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## Mapping our emotions: cartographies of authority, fear, desire and struggle

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**Abstract:** This paper puts into practice Marilyn Frye's proposal of anger as a tool of cartography, mapping anger as a means to learn about the micro-politics of our own lives. Using dialogue as a form of social research, this paper expands Frye's idea through the analysis of a conversation I had with another woman, a friend of mine, about anger. The analysis shows how 'anger as cartography' can go beyond Frye's original suggestion. It shows how mapping emotions can help us understand not only what others expect of us, but also what we expect of others and what we want for ourselves. Moreover, it shows how mapping anger can locate relationships of authority, but also of struggle, fear and desire. Finally, the paper argues that anger is not the only emotion which can be mapped. In doing so, it hints at the possibility of using emotions, more broadly, as cartography, and the different relationships and dynamics they can allow us to locate.

**Keywords:** Marilyn Frye, anger, cartography, feminist geography, emotional geographies.

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## Introduction

Anger can be a tool of cartography. This is what Marilyn Frye suggests in *Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist History* (1993). Contributing to feminist research methodology literature (see Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Acker et al., 1983) and emotional geography (see Jaggar, 1989; Bondi et al., 2007) her proposal of ‘anger as cartography’ (1993, p.94) suggests that by locating ‘where, with whom, about what and in what circumstances one can get angry and get uptake [be heard], one can map others’ concepts of who and what one is’ (ibid.). Since she defines anger as a social act that demands something of someone, locating the spaces in which we can make these demands and have them conceded to, tells us where and with whom we hold authority – or not – and so to which social roles we are meant to adhere.

This paper is the result of putting into practice her proposal – mapping anger as a means to learn about our own lives, and what others think and expect of us. To this end, I invited a friend of mine to converse with me about our anger. In doing so, I sought to make the exercise one of co-creation; inspired by a piece of Da Costa et al. (2015) that emphasizes dialogue as a form of social research. By this exercise, my intention is to expand Frye’s idea, as it is only briefly explored in the final chapter of her book. Since emotions are political and gendered issues (Anderson & Smith, 2001), her proposal deserves more attention – especially from a feminist geography perspective.

Our one-hour long video call points to how Frye’s idea of anger as cartography can go beyond those circumstances where ‘one is uptaken’ – when anger succeeds in engaging the person at whom it is directed – as she originally suggested. It opens the possibility of how mapping emotions can help us understand not only what others expect of us, but also what we expect of others and what we want for ourselves. It can locate relationships of authority, but also of struggle, fear and desire.

The rest of this paper is divided into four sections. The first three discuss our anger-mapping exercise in the three spaces that arose in our conversation. To begin, I explore how we experience anger in encounters with strangers in public spaces; thereafter, I move on to how we experience it in private spaces with relatives, partners



or friends; and finally, how we experience it when the limits between the public and the private become messy. The fourth section goes beyond anger to discuss what using other emotions as cartography can contribute.

From a feminist geography perspective, this paper has three objectives. Firstly, it intends to highlight the importance of Frye's contribution and to further build upon it. Secondly, it intends to contribute to the understanding of gender relations, by showing how mapping emotions can be a useful tool 'to look for micro-politics in the everyday' (Olivieri & Leurs, 2014) and by sharing the micro-politics that our experiences of anger indicate. Lastly, it seeks to address the 'marginalization of emotion [that] has been part of a gender politics of research in which detachment, objectivity and rationality have been valued, and implicitly masculinized, while engagement, subjectivity, passion and desire have been devalued, and frequently feminized' (p.2). It is important to mention that we are both cis, middle-class, educated, Mexican women who live in the UK, and therefore our thoughts on these questions are a form of 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988). Our contribution relates to the specific dynamics that can happen at the intersection of these identities.

### **In the public space**

There was one central question which ran through our entire conversation: where do we experience anger, and why? My own experiences had led me to believe we would discuss primarily - perhaps even exclusively - the private space. Contrary to my expectations, however, the first space she spoke about was public transport. As a form of public space, our experiences therein differed vastly: she frequently expressed her anger freely by confronting those responsible, while I limited myself to clenching my teeth or rolling my eyes.

The different attitudes in public spaces towards strangers proved to be contingent on different understandings of the relationship between anger, proximity, and safety. In her case, she felt comfortable enough to yell at people to move in the subway because she did not have to build or preserve positive relationships with them, as she would have had to do with friends, family and acquaintances. In my case, the fact that they were strangers meant that there was not a base of trust upon which anger could be expressed and understood. Similarly, she felt free to express anger in such a manner probably



because she had not experienced an unpleasant or aggressive response. In my case, it was this feeling of vulnerability in public transport – or what Rose (1993) calls ‘a sense of space as oppressive’ (p.143) – which also cautioned me against expressing anger, as I feared a violent response.

Moreover, our experiences of anger in the public space showed the existing tensions between our expectations of others and our expectations for ourselves. On the one hand, she felt that in public transport her right to space was constantly being disrespected, and thus the fact that others were not fulfilling their obligations towards her entitled her to express anger. On the other hand, for me, my own expectation of being cordial prevented me from doing so.

Hence, in her case, a lack of a personal relationship, a feeling of safety, and strong feeling of being wronged encouraged her to express her anger; while in my case, a lack of a personal relationship, a feeling of vulnerability, and a self-expectation to be tolerant discouraged me from expressing mine. Locating these experiences of anger in the public space allows us to visualize, as Frye suggests, what roles we are expected to play and assume (or not) for ourselves – tolerant women. Nonetheless, this is not the sole thing that it allows us to visualize. Besides relationships of authority, it also shows: 1) relationships of fear (or absence of), as we limited our anger (or not) by a perception of vulnerability; 2) relationships of desire, as she expressed her anger to strangers hoping to modify their behaviour and obtain the respect she wanted; and 3) relationships of struggle, as we decided to express our anger (or not) depending on what was more important, a feeling of being wronged or our self-expectations to be tolerant. Furthermore, it perhaps can show relationships of community, since emotions can be seen as political practices that are involved in the imagination of these ties (Ahmed, 2004).

### **In the private space**

After exploring what seemed her most frequent place of anger, we returned to mine – the private space. This meant for us a combination of places – our parents’ houses back in Mexico and the various rooms/apartments we have rented with or without partners. In these spaces, our experiences, as daughters or partners, resembled each other’s. They both point to the relationship between anger and the (re) negotiation of roles and authority.



Whenever we have returned as adults to our nuclear homes, the most controversial place for both of us, as daughters, turned out to be the dining room. However, this had not always been the case for us. When we were younger, the principal space of conflict was the bedroom, as we would dispute whose rules dictated the organisation thereof and the behaviour therein. Thus, on the one hand, the shift to the dining hall appears to be the result of being older, and the authority that age seems to entail in terms of personal management. On the other hand, the expression of our anger in the dining room appeared to be a form of protest against family dynamics with which we did not agree anymore. These included a lack of recognition of our autonomy and a lack of respect for our decisions, as well as disapproval and contestation of gendered relations within our nuclear family. What made the dining room contested spaces for us was the fact that these dynamics manifested here constantly and clearly, in casual conversations about our plans and in family roles around care work.

At our own places, when they have been shared with our partners, whether in Mexico or elsewhere, the primary spaces for anger have been the bedroom and the kitchen. In both of these cases, it has been deeply related to the sharing of housework - doing dishes, doing laundry, picking up and folding clothes, and cleaning, to mention a few examples. These spaces, thus, seem to be operating as spaces of contestation. Both of us have been trying to build gender-equal relationships with previous or present partners, yet have struggled to translate that verbal commitment to an effective practice of responsibility-sharing. Thus, our anger has been directed at those small strategies of resistance that our partners - consciously or not - have employed in order to subvert the agreement. The on-going negotiation of responsibilities is evident in the varying responses that our anger received on different occasions: it is sometimes dismissed as trivial, and at other times it is heard. Clearly, our authority in these issues is not settled.

Our conversation about the private space shows the existence of a multiplicity of private spaces and the different spatial locations of anger therein. Since our identities influence our experiences of space (Rose, 1993), our expression of anger varies in these spaces depending on the role we are playing, daughters or partners. As daughters, the primary space seems to be the dining room as it is here where contested family dynamics play out. As partners, the primary



space seems to be the kitchen and the bedroom as they are spaces where the (re) negotiation of gender roles takes place. However, in both cases our anger has played a transformative role – a function that has been previously documented in feminist literature (see Lorde, 1981). By embodying the (re) negotiating of obligations, our anger has sought to bring about a desired change, whether that is in our nuclear family or our personal relationships.

Hence, locating these experiences of anger in the private space allows us to visualize what roles our families and partners expect us to adhere to, and where our authority resides. It also allows us to trace relationships of desire, as our anger expresses our expectations of our family or of our partners to behave in gender-equal ways, and reveals what situations we would like to see transformed. Moreover, mapping experiences of anger in the private space also shows relationships of struggle, as we continuously contest – to varying degrees of success – those situations we believe to be unjust.

#### **In the borderlands between the public and the private space**

As the previous two sections illustrate, she and I had different experiences of anger towards strangers in the public space, and similar experiences when it came to relatives in the private space. However, our experiences of anger do not operate within these neat divides most of the time. When, for example, we have found ourselves getting angry at people who are close to us, but in public spaces, we have both experienced a strong pressure to deal with these situations of anger privately. We had been told that is not acceptable or appropriate to ‘make scenes’. If there was anything that upset us, we were assured it would be heard, but behind closed doors, not in public. This emphasis on the private management of anger points to the entrenchment of traditional power relations, to the conflict between social expectations and self-expectations, and to the denial of emotions because of their association with femininity.

In the first place, the fact that we have been both encouraged to express our anger only privately seems to show that the (re) negotiation of roles and authority that is taking place with our family and partners needs to be, in their opinion, invisible. By encouraging us to express our anger, they might be trying to resist or slow down the (re)negotiation process. This then is another rationale for why the bedroom appeared so prominently as a site of confrontation; it is a space out of view, where negotiations can be made or resisted and as



such it is the space to which we come back to voice the anger that was publicly silent.

This is particularly worrying since our private spaces have been continuously shrinking and with them our opportunities to express anger. For example, as we share apartments with housemates, 'home' becomes a paradoxical space. It is simultaneously a private and public space, and depending on the presence or absence of others in our homes we might or might not be able to express our anger. Similarly, at our parents' houses, the possibility of expressing anger in the dining hall depends on who is at the table - if it is the nuclear family then it might be acceptable, but if there are guests it is out of the question. As we have fewer spaces in which we can express anger in a sanctioned manner, our anger becomes more regulated, and its demands managed in order to be resisted.

This is not to say that we have been powerless in those situations. We have both often found strategies to subvert these public limits on our expression of anger. For example, at work, while we might not have expressed it outwardly to the people involved, we might have talked about it behind closed doors with people we trust; in the street or at an event, we might have done so by murmuring about it to other people present. With these strategies we manage to transform spatially, and temporally, a public space into a private one, and navigate the limits placed on our anger. Body language can be another similar subversive strategy. It can be used to express anger in public but perhaps only obvious to the person it is addressed to. In such instances, the body in the public space can be interpreted as its own private space, and so these bodily expressions of anger can be seen as well as a strategy to deal with the spatial limits of the appropriateness of anger.

In the second place, by discussing the (im) propriety of anger, it was evident that it is not only that others perceive our anger as problematic, but that we do as well. We feel guilt. We feel empowered at the time, but culpable later. If anger can be the result of feeling wronged and is a demand for respect, as Frye suggests, then it seems that we perceive it as empowering because we are expressing what we want for ourselves, but guilty afterwards because it contradicts what others expect from us - and even what might expect of ourselves. We are caught between voicing our demands and expectations and also embodying ideas of tolerance, humility, care and composure that others - and ourselves - desire of us. Thinking along Foucauldian



lines (1975), anger is then a mechanism of gendered (self) surveillance and discipline, one that is contested by our resistance to being ‘docile bodies’.

Thirdly, these limits speak, more broadly, of the social norm to sanitize relationships in the public space, as if emotions – to varying degrees – were dirty and shameful. This discourse around emotions appears to be partly the result of a patriarchal Western construct of emotions as feminine and inferior, and thus of emotion as needed to be overcome or controlled through masculine rational thought (Merchant, 1989). This binary is reinforced when we are disciplined to restrict, spatially, our expressions of anger.

Exploring our anger in the borderlands between the public and private space allows us to further visualize the roles to which our families and partners expect us to adhere. It allows us to locate relationships of struggle by illuminating various (re) negotiations of power with others, and also enables us to understand when our own bodies are sites of struggle – between competing fears and/or desires resulting from conflicting social and self-expectations. Finally, it shows that patriarchy’s views of emotions as inferior and feminine still remains dominant.

### **Beyond anger**

Talking about the shame around anger prompted us to talk about sadness too, since these experiences too had caused us to feel guilt, perhaps even more so than anger. This part of our discussion hints at the existence of a gendered emotional hierarchy, and extends the possibility of anger as cartography to one of emotional cartographies more generally.

Anger, if shameful, is still associated with strength. It has been constructed as a masculine emotion. Sadness, on the other hand, has been associated with weakness and fragility. It has been framed as a feminine emotion. This emotional hierarchy between anger and sadness might explain our realisation that there are even fewer spaces in which we can express sadness – the private space, and within it, the bedroom. If it is expressed in public, then it should be done in the same fashion as anger, in provisionally created private spaces – that is, behind closed doors.

Limiting the expression of sadness in the private space may be anchored in two common perceptions of this emotion. Firstly, it





might be that, since it is thought of as a feminine emotion, it is seen as a passive one – one that does not make a specific claim upon someone, one that is not a social act (Frye, 1993). As a result, we might think it is not necessary to express it in the public space, since it does not include or pertain anyone but ourselves. Secondly, it might be also be that since sadness is perceived as a sign of weakness, we feel more compelled to hide it in spaces where masculinity, and those traits associated to it, are valued.

These characteristics of sadness mean that identifying those with whom we can cry can tell us about (perhaps gendered) relationships of trust and care. Those with whom we cry most, seem to be those whom we trust enough to let into our homes, into our bedrooms (or trust enough to share them with), those with whom we feel safe being vulnerable (being ‘feminine’), and those whom we hold in respect to ask counsel from. Anger is therefore not the only emotion that we can map in order to begin unpacking the micro-politics around us; sadness can be used as well. Sadness as cartography might not only be able to identify relationships of authority, fear, and desire, but also those of care and confidence.

### Conclusion

Our discussion about our experiences of anger expands upon Frye’s idea of anger as cartography in several ways. Our conversation around anger in general, not only around where we felt our anger was ‘uptaken’, points to the need to specify Frye’s theorization of anger. For her, anger as cartography is not mapping all instances and spaces where we *feel* angry, but rather where we *express* our anger, and within those, instances when we are *heard*. If expressing anger is a righteous claim upon something, as Frye explains, then being *heard* means it is understood as valid. Thus, when we map anger in these instances, what we are tracing is where, in what issues, and with whom, we hold authority (or not) – and even the degree to which it might be contested. However, our findings have shown that mapping anger needs not to be limited to these instances.

To begin with, the situations where our anger is uptaken do not only allow us to understand what others expect of us, but also what we expect of them, and thus what we want for ourselves. When we are getting angry, we are demanding a particular thing of someone, *even if we are not uptaken*. In most of the situations we discussed, our anger was the result of feeling disrespected – either by an invasion of



space, a lack of recognition or a disregard for commitments – and so it had a (perhaps unintentional) corrective rationale. Anger, then, speaks of desire as well, and in particular of desire for change. It is useful, therefore, to map not only those instances when our anger is heard, but also where it is expressed and is not uptaken, since it tells us about the sites where authority is desired but contested, and where expectations are being transformed and negotiated but are not yet settled.

Moreover, our conversation has shown that is also useful to map where we feel angry but do not express it. This exercise tells us about what others expect of us – especially where we are expected to be obedient or compliant. Perhaps more importantly, it also tells us about the tensions between our expectations of ourselves and our expectations of others. It tells us where, with whom and about what we choose to comply with others' expectations of ourselves above our own, and/or how we have internalized those very expectations. Tracing where we only *feel*, but do not *express* anger, can thus result in a map of fear and discipline, a map of where we are, but resist being, 'docile bodies'.

Hence, our conversation shows how Frye's proposal of spatially locating anger is an '...everyday geography of kitchens and bedrooms – and streets and workplaces and neighbourhoods – [that can be] the geography of many women's spatiality, and of feminism too' (Rose, 1993, p.142). Since it attends to the micro-politics and the fluidity of power around us – a rather Foucauldian understanding of power which focuses on how power occurs through discourse and social relations – it enables us to start unpacking the web of relations in which we are embedded and the multiple expectations of us that we negotiate. However, in doing so, we need to map where our anger is heard, but also where it is dismissed and where we decide to remain silent. With this in mind, using anger as cartography tells us about authority, but also about fear, desire and struggle.

Furthermore, anger is not the only emotion that can be mapped. Mapping sadness also allows us to further understand social relations and expectations, as well as our own concept of ourselves. Whether other emotions can be employed in a similar fashion would be an exciting avenue for further thought and research that could contribute to the practice of emotional cartography for social research.



As with any tool for social research, cartography runs the risk of producing a static understanding of social reality and thus it is important to recognize the inherent fluid character of emotional mapping. For example, the dynamics of the public space described above were tied to a perception of safety, and so the expression of anger in these spaces is open to change if that perception is modified. Similarly, it also seemed to be contingent on geographical location. The situations to which we referred took place in Mexico - in Mexico City specifically - and never within the UK. Whether these dynamics would reproduce in the UK, where we are immigrants and might feel less entitled to make public claims on people, is an open question. Clearly, a given emotional cartography needs to be understood as a time and place specific product, subject to constant transformations, in order not to defeat its feminist origin.

Mapping emotions is obviously not only relevant to understanding women's experiences, but can be employed to understand dynamics around race, gender, sexuality, class, and so on. Emotions as tools of social research can contribute to feminist 'awareness of the politics of the everyday... [and] of the intersection of space and power' (Rose, 1993, p.143). These maps of power, fear, desire, and struggle can then instruct our projects of social transformation.

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