of love" (2007, 150).

### My Anger Story

This is where my story starts—love. Two of my earliest memories, and most profound, were around the age of four. One was when my mom slapped my face—hard—and another time when I threatened to run away from home. In the first instance, I was more sad than angry; just shocked. I went to my room and cried. Eventually, my dad asked me what was wrong. I told him what happened, and then he brought me to my mom. I told her not to slap me on my face again, but instead slap my hand. And she did just that. She listened to her child and changed her behaviour. In the second instance, I listened to her. I don't remember why, but my parents had made me very angry about something, so I told them I was going to run away. One night, I packed my child-size overnight suitcase, put on my faux fur jacket, and then sat outside on the front porch. When I came back into the house my mom told me never to say that I was going to run away again. I could tell I hurt her, so I never did say it again.



Now, my relationship with my parents was not ideal. They thought I was overly emotional. Most of my anger was not validated in their eyes. I physicalized a lot of it by biting hard on my right index finger which created a large callus; it was only in my early twenties that I saw that my dad had the same callus. But I usually did trust my parents enough to express my anger. With two younger brothers, you can imagine I was disappointed and upset a lot: there was a lot of “why does he get to do that, but I can’t?” or conversely, “why can’t he do it?” As I grew older, I kept saying this was “sexist,” or that was “sexist.” I was becoming, in Ahmed’s terms, a “feminist killjoy” (2017, 11). As Ahmed says, the everydayness of sexism makes you question your “sense of being” (2017, 20). And no one describes sexism as a disembodied experience better than her (in my opinion), but I will give it a go. You are blamed for things you didn’t do. You are held responsible for other people’s actions. You are told to be compromising, which translates to letting the other person have it their way. You go out of your way to make things easier for others, even if it’s at a cost to yourself. In this context, empathy becomes twisted. As a result, you are easily manipulated and find fault in yourself where none exists. The guilt you feel makes you doubt yourself. You become self-punishing. You become a dumping ground for other people’s stress and anxiety.

The conflicts I had with my parents tended to revolve around either domestic work, taking care of my brothers, or my independence—or, rather, lack thereof. They constantly retorted, “we can’t trust your brothers with responsibility” and “you have more freedom than your cousin-sisters.” I was constantly compared to my cousin-sisters because my parents were worried about what their siblings thought of them, particularly the ones with whom we regularly socialized. Three of my uncles lived near us, or rather one Chachaji (father’s younger brother) and two Mamajis (mother’s brothers—one younger, one older). All their other siblings were in India. I wonder if I could have strongly identified with one of them. Such is the price of dislocation. Those in the U.S. were trying to outdo the others economically and socially, and socially meant whose child was the least Americanized—particularly daughters, which meant sexually pure. There was a contest for whose daughter was best, which meant you had to do well in school, perform domestic duties, and you couldn’t go out with your friends.

Initially, my parents were more relaxed with me going out with my friends, because my friends were nerds. But then quite suddenly in my junior year of school, they became distressed and changed my weekend curfew from 10 pm to 9 pm, because, of course, my cousin-sisters weren’t allowed out at all. In the fullness of time, I would break the new curfew since my parents never followed through on their punishments. They never quite got the hang of North American disciplinary tactics like “grounding” or taking away television access. But initially, my parents were united and steadfast, and I took them more seriously. A battle of wills ensued. There was a lot of debating, which deteriorated into yelling. I thought the new curfew was ridiculous and arbitrary; I mean, who has ever heard of someone’s curfew being moved to an earlier time when they have not misbehaved? I escalated my tactics and went into my version of the silent treatment: if my parents addressed me, I would address them back, but curtly and over politely; they could feel my rage underneath. In my household my mom was the disciplinarian, so I targeted her. I started calling my mom, “mother.” There was a lot of: “yes mother,” “ok mother,” “alright mother.” She hated this. It pissed her off so much that one time she yelled at me and said, “stop calling me that,” and I said “what?” and she said, “that word, mother.” It was the fake obedient tone that I used that she couldn’t take. I eventually moved into a hunger strike—also fake. My mom said, “I knew we shouldn’t have taken you to see *Gandhi*” (Attenborough 2007). They knew I was eating in the middle of the night, but I wouldn’t eat with them—and I certainly wouldn’t eat the food my mom made for me. Then one



night they made me sit at the dinner table with them. When I wouldn't eat, my mom went into a rage. I responded by dramatically shoving a bunch of food into my face while crying. From that climax point, the conflict would decline with occasional eruptions.

I think most girls and women can relay a childhood story of their movement being constrained. This is one of the first constraints that many girls and women experience, i.e., speech, sexuality, etc. You could postulate that my parents tightened my gendering to protect me from charges of immorality by family members—which did happen periodically. But I think, via a gendered Fanon, that:

At the level of the unconscious, therefore, [*gendering*] was not seeking to be perceived by the indigenous population as a sweet, kindhearted mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather a mother who constantly prevents her basically perverse child from committing suicide or giving free rein to its malevolent instincts. The [*gendering*] mother is protecting the child from itself, from its ego, its physiology, its biology, and its ontological misfortune. (Fanon 2004, 149)

The act of gendering has an unconscious dimension that assumes girls and women are “perverse,” and therefore need to be restrained to protect them from themselves. My parents, like most parents, instinctively intensified my gendering in my teen years. Girls and women need to be straightened out, which assumes they are bent. When girls and women resist the psychological disorientation of gendering—being made into a problem that needs to be policed and punished—they get angry. Fanon explains:

[...] deep down the [*gendered*] subject knows no authority. [*She*] is dominated but not domesticated. [*She*] is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of [*her*] inferiority. [*She*] patiently waits for the [*genderer*] to let down his guard and then jumps on him. (Fanon 2004, 16)

In other words, the process of subjectification is never total, the subjected will get angry and fight back.

However, the ease with which I could express anger in my home would not translate outside of it. When I was ten, we moved from a multicultural suburb in Los Angeles County to a predominantly white one in South Orange County. It was the first time I experienced racism in such a visceral way. When I took the bus to school and asked other children who were seated by themselves if I could sit with them, most would say no. I remember once, and possibly more than once, the bus driver had to physically seat me. Sometimes I would walk home with a couple of boys from my neighbourhood. I tried to befriend them, but then one of them molested my breast. They ran off in glee. After that, I stayed away from them. Later, there were three other boys who occasionally followed me at a short distance and in menacing unison called me “beaner.” This went on for three years. It took me a while to figure out that “beaner” was a derogatory term for people of Mexican descent. In junior high, during the Iran hostage crisis, a boy walked past me aggressively and said, “What are you, fucking Iranian, Indian?” Another boy antagonistically and sarcastically asked me out. My best friend cussed him out for me. Of course, all of these boys were white. Initially, I tried telling my mom about these incidents (except for the molestation) but she told me to ignore it. This was unlike her: if anyone mistreated her, she would get in their face. So at that time I was mostly scared and sad. As Fanon states: “The colonized subject is always on [*her*] guard: confused by the myriad signs of the colonial world [*she*] never knows whether [*she*] is out of line” (Fanon 2004, 16). I wouldn't

get angry until my last two years of college. I wish I could have told those guys to go fuck themselves. Then I started to hate white men, white people, and talked shit about them whenever I could. This rage would peter out over time but would never entirely go away.

Meanwhile, the men I could express anger towards immediately were my dad, brothers, and partners because I had good relationships with them. When I did get angry with them, it was usually in reaction to sexism, but some of it was misplaced. Two of my partners told me, “You’re so nice to everybody else, and so mean to me.” I’m a stress displacer, a habit I picked up from my parents. If something didn’t go right, I would feel out of control and lash out at my brothers, and later my partners. “If they had only done ‘x,’ then ‘y’ wouldn’t have happened.” I usually had enough awareness to recoil and apologize, and in time largely stopped the behaviour altogether. If I didn’t, then I wouldn’t have been able to sustain relationships with them. But there were also times when I was incoherently angry and struggled to articulate my feelings. As Ahmed states, “We encounter racism and sexism before we have the words that allow us to make sense of what we encounter” (2017, 32). You’re angry, and you don’t quite understand why. It takes time to figure it out, and then more time to speak it. And in between it all, you second-guess yourself. It’s anxiety provoking. Part of sexism, along with other oppressions, is an emotional excess that weighs women down. Jacqueline Rose (2005) contends that gendering is so heavy we often tuck it away in our sub- and unconscious, leading to slips of the tongue, body tics, and dreams.

When women’s repressed anger bursts forth into consciousness, resistance is born. This psychic movement is what personifies the “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed 2017). My family called me “stubborn;” while at my university, I am “passionate.” In the last twelve years, I’ve had a few key angry moments at work—mostly with people in positions of authority over me. Those on the receiving end of my anger were usually taken aback. Once I even surprised myself, because I snapped. I won’t go into detail about it, but there were several exchanges, my voice became stern, I was doggedly obstructive, I inadvertently made it uncomfortable for those who witnessed it, and I made sure I had the last word—feminist killjoy. I stood up for myself and was joyous afterwards. Ironically, there can be joy in being a killjoy.

I used to naively think that the university was a special place where abuses of power were confronted. But abuses of power are intrinsic to the university and academia—it is a colonial enterprise after all (Jensen 1984; Kelly and Altbach 1984; Viswanathan 1988). Even in departments dedicated to a critique of power and domination, you’ll find colonial style corruption—a belief in hierarchy, a bureaucratic style, a penchant for exploitation, a disregard for other people’s humanity, and a willingness to be deceitful. Like gendering, those in authority can make you into a problem that needs to be policed and punished—this has only happened to me at the hands of women of colour in academia and I have been intensely angry about it. When marginalized peoples gain and exercise power over other marginalized peoples, it’s facilitated by white heteropatriarchy. It’s a derivative power that is conflated with policing. This policing is performed at will and selectively, hiding a repository of displaced anger. As Albert Memmi describes, using the substitution method again:

The recently assimilated [...] push a colonial mentality to excess. [...] Such is the history of the pyramid of petty tyrants: each one, being socially oppressed by one more powerful than [*she*], always finds a less powerful one on whom to lean and become a tyrant in [*her*] turn. (Memmi 1991, 16–17)

It sucks when you are the one being leaned on. The following observation by adrienne marie brown captures how I feel about my experiences at work:



I've seen a lot of situations where women are in charge, but they still do patriarchal, capitalist, competitive things. Their leadership style is 'I'm strong like a man, and I can manipulate, dominate, and take over.' I don't consider that feminist leadership. (brown and Nieves 2018, 27)

What made these incidents at work worse was that there was a pretense of family in the department, with the notion that things should be kept inside the family.

I once went to a lecture by Angela Davis where she said the family was the most violent place (Davis 2012). This brings me back to my brothers, the people I am angriest at. They have, as Marx states, "reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (1978, 476). Since my father's death, I don't really speak to the brother closest to me in age. We once met up to talk with each other, but it blew up quickly. In my first public expression of anger—I've only had two—I exclaimed to him, "You are a fucking liar." I pounded the table to each word I bellowed out at the coffee shop we met at. In these few seconds I felt pure rage and was shaken afterwards. The thing that pisses me off is that he knows he's lying and still continues to do so. He's always uncomfortable around me at family parties. I know my family would like us to make up, but I believe, like Terese Marie Mailhot, "it's dangerous to let go of a transgression when the transgressor is not contrite" (2018, 40).

My anger at my brothers is the deepest anger I have ever experienced because it was born out of betrayal. I used to be close to both my brothers, so their betrayal is shocking to me. As Avishai Margalit explains,

It is thick human relations that are betrayed in acts of betrayal. Where there is no love there is no betrayal [...] In the limited environment of our thick relation we are special. Betrayal tells us in a brutal way that we are not. (Margalit 2017, 113)

I'm so befuddled by their betrayal that I don't even feel sad. I mean, I'm sure I do deep down inside. I keep saying to my friends, "I feel like I never knew them." But of course I did, and as I dissect our past, I see the seeds of it all. I also see that in trying to be a good sister, I enabled them. I naively thought my brothers had outgrown the sexism of our childhood—I was wrong. I've even resorted back to biting my index finger on occasion. Their sense of entitlement is outrageous. They are cowardly and destructive in every way possible. Nothing matters more than their masculinity. They have treated me with no respect or regard, or love for that matter. It's like how Carmen Maria Machado describes betrayal: "[...] after a perfunctory period of pleasure and safety, she tried to drown you. And so, you aren't just mad or heartbroken: you grieve from the betrayal" (Machado 2019, 142). What keeps all of us in this strange death grip with each other is that the youngest has a serious degenerative condition, so care, obligation, and resources are what continue to bind us. In the aftermath of my mom's death, my dad filed for bankruptcy, and we learned to work together out of necessity. My partner/husband used to call our bond "the power of three"—he loves that TV show *Charmed* (Kretchmer 1998–2006). I never thought our bond would break. However this shakes out, I will never trust my brothers again.

### My Feminist Counter-Modern Story

Occasionally, I grieve with my Chachiji (father's younger brother's wife—my aunt) about my brothers, and in turn she commiserates with me about her son—my cousin-brother. My



Chachiji, of course, never directly names her son in these discussions because it's awkward for her to talk badly about him to me. We wonder how my brothers and her son developed into the men they are now. She's tired of being blamed by her son for his life choices, so she says things like, "why don't they take responsibility for their decisions?" and "why don't they see a therapist?" She is really angry, and rightfully so. She constantly warns me to take care of my health and checks to see if I'm taking my blood pressure medication. A friend at work, another Indian woman, also told me to take care of my health, which kind of freaks me out. I saw how excessive stress jeopardized my Chachiji's life and took away my mother's. I take my friend's advice seriously because I know she may be right. My Chachiji ends all our conversations by asking about my partner/husband and telling me to make sure to take care of our relationship. She knows he is a good person and a supportive partner, but there are times when my partner feels at a loss and knows to send me to my friends. He knows the time I spend with them is invaluable to our relationship, and to my health and wellbeing. Nothing is better than the company of women who love you.

I was lucky to have spent my thirties largely single. Over the course of that decade, many of my friends lived with me in my home, and we developed a network of intersecting friendships. I wish I could say that I did this intentionally, but I'm not that cool. I didn't even think of myself as having been single until one of my students asked to interview me for her senior thesis on single women. Sometimes when I'm teaching, I tell stories about this period of my life to illuminate course concepts in feminist and queer theory. When I reminisced about this time of my life with my student, I talked about how formative those relationships were and are. As I grow older, I light up inside when I see my friends.

Many of us had short-term working relationships with each other either in university Student Affairs and/or non-profit organizations. My first job at the university I work at now was in Housing as an Area Coordinator. After my first year in Housing, my supervisor/mentor recruited me to work with the National Conference for Community and Justice's (NCCJ) anti-oppression programs in Los Angeles, which I did for eight years. I met all kinds of people at NCCJ, many from the Los Angeles non-profit community. We were trained to facilitate difficult discussions about racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism. Sometimes things got heated at NCCJ; it was refreshing and honest. As I received mentorship from older queer women of colour and developed friendships in Student Affairs and NCCJ, a pipeline developed where we worked in each other's programs conducting workshops and trainings. A few who worked in non-profit would transition to Student Affairs, and vice-versa, and then some would transition to Academic Affairs. Because of the interpersonal nature of our work, we came to know each other well.

It's from this well of people that I have my oldest, active friendships. Then from this group, seven have lived with me, and one was an honorary housemate—my best friend. These friends I know intimately. We were each other's counselors and helped each other economically. I wouldn't have my home without my friends. When we shared our anger with each other, it was in the safety of knowing that the other person understood completely. But we also challenged each other, and sometimes things got uneasy. I had so many profound conversations over those years, and a lot of fun. We critiqued colonialist ways of being (this is a refined way of saying that we talked shit about people who pissed us off), created family in new ways, and dreamt of feminist revolution. Our discussions ranged from relating our personal history of sexual harassment to resisting capitalist patriarchy. We cried sometimes, but mostly we laughed because sexism—and all the rest of it—is fucking ridiculous. I thank god (not the Christian one) for my friends and for anger, because anger helped me figure out who I am.



Anger has been a clarifying force for me and a moral one too. I think no one should be stripped of their dignity, and those who have been made undignified have every right to be angry. As Paulo Freire says,

I have a right to be angry, to show it and to use it as a motivational foundation for my struggle, just as I have a right to love and to express my love to the world and to use it as a motivational foundation for my struggle because I live in history at a time of possibility and not of determinism. (Freire 1998, 71)

Similarly, in his foreword to *Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabba discusses: “The time is right to reread Fanon, according to David Macey [...] ‘Fanon was angry,’ and without the basic political instinct of anger there can be no hope” (Bhabba 2004, x).

My last story is about anger, love, and hope. For four years, I have been involved with a non-profit organization, *Gente Organizada*, to institute an Ethnic Studies requirement at the school district. My involvement happened quite by accident. I was on their listserv, and they called an urgent meeting, so I attended. The first time I visited their physical location, I was given a tour. The space was beautiful and expansive. There was a workspace, hang-out space, kitchen, media/audio room, library room, small art gallery, and back patio. The staff member explained that the organization was largely founded by Latine mothers in the community who organized for better treatment and resources for their children at school. I was offered lunch, tea, and cantaloupe juice—it was delicious. After we chatted, the staff member suggested that I conduct a gender and sexuality workshop for their parents’ group.

The next time we met, one of the founding mothers joined us. We had a profound discussion largely about gender and sexuality that lasted for three hours. Towards the tail end of our conversation, I mentioned my meetings at the school district. I was confused by the interactions I witnessed between the various parties, which included another community organization, the school district’s administration, the school board, and *Gente Organizada*. Then the founding mother explained the various power and money relations between these key players. It was like someone had opened a window in my head. This was my first involvement in local politics, and I was inexperienced, so I esteemed her knowledge. On my way out, I was given fresh vegetables harvested from their small farm. I had spent such a lovely day with them that when I left, I said, “every day should be like this.”

The next time I was there was to conduct the gender and sexuality workshop. In the first half, I facilitated a discussion on the social construction of gender and the coloniality of gender and sexuality. Then, in the second half, some women discussed their anxieties about their children’s gender and sexuality. The final comment made by one of the women was this: “We are now seeing what has always been there.” And I replied, “that’s a beautiful way of saying it.”

This is the feminist counter-modern. It is everywhere: in our family, among our friends, in the homes we make, and the communities we belong to. It’s fueled by anger rooted in resistance. Its cultural practices derive from the dialogic and therapeutic. It is a sanctuary from which a humanizing force is produced. It’s an imaginative space that gives us a view of what could be. And it’s our hope for a lasting revolution.



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