

## **It is not the time for a party**

Posted on [May 13, 2015](#)

It is devastating. We need to be devastated. A party based on a system of class loyalty has been given permission to rule. A party: how a few reproduce themselves by convincing many they are the many. How a party assumes human rights can be abolished by the act of abolishing an act. A party that is Eugenicist: how a few reproduce their fortune by reproducing themselves; how the few justify their good fortune as deriving from work, or effort, or good will, or character, rather than inheritance; how a few who benefit from the exploitation of many present many as those receiving benefits; how many are ruled by holding onto a distinction created by the rulers between the deserving and the undeserving, assuming that by trying to be more deserving they will be less unsafe.

[Eugenics](#) becomes a social policy: how you can eliminate others by making it harder for them to exist. Drawing on Francis Galton's own terms, eugenics is the reproduction of the conditions that enable the reproduction of those deemed "men of a high type."

What conditions.

A party: how some are left for dead.

Capitalism (I won't add racial as an adjective here, all capitalism is racial as well classed because it depends on making moral distinctions between higher and lower beings) is identity politics: how the identities of some are posted because those identities secure access to a world; how the identities of some disappear by being registered as universal.

No wonder that any politics based on asserting one's particulars against the universal is called identity politics!

Capitalism is identity politics.

Capitalism is how "the others" become labour to be used, or useless; how others become usable is how others become expendable; how others become expendable is how others become killable. Capitalism is how "the others" become those who have to be welcomed to be at all: capitalism is Neighbourhood Watch generalised into a system (that is Neighbourhood Watch extracts its particular logic from a general system – as I tried to argue in my book *Strange Encounters* (2000)): it is how the others become loitering, those who here, there, without a legitimate purpose, whose proximity registers as crime; or whose arrival is deemed to endanger property or to lower the value of a neighbourhood; it is how the strangers are those whose entry is understood as damage, whose entry is unlawful; whose life becomes unlawful; whose death becomes lawful. The figure of the bogus asylum seeker and what they used to call in the Australian press the "dole bludger" are "stuck together" to use the terms I introduced in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). By sticking together these figures, through their adherence, we have the effect of *coherence*: a national body is reproduced around "some bodies," as *the "who" who must be defended*.

We can understand why and how willfulness too has utility as a judgment: willful beings are those for whom being is willful, *those who are judged to falsify their personhood as persecution* with the intent of receiving

benefits.

It is a system from which only a few benefit.

It is the party.

Capitalism is identity politics: how the few become the universe/universal; it is how the universal is handy because it makes others into the hands, helping hands, those who have to help reproduce the very system that reproduces their own subordination, or risk becoming unhandy hands, who are grasping at something that is not theirs.

It is time for us to curl our hands into fists. We should not be handy.

It is not the time for a party.

It is a time to be angry. We cannot separate a feeling from what a feeling is doing. To be angry is to enact your relation to a world: anger is action because anger is reaction.

I have written about anger often. I need to write about anger some more.

When I wrote *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) I spoke on anger as key to feminism, in particular, to black feminist and feminist of colour scholarship and activism. I wanted to challenge some of the critiques of “wound culture” within some feminist theory. Let me share some of these words.

-----

The response to pain, as a call for action, also seems to require anger: an interpretation that this pain is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it. But it is precisely the intimacy of pain and anger within feminism that Wendy Brown critiques as a form of *resentiment*. Following Nietzsche, Brown suggests that *resentiment*:

produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt; and it produces a site of revenge to displace the hurt (a place to inflict hurt on the sufferer who has been hurt). Together these operations both ameliorate... and externalize what is otherwise unendurable (Brown 1995: 68).

Brown sets up an opposition between reaction and negation as responses to injury, and an action which she suggests earlier might wish to ‘forget’ the injury, or indeed the history of that injury in the pursuit of a different kind of future (Brown 1995: 56). She hence assumes that all forms of reaction necessarily lead to the fetishisation of the wound. However, I would suggest that there is no “pure action,” which is outside such a history of “reaction,” whereby bodies come to be “impressed upon” by the surfaces of others. This is important as it suggests that if feminism is an emotional as well as ethical and political response to that which it is against, then what feminism is against is not exterior to feminism, and indeed may give that politics its edge. If anger is a form of againstness, then it is precisely about the impossibility of moving beyond the history of injuries to a pure or innocent position. Anger then does not necessarily require an investment in revenge; “being against something” is dependent not only on how one reads what one is against (for example, whether violence against women is read as dependent on male psychology or on structures of power), but also on what form of action are felt to be possible given that reading.

More broadly within feminism, of course, the passion of anger has been seen as crucial. Nowhere is this clearer

than in the work of Audre Lorde, specifically in her critiques of racism against Black women. As she writes so powerfully:

My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger ignoring it, feeding it, learning to use it, before it laid my visions to waste for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight. My fear of anger taught me nothing... Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification.... Anger is loaded with information and energy. (1984: 127)

Here, anger is constructed in different ways: as a response to the injustice of racism; as a vision of the future; as a translation of pain into knowledge; as being loaded with information and energy. Crucially, anger is not simply defined in relationship to a past, but as opening up the future. In other words, being against something does not end with “that which one is against” (it does not become “stuck” on the object of either the emotion or the critique, though that object remains sticky and compelling). Being against something is also being for something, but something that has yet to be articulated or is not yet. As Lorde shows us, anger is visionary and the fear of anger, or the transformation of anger into silence, is a turning away from the future (1984: 127). For Audre Lorde, anger involves the naming of various practices and experiences as racism, but it also involves imagining a different kind of world in its energy (Lorde 1984: 127). If anger pricks our skin, if it makes us shudder, sweat and tremble, then it might just shudder us into new ways of being. Anger might just enable us to inhabit a different kind of skin, even if that skin remains marked or scarred by that which we are against.

We do not all respond with anger, and to be angry is to assume that something is wrong. However, it is not necessarily the case that something is named or felt to be the cause of anger: there are moments of anger where it is unclear what one is angry about, and all these moments do not necessarily gather together to form a coherent response. Or as Carol Tauris puts it, “There is no one-to-one correspondence between feeling angry and knowing why” (1982: 18). But feminism also involves a reading of the response of anger: it moves from anger into an interpretation of that which one is against, whereby associations or connections are made between the object of anger and broader patterns or structures. This is what allows an object of knowledge to be delineated. The object is not then the ground of feminism (it does not come first, as it were), but is an effect of a feminist response. Anger is in this sense creative; it works to create a language with which to respond to that which one is against, whereby “the what” is renamed, and brought into the feminist world.

This process is dynamic – as can be seen by the different ways feminists have named that which they are against (patriarchy, sexual difference, gender relations or hierarchy, phallocentrism). Indeed, different feminisms construct the “object” of anger quite differently, in ways that are in tension, although they may share some similarities. So the attachment implicit in the response to anger is not simply about the creation of an object (and to create is not to create something out of nothing, but to produce a name out of a set of differential relations), as the object always fails to be secured. Not only have feminists created different names for that which they are against, but they have also recognised that what they are against does not have the contours of an object that is given; it is not a positive entity. This is implicit in the very argument that gender permeates all aspects of social life and that it is in this sense “worldly.” Anger hence moves us by moving us outwards; while it creates an object, it also is not directed simply against an object, but becomes a response to the world, as such. Feminist anger hence involves a reading of the world, a reading of how, for example, gender hierarchy permeates all aspects of sociality, is implicated in other forms of power relations, including race, class and sexuality, and is bound up with the very construction as well as regulation of bodies and spaces. Anger against objects or events, directed against this or that, moves feminism into a bigger critique of what is, as a critique that loses an object, and hence opens itself up to forms of possibility that cannot be simply located in what is. When feminism is no longer directed towards a critique of patriarchy, or secured by the categories of “women”

or “gender” feminism is doing the most “moving” work. The loss of such an object is not the failure of feminist activism, but is indicative of its capacity to move, or to become a movement.

---

You are against what is; it is a movement.

Anger always comes up: how could it not when you are opposing a world that opposes your being? Anger came up again in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) where I was interested in the figure of the angry woman of colour. I wanted to give her a hearing. Let’s hear from her again.

---

Of course, within feminism, some bodies more than others can be attributed as the cause of unhappiness. We can place the figure of the feminist killjoy alongside the figure of the angry woman of colour explored so well by writers such as Audre Lorde (1984a) and bell hooks (2000). The angry woman of colour be described as a kill joy; she may even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. She might not even have to make any such point to kill joy. You can be affectively alien because you are affected in the wrong way by the right things. Or you can be affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: your proximity gets in the way of other people’s enjoyment of the right things, functioning as unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, which disturb an atmosphere. Listen to the following description from bell hooks: “a group of white feminist activists who do not know one another may be present at a meeting to discuss feminist theory. They may feel bonded on the basis of shared womanhood, but the atmosphere will noticeably change when a woman of color enters the room. The white women will become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory” (2000: 56).

It is not just that feelings are “in tension,” but that the tension is located somewhere: in being felt by some bodies, it is attributed as caused by another body, who thus comes to be felt as apart from the group, as getting in the way of its organic enjoyment and solidarity. The body of color is attributed as the cause of becoming tense, which is also the loss of a shared atmosphere (or we could say sharing the experience of loss is how the atmosphere is shared). As a feminist of color you do not even have to say anything to cause tension. The mere proximity of some bodies involves an affective conversion. To get along you have to go along with things which might mean for some not even being able to enter the room. We learn from this example how histories are condensed in the very intangibility of an atmosphere, or in the tangibility of the bodies that seem to get in the way. Perhaps atmospheres are shared if there is an agreement in where we locate the points of tension.

To speak out of anger as woman of color is then to confirm your position as the cause of tension; your anger is what threatens the social bond. As Audre Lorde describes: “When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of helplessness,’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action’” (1984: 131). The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence. The woman of color must let go of her anger for the white woman to move on.

The figure of the angry woman of colour is also a fantasy figure that produces its own effects. Reasonable thoughtful arguments are dismissed as anger (which of course empties anger of its own reason), which makes you angry, such that your response becomes read as the confirmation of evidence that you are not only angry but also unreasonable! To make this point in another way, the anger of feminists of color is attributed. So you might be angry *about* how racism and sexism diminish life choices for women of color. Your anger is a judgment

that something is wrong. But then in being heard as angry, your speech is read as motivated by anger. Your anger is read as unattributed, as if you are against x because you are angry rather than being angry because you are against x. You become angry at the injustice of being heard as motivated by anger, which makes it harder to separate yourself from the object of your anger. You become entangled with what you are angry about because you are angry about how they have entangled you in your anger. In becoming angry about that entanglement, you confirm their commitment to your anger as the truth “behind” your speech, which is what blocks your anger, stops it from getting through. You are blocked by not getting through.

---

Blocked by not getting through.

Walls. They come up again.

Walls: how history becomes concrete.

Walls: how some can progress by blocking others, including those who aim to unblock the system.

*How about this:* what is unendurable is external. *How about this:* capitalism generates an assumption as a ruling logic: that in being resentful or angry we have made something external internal.

I have been thinking about anger because I have been feeling angry. When we are too angry to write, we must write. We can write from our anger, about our anger, with our anger, through anger. I described in *Willful Subjects* (2014) how the figure of the willful subject becomes, rather like the killjoy, a container of violence: as if violence comes up because or when we speak up. We have to spill out from our containers. Our words must spill. Bodies: too.

Of course our willfulness is diagnosed as moral weakness. Or course our anger is judged as passive and weak. Of course we are understood as being unreasonable when we refuse their reasons. Of course they call us mindless when they don't like the content of our minds. Of course our protests are framed as riots. Of course when we oppose something we are being oppositional. Of course when we point out oppression we are being oppressive. Of course when we revolt against a violent system we are described as violent. Of course we will be judged as putting ourselves first when we don't put them first. Of course we are assumed to be attached to our own injuries when we point out that injuries are present. Of course we become killjoys when we express unhappiness about how the happiness of a few rests on the unhappiness of the many.

*Of course, of course, of course:* this is the logic of the course.

This is the party. It is not the time for a party.

Seize the judgement; take it on; fight; hold on.

It is a movement. Watch us spill. Watch us roll.

---

**Share this:**



8 bloggers like this.

---

**Related**

No  
With 12 comments

[Speaking Out](#)  
With 68 comments

[Making Feminist Points](#)  
With 25 comments

**About feministkilljoys**

feminist killjoy, affect alien, angry queer woman of colour

[View all posts by feministkilljoys →](#)

This entry was posted in [Uncategorized](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

## 4 Responses to *It is not the time for a party*



**dependent happiness** says:

May 22, 2015 at 1:17 am

Thank you. There's so much of value here. So much that revives anger. And thus inspires.

[Reply](#)

---

Pingback: [Upcoming Discussions | Feminist Discussion Circle](#)

---

Pingback: [Previous readings | Feminist Discussion Circle](#)

---

Pingback: [If You're Not With The Dead You're With The Vampires – Letters from the Palace\(s\)](#)

---

**feministkilljoys**

*Blog at WordPress.com.*