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Critical review of the classical definition of anger: A defense of the pluralistic approach

Revisão crítica da definição clássica da raiva: uma defesa da abordagem pluralista

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ABSTRACT:

I argue that, in contexts of social oppression, anger usually does not aim at retribution, but at recognizing the perceived injustice. I present a critique of the retributive definition of anger defended by Aristotle (2009) and Nussbaum (2016), as I understand that it does not satisfactorily explain the complex expression of anger elaborated in this text. As an alternative, I present Silva's (2021a) pluralist definition, applying it to Frye's (1983) and Leboeuf's (2018) defenses of anger, hooks (1995) and Lorde (1997), to demonstrate that their defenses point to an anger devoid of the desire for retribution. I conclude by suggesting that the retributive definition be rejected and replaced by the pluralist one.

KEYWORDS: anger; oppression; injustice; retribution; recognition.

RESUMO: Argumento que, em contextos de opressão social, a raiva comumente não objetiva retribuição, mas sim reconhecimento da injustiça percebida. Apresento uma crítica à definição retributiva da raiva, defendida por Aristóteles (2009) e Nussbaum (2016), por compreender que esta não explica satisfatoriamente a expressão complexa da raiva, elaborada no presente texto. Como alternativa, exponho a definição pluralista de Silva (2021a), aplicando-a às defesas da raiva de Frye (1983), Leboeuf (2018), hooks (1995) e Lorde (1997), para demonstrar que suas defesas apontam para uma raiva desprovida do desejo de retribuição. Finalizo sugerindo que a definição retributiva seja rejeitada e substituída pela pluralista.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: raiva; opressão; injustiça; retribuição; reconhecimento.

1 Introduction

In *Relatos Salvajes* (2014), an Argentinian film, anger is portrayed as a salvage, vengeful and irrational emotion. The Bride's junt for Bill, in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), also reinforces the image of anger as vengeful and violent. On the other hand, there is a more positive perspective of anger, exposed in documentary narratives such as Mary Dore's *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* (2014), in which the anger of the women of the first feminist wave is analyzed as a valuable source of motivation for the fight for their reproductive rights. The popular film *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) also constructs a narrative in which the protagonist is a young woman angry at the misogynistic society in which she lives, exploring everyday anger as a form of female empowerment. These popular expressions point to anger from two perspectives: on the one hand, anger is constructed as vengeful and violent and, on the other, as a source of motivation for the search for social justice. These two perspectives show that anger is a complex emotion, made up of nuances that make it possible to characterize it both as negative and politically positive.

The reason for this division of anger into negative and positive consequences can be traced back to its classic definition: for Aristotle (2019), anger is a response to a perceived offense, followed by the desire to retaliate. This definition was as a starting point for the moral and political debate on the emotion, in which anger unfolds in a complex way and can be both negative and positive: when engaged in vengeful plans it is vicious but, if moderated, it can be a virtuous character trait (BELL, 2009). Contemporarily, Martha Nussbaum has been one of the main authors criticizing the moral validity of anger, understanding that the emotion essentially involves the desire to cause suffering in its object. Nussbaum (2016) partly follows the Aristotelian definition of anger, although she is also influenced by the Stoic theory of emotions. She states that anger should be eliminated from moral life and from the political sphere, and that it should be replaced by more generous emotions.

Nussbaum is an influential philosopher with an extensive project on political emotions. By developing her normative critique of anger, she paves the way for the defense of forgiveness as an effective political practice for a society to flourish. However, in advocating the elimination of anger in the public sphere, Nussbaum neglects a range of feminist and anti-racist philosophers who have argued for the moral and political value of this emotion as a response to oppression. Here I structure these arguments in favor of anger and argue that they can be better understood if we consider the pluralist perspective, formulated by Laura Silva (2021a), rather than the classical retributive perspective, first

formulated by Aristotle (2009) and recently endured by Nussbaum (2016). The pluralist perspective admits the desire for retribution, but argues that the desire for recognition is central to anger, offering a more comprehensive definition of the nature of the emotion that matches its complexity. I intend to show that Nussbaum's understanding of the nature of anger is not adequate to understand the complexity of this emotion in situations of social oppression.

2 The normative critique of retributive anger

Martha Nussbaum (2016, p. 15) identifies the desire for retribution as one of the constituent components of anger. For her, part of the emotion is the belief that something unjust has occurred, accompanied by the belief that it would be good to repay this injustice. The author explains that the retribution component is the desire for suffering (p. 22-23):

> I just want the doer to suffer. And the suffering can be quite subtle. One might wish for a physical injury; one might wish for psychological unhappiness; one might wish for unpopularity. One might simply wish for the perpetrator's future to turn out really bad. All that I am investigating here is that anger involves, conceptually, a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender, in a way that is envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense. They get what they deserve.

Nussbaum's basis to her criticism of anger is the focus on the component of retribution, constituted by the desire to cause suffering. For her, the desire for retribution can be the desire for the offender to suffer or experience some kind of degradation and humiliation, which makes the emotion normatively problematic (ibid., p. 31). The desire for retribution also culminates in the impossibility of morally justifying anger. For Nussbaum, an emotion that wishes to cause suffering to others is not justifiable; it is, at most, well-grounded when directed at an injustice, but never morally justified (ibid., p. 35).

According to Nussbaum, an angry person has the possibility of following two roads: the first is the *road of payback*, where retributive anger makes the individual focus on vengeful plans with the illusion that this will diminish the initial offense. The angry person wants to take revenge on their target, with the fantasy that the offense or injustice will be undone. In Nussbaum's view, this road of anger is problematic because it is irrational: making the offender suffer does not diminish the harm inflicted on the individual. There is, however, a second road, called the *road of status,* where anger is directed towards promoting damage to the offender's reputation. In this domain, Nussbaum closely follows the approach developed by Aristotle, who emphasizes the relationship between anger and reputation. Explaining the relationship of emotion to issues of status and disregard, David Konstan (2000, p. 80, my translation) observes that:

> Aristotle makes it clear, in the very definition of anger, that disregard as such - a particular remark or gesture, for example - is not the cause of the emotion; more precisely, it must be disregard on the part of someone who is not expected to be, or who is not fit to be, the author of it (*prosêkôn*).

Nussbaum follows this definition and states that status-centered anger is still very present in contemporary society, and is the road most commonly taken by people who experience anger. The difference between the *road of status* and the *road of payback* is that, in the former, there is no concern with the offense or injustice itself, but rather with one's reputation in relation to the offense. To Nussbaum (p. 21),

> Anger aims at restoring lost control and often achieves at least an illusion of it. To the extent that a culture encourages people to feel vulnerable to affront and down-ranking in a wide variety of situations, it encourages the roots of status-focused anger.

The *road of status* is not irrational, like the *road of payback*, since retribution can indeed restore the reputation that was diminished by the initial insult. However, the individual makes an effort to take revenge, intending to cause humiliation and degradation. Nussbaum characterizes this action as a type of obsessive and narcissistic behavior. Narcissism corresponds to a person who is excessively focused on self-image issues. This person understands that the damage caused must be repaired, not through apologies or some kind of moral adjustment, but by lowering the status of the offender. Often, this debasement takes the form of public exposure of the insult received, with the aim of tarnishing the offender's image. For Nussbaum, this development of anger, despite achieving the desired result, is morally reprehensible due to its obsessive vengeful component. Therefore, for her, it is problematic in this other sense (2016, p. 28-29).

In exposing these roads that anger can take, Nussbaum states that every person who cares about rationality and morality eventually realizes that neither of them is coherent. In order to overcome this problem, she develops the *road of transition,* where anger is replaced by forgiveness or other more generous emotions. According to Nussbaum, by being able to think and act rationally, the angry person will realize that neither of the two paths should be followed and that there is the possibility of a third one, in which anger is not vengeful. She argues that (p. 30-31):

> in a sane and not excessively anxious and status-focused person, anger's idea of retribution on payback is a brief dream or cloud. soon dispelled by saner thoughts of personal and social welfare. So anger quickly puts itself out of business [...]

Nussbaum states that transitional anger is the only type of anger that is free from the retributive component and is, therefore, only a transition to other emotions. Transition anger is not definitely considered an instance of anger, insofar as it is not a retributive emotion (2016, p. 36). For her, transition anger is an emotion that transforms itself into forgiveness. Forgiveness, in this sense, is the moderation

of angry attitudes (2016, p. 15) and is the emotion necessary for the problem of anger - illustrated by the two roads of anger - to be overcome. The author states that any gain that anger has for morality is easily overcome when we put forgiveness in its place (ibid.).

Thus, for Nussbaum, transition anger is the only kind of anger that can be defended from a moral point of view, precisely because it is not retributive: "In the Transition, one comes to see that the real issue is how to produce justice and cooperation." (ibid., p. 32), as opposed to focusing on narcissistic vengeful plans. According to the author, "the retributive mentality wants degradation. The Transition mentality desires justice and brotherhood" (2015a, p. 53). She also argues that (ibid., p. 54):

> Transitional anger doesn't focus on status; nor does it desire, even briefly, the suffering of the offender as a kind of revenge for the injury. This anger never engages in any kind of magical thinking. It focuses on future well-being from the start. By saying "Something should be done about this", transitional anger commits itself to seeking strategies, but leaves open the question of whether the offender's suffering will be a strong candidate.

According to Nussbaum, transition anger seeks future improvements and does not focus on vengeful plans. This exception proposed by the author is not considered, here, to be a satisfactory alternative for understanding anger in situations of oppression, insofar as transition anger is defined only as a passage to other emotions. In developing the *road of transition*, Nussbaum aims to offer a solution to the problem of anger: concerned with overcoming the moral and political problems that expressions of anger impose, and considering that anger is a recurring emotion in the public sphere, Nussbaum offers the transition as a way of replacing the anger experienced initially. The author suggests that only in rare cases the response to offenses or injustices is immediate forgiveness or generosity (2016, p. 35) while, in more common cases, it is necessary to control one's own retributive anger in order to arrive at positive emotions. It is through the road of transition that one is then able to give up retributive anger. The proposal of transition anger is not, therefore, a proposal aimed at defending non-retributive anger; it is only a proposal that indicates the road to eliminating anger.

Thus, instead of anger, generous actions - even excessively generous ones - are more appropriate and more effective, Nussbaum argues. The conclusion of this analysis is that anger, considered in itself, is a problematic, irrational and narcissistic emotion. Even if it has some moral gains, it is too prone to error due to the centrality of its retributive component (2016, p. 14). From this conclusion, I point out that Nussbaum's approach neglects a range of feminist and anti-racist philosophers who consider anger in contexts of oppression, and I argue that the retributive definition is not capable of explaining the complexity of the kind of anger that is directed at social injustices. I therefore argue that the cases of anger towards oppression favor the pluralistic perspective, developed by Laura Silva (2021a; 2021b).

3 The pluralistic perspective on anger

The pluralist perspective, recently developed by Silva, argues that anger is better explained when we consider its capacity to contain a plurality of desires. In opposition to the classic definition of anger, Silva (2021a, p. 8) argues:

> Anger seems to robustly motivate behavior that is not aimed at the suffering of its targets. The evidence points to anger involving a distinct desire, one that does not dispose one to act in particularly retributive ways [...]. I take the desire in question to be a desire for recognition, that is, a desire for the targets of anger to recognize that they have committed a wrong.

Silva draws on empirical research to analyze the multiple desires contained in the emotion of anger and she concludes that the empirical research analyzed refers to three possibilities for defining anger (2021a, p. 1123-4): i) the emotion aims at recognition, while punitive behaviors are merely instrumental in achieving recognition of the target; ii) anger prototypically aims at recognition, with retributive anger being experienced only in atypical cases; and iii) anger involves causal relationships with at least two desires - retribution and recognition - with contextual moderators determining which desire will be experienced. The pluralist perspective defends definition iii).

Silva characterizes the desire involved in anger as follows (ibidem, 1124):

> Often, in anger, we wish the target would acknowledge the gravity of what they have done. In the first instance, we might wish for a justification of the harm we have suffered, such as to potentially excuse it [...] but if none can be given, we wish for accountability, where the offender judges their own act, or omission, as wrong. We do not aim to harm the offender, in a literal or symbolic way, we want them to share our evaluation of the harm as unacceptable.

Silva also argues that anger can have violent or retributive expressions even when its desire is recognition. In other words, even though anger does not desire revenge and suffering, it can be expressed through punitive behavior in order to achieve the desired recognition. Silva's pluralist perspective seems to explain the emotion more coherently, especially if we consider contexts of social injustice, where anger is experienced and expressed in a very complex way. I argue that this complexity is due to the fact that social contexts are permeated with political and structural concerns, which are not consistent with the desire for retribution as explained by the classic definition. In situations of social oppression, an exclusively retributive definition of anger is not capable of explaining the complexity of the emotion's desires, feelings and behaviors - as I will show in the next section.

As part of my argument, I consider that Nussbaum's alternative – transition anger – is not satisfactory and therefore the pluralist alternative is favored. While Nussbaum's transition defines anger

as a transition to other emotions, such as forgiveness and generosity, the pluralist perspective is able to understand the nature of anger in its variations. In the pluralist perspective, anger is not set aside, nor does it lose its intense and eventually aggressive nature; it is neither generous nor does it tend towards forgiveness. Insofar as my analysis seeks an approach to anger that better understands the emotion in contexts of oppression, transition anger is not a coherent alternative – since, in its political motivations, transition anger aims to extend forgiveness and act generously towards the object of the emotion. The pluralist perspective, on the other hand, understands the plural dimensions of anger, without reducing it to retribution, but also without turning it into a generous emotion. In what follows, I present two approaches to anger - one centered on gender concerns, and the other centered on racial concerns - to show that these defenses of anger are best analyzed from the pluralist perspective and not from the classical definition.

4 An analysis of anger's desires in context of oppression

Marylin Frye (1983) wrote several essays in feminist theory and became an important exponent of a tradition of feminist women who seek to understand morality through existing social hierarchies. In one of these essays, *A Note on Anger,* Frye investigates the anger experienced by (white) women, especially in the face of gender inequality.

The author provides a comprehensive perspective that helps to develop an idea of the value of anger in the face of gender inequality. Frye's conception of anger states that the emotion arises from frustration when an injustice is perceived. She argues that "anger seems to be a reaction to being thwarted, frustrated or harmed" (1983, p. 85). Anger appears when the flow of your life is obstructed. With this obstruction comes a feeling of frustration that can remain as mere disappointment or turn into anger. Frye argues that the transformation to anger occurs when this frustration is accompanied by the perception that the individual has been wronged: "Anger implies not only that the inhibition or obstruction is stressful, but that it is an offense" (ibid., p. 86).

From her conception of anger, Frye associates the emotion with respect. She argues that anger always involves a sense of justice: "Anger is always righteous" (1983, p. 86). In this sense, in order to perceive oneself as wronged, it is necessary to have a range of principles considered to be the fair way to be treated; to experience anger is to perceive that elements of this range of rights were not respected. In this context, anger contains a claim for dominance, involving a domain of "objects, spaces, attitudes and interests that are worthy of respect" (p. 87).

In this way, to feel anger is to implicitly believe that one is respectable or that a certain principle should be respected (p. 90). With this in mind, Frye states that anger is a communicative act: when you feel angry at being treated unfairly, you demonstrate what would be the fair way to act. When a woman feels angry, she reacts to the disrespect by demanding to be treated fairly. However, for anger to succeed as a communicative act, the object of the emotion must recognize the domain that is being claimed. In fact, it is common for the domain of principles involving a woman's life to be ignored and, as a result, anger fails in its communicative goal. If a woman feels angry at being treated unfairly, her emotion would have the capacity to express that this woman demands to be treated differently. However, if the object of the anger does not recognize the demands as valid, the communicative act of anger fails, and the emotion is understood as an isolated emotional outburst. In general, there is a consensus in the feminist tradition that anger, even if justified, is perceived by society as an irrational reaction, an emotional lack of control that must be contained (Scheman, 1993; Lorde, 1997).

Frye suggests that anger is an instrument for mapping the respect attributed to the angry individual. The emotion, from this perspective, works insofar as it shows the recognition of the dominance attributed to the person. She gives an example (p. 94):

> She entered the apartment she shared, not unhappily, with her young husband, imaginatively testing the viability of her anger [...] She discovered that the pattern was very simple and clear [...] She could freely feel anger in the kitchen, and with a little less freedom and on limited subjects she could feel anger in the living room. She couldn't feel anger in the bedroom.
>
> Anger. Domain. Respect.

The intelligibility of the woman's anger shows the extent of the respect attributed to her. As a housewife, she can feel anger in the kitchen, but she can not feel the same in the bedroom, demonstrating that the object does not recognize that the woman has control over her own sexuality.

Frye's description of anger does not seem to desire the humiliation or suffering of the object. This anger is closely linked to self-respect and the demand for recognition of the respect deserved, so that Frye's conception is better explained by understanding the desire for recognition as central to anger, and not the desire for retribution. Silva (2021a, p. 8) explains that "the desire for recognition is a desire for epistemic change in the target of anger [...], that is, a desire for wrong to be recognized". In the retributive definition, the emotion is necessarily linked to the desire for retribution and, therefore, when perceiving the offense, the desire of anger would be for the object to suffer in some way. Frye's anger, however, doesn't seem to involve any kind of retributive thinking and appears to be a claim for recognition: the recognition that one deserves respect in a domain of situations.

More recently, the author Céline Leboeuf (2018) has framed a defense of anger based on race. Her argument takes a phenomenological perspective that emphasizes the bodily and subjective dimension of the individual's experience and she argues that anger is a way of subjectively combating the consequences of racism. In her arguments, Leboeuf demonstrates how anger, even when involving desire for retribution, is capable of inhibiting the individual who suffers racism from internalizing the oppressive narrative.

Leboeuf (2018) exposes descriptions by the philosopher Frantz Fanon, in which the black man is faced with the oppressive gaze of white people. Fanon, in *Pele Negra, Máscaras Brancas* (2008, p. 104, my translation), describes:

> In the white world, people of color find it difficult to develop their body schema. Knowledge of the body is solely an activity of negation. It is a third-person knowledge. A dense atmosphere of uncertainty reigns around the body.

Leboeuf argues that this "white gaze" (p.15) that the black man encounters in the colonized world can provoke a sense of disorientation and bodily alienation in the black person. The gaze of the dominant assumes a position of power in relation to the black man, to the extent that the white gaze passes through the black man, but the black man does not look back at the white man. Fanon (2008, p. 105, my translation) describes:

> [...] it was no longer a matter of knowing my body in the third person, but in triple. On the train, instead of one, I was given two or three seats. [...] I existed as a triple: I occupied a certain place. I went to meet the other... and the other, evanescent, hostile but not opaque, transparent, absent, disappeared. Nausea...

By quoting this passage, Leboeuf elaborates the concept of bodily alienation caused by the white gaze. She argues that, in narrating his self-knowledge in third person, Fanon is describing that he has come to have a relationship with his body that is permeated by a multiplicity of racialized gazes. Thus, the black man becomes incapable of recognizing his own body and handling skillfully with the environment around him. His body schema is compromised by the internalization of someone else's gaze, the gaze of the dominant, of the colonizer.

Leboeuf continues his analysis by investigating the phenomenology of anger. Fanon describes anger as an explosion (Leboeuf, 2018, p. 23), demonstrating that, rather than imploding, anger has an expansive and evasive character. This evasion of anger takes feelings out of the inside and into the world, helping to get rid of the internalized white gaze. As the black man expresses his anger, he identifies his enemy (ibid., p. 24). Lebeouf says: "[...] In short, the black man's anger endows him with an acuity that he had lost when he first entered the white world" (p. 24).

This anger, present in Fanon's descriptions, is not an emotion free from the component of retribution. Fanon feels this explosive anger when a white woman says a racist phrase at him. By feeling anger, Fanon is able to identify his enemy and respond to him. In responding, he (2008, p. 107, my translation) states:

> Shame adorned the lady's face. At last, I was free of my ruminations. At the same time, I realized two things: I had identified my enemy and I had caused a scandal. I was completely satisfied. We were finally going to have some fun.

Leboeuf, for her part, argues that the anger Fanon feels is the kind of emotion related to status concerns, which Nussbaum (2016) characterizes as narcissistic. The satisfaction in seeing the woman ashamed, in causing a scandal, seems to be consistent with the desire for degradation that Nussbaum endorses in anger's definition and criticizes. Leboeuf argues, however, that if anger, even retributive anger, has the capacity to subjectively protect the oppressed individual, it should not be disregarded.

I want to suggest that the anger described by Fanon and analyzed by Leboeuf is not retributive, as Lebouef understands it. At the end of *Pele Negra, Máscaras Brancas* (2008, p. 191, my translation), Fanon writes: "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to sensitize the other, to feel the other, to reveal myself as another?". In relation to this passage, Leboeuf argues that Fanon seems to have overcome the desire for retribution and the concern to insult the white woman. She goes on to make an important connection: "[...] the anger he experiences when he enters white spaces, though tainted by ideas of retaliation, not only awakens him to his oppression but also sets the stage for reflections on racism that transcend the desire for revenge" (Leboeuf, 2018, p. 26). Here, Leboeuf relates the desire for retribution as the beginning of a reflection on oppression as something that is structural. At the end of his book, Fanon (2008, p. 191, my translation) writes: "Oh my body, always make me a man who questions!", which Leboeuf understands as a desire to understand racism, motivated by his bodily experience.

In addition to what Leboeuf argues, I would like to suggest that this anger does not initially involve a desire for revenge, but rather for racist situations to be recognized as unjust and wrong. For Silva (2021a), even when an action triggered by anger takes the form of retribution - such as Fanon's response to the white woman - this attitude may be aimed at recognition, not revenge: "We do not aim to harm the offender, in a literal or symbolic way, we want them to share our evaluation of the harm as unacceptable." (p. 1124). This situation can not be satisfactorily understood through Nussbaum's transition anger, since here retributive actions are triggered, even if the aim is not retribution. For Nussbaum, transition anger is a morally and politically defensible emotion precisely because, as a consequence of the lack of desire for retribution, the actions triggered by the emotion are not punitive or violent. In this way, Fanon's aggressive attitude towards the woman who offended him does not fit

the definition of transition anger, since its definition corresponds to an emotion educated for non-violent ends (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 52-3).

When Fanon feels energized to respond to the white woman's racism, and says "we were finally going to have some fun", he does not do so with the desire to payback the woman. Fanon (2008, p. 107-8, my translation and emphasis added) continues immediately after this passage:

> Once the battlefield had been marked out, I entered the fray.
>
> What do you mean? The moment I forgot, forgave and wanted only to love, my message was slapped back in my face! The white world, the only honest one, rejected my participation. [...] Since the other person hesitated to *recognize* me, there was only one solution: to make myself known.

In this passage, Fanon understands anger as a response to rejection, to a lack of *recognition*. In the end, when Fanon asks about superiority or inferiority, there is no desire to repay the dominant group, but rather to recognize the injustices that permeate colonized society; there is a demand for sensitivity (Fanon, 2008, p. 191), which can only be achieved by recognizing the Other.

In addition to the subjective gains of claiming respect and to the subjective protection, anger is also understood by Audre Lorde and bell hooks[1] as important for motivating to fight for social equality. In this sense, Nussbaum (2016) concedes that anger at social inequalities can motivate the search for justice; however, it always involves the idea of retaliating the initial insult. On the other hand, authors from the anti-racist tradition postulate that anger is important, not for retribution, but for changing society: for bell hooks (1995), anger is important for motivating courageous action and for Audre Lorde (1997), the emotion is a source of energy for significant social change. This tradition understands that anger is a common and justified emotional response to the various forms of racial insults that black individuals suffer in a structurally racist society.

bell hooks, in her first chapter of *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (1995) describes a situation in which she suffers racism from a white man who sits next to her on an airplane. She writes how the anger was experienced through the desire for retribution (p. 11):

> It was these sequences of racialized incidents involving black women that intensified my rage against the white man sitting next to me. I felt a 'killing rage'. I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly 'racism hurts'. With no outlet, my rage turned to over-whelming grief and I began to weep , covering my face with my hands.

[1] The author bell hooks chose to use her name in lowercase letters as a political position that prioritizes her ideas over her identity. In this article, her position will be respected.

hooks' anger involves the desire to cause suffering in the object of the emotion, which is described through fantasies about the man's death. This description of anger seems to be coherent with the retributive definition defended by Nussbaum, in which anger is constituted by the desire to cause suffering; in this conception, the emotion only ceases when the desire to payback the pain is satisfied. hooks describes that, without evasion, this desire to cause suffering in the object of her anger has become grief, so hooks' explanation seems to corroborate a description that I am attacking here. However, I want to show that this anger does not have, constitutively and centrally, the desire to cause suffering. She (1995, p. 19) states:

> I did not kill the white man on the plane even though I remain awed by the intensity of that desire. I did listen to my rage, allow it to motivate me to take pen in hand and write in the heat of that moment. At the end of the day, as I considered why it had been so full of racial incidents, of racist harass-ment, I thought that they served as harsh reminders compel-ling me to take a stand, speak out, choose whether I will be complicit or resist.

In this way, hooks demonstrates that anger was permeated by the desire for retribution; but was it the suffering of the offender that hooks seek? She describes an anger called *militant rage* which moves her to growth and change and which motivates courageous action to fight against racial injustices (p. 16):

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

If, as hooks shows, the desire for retribution were dissipated and, in its place, positive feelings of generosity and forgiveness remained, Nussbaum's transition could be coherent enough to explain militant rage. However, hooks' militant rage has an important element that does not fit into the definition of transition anger: the temporality. Transition anger is brief, transitive. Militant rage, on the other hand, is a lasting emotion; as a motivation for political struggle, this emotion does not turn into forgiveness, it continues to have intense, aggressive and disruptive elements. Regarding the connection between anger and positive emotions, hooks criticizes Cornel West who, by explaining Malcolm X's anger as 'love for blackness', ends up tempering the anger, transforming it into a positive emotion (1995, p. 13). For hooks, militant rage is a 'killing rage', particularly because of its intense component, which demolishes the passivity about the *status quo*.

Thus, hooks' work links militant rage to structural racism and argues that this emotion is a catalyst that motivates the search for social justice. As in Leboeuf (2018), the pluralist perspective, once again, can offer us a new way of understanding hooks' anger, insofar as it is able to explain the nuances of an emotion that desires retribution, which has in its phenomenology a feeling of intense discomfort, but which is not expressed with the goal of causing suffering in the object, but rather to overcome oppression.

Silva (2021a, p. 10) demonstrates that even when anger is expressed as retributive, it can be aimed at getting the target to recognize the injustice committed. She argues that there is evidence that, in most cases, "anger is best described as involving feelings of wishing that the target of the anger understands, recognizes or apologizes for the injustices of their actions" (2021a, p. 11). When hooks (1995, p. 11) fantasizes about the death of the white man on the plane, she states that: "[...] as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly 'racism hurts'", she seems to be wanting him to understand that his racism is painful, that it is unjust. This recognition can be achieved through suffering. hooks states (p. 20):

> Progressive black activists must show how we take that rage and move it beyond fruitless scapegoating of any group, linking it instead to a passion for freedom and justice that illuminates, heals, and makes redemptive struggle possible.

In this sense, hooks' militant rage, which initially seems to desire retribution, is an emotion that desires recognition of racism, which inspires social action and the fight against an unjust system.

Audre Lorde, an important author also belonging to the anti-racist tradition who defends anger in the struggle for social justice, makes a similar connection to anger as a motivation for the fight for social justice. In her speech called *The Uses of Anger* (1997), Lorde claims her anger at racism and defends the emotion as an appropriate and important response to foster social change. For her, all women have an arsenal of anger that arises from the oppressions they have suffered. When analyzed, articulated and well-directed, this anger can be a relevant source of energy for significant social change (p. 280):

> Focused precisely, it [anger] can become a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change. And when I talk about change, I'm not talking about simply changing positions or temporarily reducing tension, or the ability to smile or feel good. I'm talking about a basic, radical change [...].

Lorde's anger is a type of emotion with transformative potential. For her, the emotion has nothing to do with retribution and its aim is not to "exchange positions". She directs part of her speech at white feminist women and argues about the importance of black women's anger at racist attitudes being accepted and heard by white women, who are perpetrators of these behaviors. However, the reception of this anti-racist anger should not be through guilt: "[...] for corrective surgery, not guilt. Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we will all perish, for it does not save the future of any of us" (p. 278). In light of this, Lorde is proposing that anger is a bridge for building social alliances, so that the goal of Lorde's anger is not the debasement of the object, nor is it suffering.

5 Conclusion

The pluralist perspective developed by Laura Silva is recent and it demonstrates that anger is not necessarily a retributive emotion and can therefore be effective in the fight for justice. In this article, I

have applied Silva's perspective to the main defenses of anger in the feminist and anti-racist traditions. The aim was to demonstrate that anger does not have the fantasy of undoing the initial offense or the desire to humiliate the offender, as Nussbaum claims; instead, it more commonly desires recognition of injustices. The recognition component is not explained by Nussbaum's exception, namely her definition of transition anger. This emotion, elaborated as an alternative by her, has a restricted temporality where it is only briefly considered anger, and quickly makes the transition to emotions such as forgiveness and generosity. The pluralist alternative, on the other hand, is able to explain an anger that is not reduced to the desire for retribution but which has, in its phenomenology and expressions, the nuances of the emotion of anger that are intense and disruptive – not generous.

I conclude that the anger experienced in contexts of social oppression is better explained through Laura Silva's pluralist perspective of anger, which includes both desires for recognition and retribution and, in this way, there is no reason to accept the classic retributive definition of anger or its exception of transition anger, which has, in its nature, the transition to generosity or forgiveness. I leave open the cognitive, bodily and phenomenological components that are implied by accepting the pluralist perspective. At this point, my aim is to contribute to the argument that we must reject the exclusively retributive definition of anger in favor of a pluralist one.

A more exegetical analysis of the definition of 'transition anger', elaborated regarding the essential characteristics for the identity of anger in general (such as expressive and behavioral, physiological and phenomenological components) is yet to be developed – not even Martha Nussbaum offered a precise definition for this emotion. At this point, my analysis has focused on what has been developed by Silva: anger's desires. It is also important to consider that this article is part of a cognitivist debate on emotions, i.e., the definition of anger is disputed within a delimited scope that understands emotions as cognitive processes constituted by perceptions of intentional objects and desires.

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