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Artigos

The limitations of Constructive Anger

As limitações da Raiva Construtiva

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RESUMO

Este artigo oferece uma análise da definição de raiva e sua instrumentalidade política, enquadrada na literatura cognitivista sobre emoções. Analiso a crítica de Martha Nussbaum (2016), que afirma que a raiva é contraprodutiva e que deve ser substituída por emoções positivas – o que eu chamo de 'proposta de substituição'. Abordagens negativas da raiva assumem conotações prejudiciais quando direcionadas a mulheres e pessoas negras, por reforçarem estereótipos de gênero e raça. Em resposta a esse problema político, diversos estudiosos, entre eles Myisha Cherry (2022), desenvolveram defesas da raiva defendendo sua necessidade na luta contra o racismo e caracterizando-a como uma emoção construtiva. No entanto, eu argumento que a defesa que Cherry desenvolve de uma raiva construtiva – o que ela chama de "raiva Lordeana" – alinha-se à proposta de Nussbaum já que ambas, em última instância, advogam por um tipo de emoção positiva que envolve um processo de regulação emocional. Eu termino por defender que as defesas da raiva devem considerar a raiva não regulada e hostil que emerge no contextos de opressão.

Palavras-chave: Raiva; Raiva Política; Regulação Emocional; Raiva Lordeana; Raiva de Transição

ABSTRACT

This article provides an analytical examination of the definition of anger and its political instrumentality, framed within the cognitivist literature on emotions. I analyze Martha Nussbaum's critique (2016), which states that anger is counterproductive and that it should be substituted by positive emotions – a perspective I call the 'substitution proposal'. Negative approaches to anger take harmful connotations when directed at women and Black people, by raising up gender and race stereotypes. In response to that political problem, a range of scholars, among them Myisha Cherry (2022), have developed defenses of anger, advocating for its necessity to the fight against racism and characterizing it as a constructive emotion. However, I contend that Cherry's defense of constructive anger – what she calls 'Lordean rage' – aligns with Nussbaum's proposal, as both ultimately advocate for a type of positive emotion that entails a process of emotional regulation. I argue that defenses of anger should pay attention to non-regulated and hostile anger that surfaces in the context of oppression.

Keywords: Anger; Political Anger; Emotional Regulation; Lordean Rage; Transition Anger

1 INTRODUCTION

Anger is a controversial phenomenon that oscillates between being perceived as the most destructive of all emotions and an important tool for resisting oppression. Regarding the former, there is a long western tradition of anger's critics, tracing back from Aristotle and the Stoics, that have argued for its moderation or total elimination from the social realm, focusing on its negative and destructive components, particularly the hostile and retributive ones. Recently, Martha Nussbaum (2016) has taken the task of criticizing anger and defending a politics without it, precisely because anger has negative elements that make it too prone to destructive consequences. On the other hand, a range of contemporary defenses of anger have been developed, focusing on anger's positive components rather than on its negative ones. These defenses vary between and sometimes converge into anger's moral value and its political instrumentality. I am particularly interested in the definitions of anger that are defended within the debate on anger's instrumentality in which anger's constructive elements are highlighted – those elements that aim to construct a better society through positive and peaceful actions, as opposed to those that seek to correct injustices by destroying the target through punitive actions. I shall demonstrate that defenses of constructive anger are also defenses of emotional regulation, and I argue that hostile anger in the context of oppression is more prevalent than pro-anger accounts typically acknowledge.

I begin my analysis with Nussbaum's theory (2016) which, while depicting anger as retributive and politically counterproductive, argues that anger must be eliminated by a regulation process[1], called the Transition. She states that anger should be substituted by positive emotions such as civic love, compassionate hope, empathy, forgiveness or by a regulated instance of anger, called 'transition anger'. In the next

[1] I will not delve into the debate on emotional regulation here. I refer to this process in its broad spectrum – from the simple habit of reflecting on one's emotional response before expressing it (something quite common in adult life) to the more complex educational process of setting aside all negative emotions (such as Nelson Mandelas' life-long spiritual development). I thank Professor Myisha Cherry and colleagues for inviting me to reflect on this topic at the Emotion and Society Laboratory's Work In Progress session.

section I delve into her account, referring to it as the 'substitution proposal'. Opposing Nussbaum's proposal, Myisha Cherry (2022) has developed an antiracist approach in which she argues that one type of anger is essential to politics because it is constructive rather than destructive and counterproductive. In section 3 I shall complicate Cherry's thesis, arguing that Cherry agrees with Nussbaum's substitution proposal precisely because she eliminates all of anger's negative components – i.e. hostility and aggressivity – in her approach to Lordean rage, limiting the contexts in which Lordean rage could be experienced as it is a kind of anger that requires a process of emotional regulation. I draw on Laura Silva's recognitional view (2021a) to explain why I take constructive anger to be a type of regulated anger in cases of oppression, and I argue that we must start considering the effectiveness of hostile anger in our efforts to argue in favor of this emotion.

2 Anger's counterproductivity and the substitution proposal

Martha Nussbaum is the major critic in western contemporary literature on anger's political productivity and moral value since her book *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016). She advocates for anger's elimination and argues for a larger project in which emotions such as civic love, forgiveness and generosity should replace it in politics (Nussbaum, 2015b; 2016). Most of the reactions on Nussbaum's account take the perspectives of the oppressed, since there is a consensus in the present literature that anger is a response to injustices. Arguments for anger's elimination have potentially harmful consequences to political discourse to the extent that it affects specially people that face injustices the most. The dismissal of anger's expressions in politics is also connected to race and gender stereotypes, inasmuch angry women are deemed hysterical and angry Black people are deemed savages (Srinivasan, 2018; Williges, 2023). On the other hand, anger is legitimized when displayed by dominant groups (Lyman, 2004), especially when it is harnessed by the State. In this sense, the philosophical debate on anger is grounded on political concerns, and the consequences

of eliminating anger from politics are considered, by proponents of anger, as socially harmful to oppressed groups.

It is through some of these political motivations that the debate on anger has been developed and Nussbaum's account on anger has been discussed. This debate is centered in a cognitivist framework. Nussbaum follows the Greek Stoic tradition according to which emotions are evaluative judgments about objects in the world (2001, p. 32). To her, the necessary elements to emotions are: the object of the emotion; the intentionality of the object; the beliefs about the intentional object; and the evaluative character of these beliefs. Regarding anger, its object involves the evaluative belief that an offense or wrongdoing has occurred and the belief that it would be good to retaliate; in other words, anger is defined as the belief that the agent has been wronged, followed by the belief that the object should suffer as a way of retribution for the damage caused (2016, p. 46). She links the belief the one should suffer with the idea of desire accounted in Aristotle's view, who defines anger as "a desire accompanied by pain for an imagined retribution on account of an imagined slighting inflicted by people who have no legitimate reason to slight oneself or one's own" (Aristotle apud Nussbaum, 2016, p. 17). Nussbaum points to some limitations to the Aristotelian definition, such as the reference to a 'slight' inflicted upon the agent. She expands this component, agreeing with the Stoic tradition that develops it in terms of belief of 'wrongful harm' (p. 20) and she concludes that anger can be both aimed at a slight but also at a 'wrongdoing' that does not involve a 'status injury' (p. 19). As Nussbaum has both Aristotelian and Stoic influence, she uses the terms 'desire' and 'belief' interchangeably in her work. Although the bodily feelings have too little constancy to be included in the definition of anger (p. 16), anger still has a conative component related to its beliefs/desires that predisposes one to act. Nussbaum uses the belief for retribution as synonym of the desire for retribution in the extent that it indicates that the angry agent will plan to harm the object in retribution or they will effectively do so. Her account of retributive anger is, in other words, an account of punitive anger.

Grounded on this definition of retributive anger, Nussbaum has criticized the emotion's role in political changes because it is destructive and eventually ends up putting the angry agent in a worse situation, stating that this emotion is counterproductive to revolutionary justice. Her argument involves both a moral critique on the grounds that desires to cause harm in another person are morally problematic, and a counterproductivity claim that states that retributive anger has an aggressive and punitive tendency which, according to her, is counterproductive to social justice.

Nussbaum argues that anger puts society in a worse situation, as violence is considered to be politically ineffective in the sense that it does not bring justice[2]. She argues in favor of a generous and reasoned approach to political change, eliminating anger from the political sphere and cultivating emotions such as forgiveness, generosity or civic love. According to her, a sane and not excessively anxious and status-focused person would not continue to feel retributive anger (2016, p. 30). She argues that someone reasoned and not obsessive with their own status would make a transition to generous emotions. This transition is a process that involves fostering positive emotions and setting aside irrational ones. Nussbaum says that when the reasonable subject notes the irrationality of anger and its payback beliefs, they would shift off the terrain of anger toward more productive forward-looking thoughts, focusing on what can be done to increase social welfare (p. 6). She calls this process of reflection that leads to a future-directed thinking and to generous emotions as "The Transition".

Nussbaum analyzes Martin Luther King Jr's speech, *I Have a Dream,* in which anger seems to fill its role as a motivational force for King to address the injustices. However, in her view, King quickly makes the Transition and, instead of confronting White Americans with hostility, he "calmly" talks about how the Nation can pay the debt that it has had with Black Americans since the Emancipation. Nussbaum argues that the aim is not to humiliate, but to think about how this debt will be paid (2015a, p. 52),

[2] As Srinivasan (2017) and Silva (2021b) have stated, this is an empirical question that is not satisfied by Nussbaum's conceptual analysis. There is a variety of work that conceptually analyzes it and reaches different conclusions, such as Fanon 2004 and Santos, 2022, and there are empirically informed works that analyze this issue more deeply, such as Silva, 2021c.

by setting aside retributive anger and by making the Transition process. According to Nussbaum, people that feel retributive anger are narcissists or irrational beings to the extent that, when one can think clearly and does not focus on their own status, it is possible to head to the Transition and engage into positive, generous emotions. I refer to the Transition process as a regulation process, insofar it is a process in which the person is able to deliberate their emotional expressions and behaviors. In this sense, Nussbaum argues that there are other ways to fight for revolutionary justice that do not face anger's political and moral problems. Because her conclusion is that anger should be substituted by positive emotions through a regulation process, I call her account the 'substitution proposal'.

She argues that Mahatma Gandhi, the aforementioned Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela are examples of people who made the Transition. Nussbaum analyzes Mandela's lifelong struggle against anger and argues that he was impressively capable of moving beyond it into a remarkable generosity (2018, p. 112). She says that, during his long time in prison, Mandela used to practice Stoic meditations in order to reach a state in which he would not desire the punishment of others. Nussbaum's account involves the desire for retribution as a conceptual part of it and, when regulated, retributive troughs are set aside. Although Nussbaum does not focus on anger's phenomenology and action tendencies, it is clear that anger's hostility and aggressiveness are linked to anger's desires. Therefore, when Nussbaum argues for anger's regulation into positive emotions, she is arguing for the elimination of feelings of hostility that can lead to aggressive and violent actions. By offering examples such as Gandhi, King Jr, and Mandela's, Nussbaum makes it clear that eliminating anger is a process of re-education and regulation that makes it possible to set anger aside and transition to positive emotions – such as, generosity, civic love, compassion or what she calls *transition anger.*

At this moment of her work, Nussbaum makes an exception about her claim that anger always involves a desire for retribution. She argues that there is one type of anger that is politically valuable and that aligns with 'saner thoughts of social and personal

welfare: the transition anger. In this sense, the regulation process can be followed by a number of positive, generous emotions, and transition anger is one of them.

Her account of transition anger is similar to a type of anger that Aristotle sees as a trace of virtuous character. To Aristotle, emotions are essential aspects of life that can be educated by reason to become virtuous. In this sense, there is excellence of character in knowing how to manage anger in the face of an offense, which Aristotle describes in terms of "good temper" (Aristotle, 2006, p. 50). Similarly, Nussbaum argues that when a person is reasonable, they will set anger aside. In order to experience transition anger one should be able to think clearly and educate themselves in order to eliminate punitive thoughts. Nussbaum states that one way of educating oneself is to see the object's point of view, so the angry subject would be less prone to be retributive (2016, p. 54). There are some rare cases, according to Nussbaum, in which the experience of anger is already a transition anger and the retribution is never a part of it (p. 35). So, although transition anger can be educated, it also can be the first and only instance of anger's experience, when the agent already has a virtuous character.

In this sense, transition anger is defined by the belief that a wrong has happened, but does not have the belief that retribution would be a good thing. She mentions Gandhi and King's movements, stating that they repudiated anger. In some cases in which anger was accepted by them, it was always transition anger or else a brief episode of retributive anger, but leading to the Transition very quickly (2018, p. 111), as in King's abovementioned speech.

There is a conceptual problem here. Nussbaum is not clear about whether transition anger is anger *per se:* "I really don't care how we answer this question. Such special borderline cases are rarely handled well by conceptual analysis. It's certainly an emotion: the person is really upset" (p. 36). In some moments of her argument, she very strongly claims that anger is essentially retributive and that transition anger looks like compassionate hope and not anger (ibidem). In other moments, she refers to transition anger as an exceptional case of anger. Nonetheless, what is clear is that transition anger is an emotion that apprehends wrongdoings and, instead of having retributive thoughts

or displaying retributive actions, it has been reflected upon, regulated and transformed into a non-retributive emotion. There are two important elements of transition anger: i) only exceptionally moral people feel and express it, since "Such presence of mind typically requires long self-discipline" (2015a, p. 54) and ii) it aims at injustices, it "focuses on future welfare from the start. Saying 'Something should be done about this', Transition-Anger commits itself to a search for strategies, but it remains an open question whether the suffering of the offender will be a strong candidate" (ibidem). Drawing on these claims, there are two possible ways of interpreting the emotion: as a kind of anger that transitions to *other* emotions, or as a kind of anger that went through the Transition process and *became* a positive, constructive kind of anger. I am arguing that transition anger is not a *transition* to other emotions but it is a kind of anger that already *went through* the Transition/regulation process. According to Nussbaum, King is one of the exceptional individuals who experience transition anger, and in his speech he has illustrated the Transition process until the final emotion was transition anger: "one could imagine that King's own emotion was Transition-Anger, while the emotion constructed in his speech, for his audience, is brief (standard) anger and then a turn to the Transition" (ibidem). Immediately after this quote, Nussbaum offers some suggestions on how one can be less prone to anger's errors and more prone to make the Transition, suggesting that Transition is a process of regulating one's state of mind. The Transition process is what transforms standard (retributive) anger into transition anger.

Nussbaum's overall argument states that anger itself is politically counterproductive and should be eliminated from the political sphere, and the instrumental roles that anger potentially has (such as signaling an injustice or motivating one to fight) only make sense if followed by a regulation process. In these cases, one must eliminate retributive thoughts and head to a positive, generous and compassionate mentality. Anger, in this sense, does not have a place in the political sphere, since it is too prone to errors because of its retributive desire. Nussbaum's substitution proposal concludes that the regulation process, which she calls the Transition, is the only

politically viable solution to anger, and it leads to the substitution of anger by positive emotions like transition anger, compassionate hope, civic love, forgiveness.

The substitution proposal has raised a range of counter-arguments in which anger is defended as an important tool for resisting oppression. I now turn to one of them: Myisha Cherry's account of Lordean rage. Her account of anger challenges the retributive definition endorsed by Nussbaum as she focuses on a type of anger that is constructive rather than retributive, and that is essential to antiracist struggle. I shall argue that, although Cherry develops an elaborate account of how constructive anger is necessary to the fight against racism, the definition of Lordean rage is too similar to Nussbaum's definition of transition anger, as Lordean rage is a type of emotion that can only be experienced after an emotional regulation process.

3 'Lordean rage' as a defense of regulated anger

Myisha Cherry, in *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle* (2021), offers a defense of anger's role in political struggle. Cherry characterizes herself as a 'variation artist', referring to authors that have defined anger as a multidimensional phenomenon and not reduced it to one unique definition or type. She also localizes Nussbaum as a variation artist, insofar as she accepts transition anger as an exceptional case of retributive anger. However, unlike Nussbaum, Cherry states that anger is essential to antiracist struggle and that her definition of antiracist anger can not be equated to transition anger. In what follows I explain Cherry's definition of Lordean rage and I argue that Cherry's approach aligns to Nussbaum's in being a rare and exceptional type of anger, experienced only in limited contexts of racial oppression.

Cherry builds her definition of constructive anger upon Audre Lorde's discourse, *The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism* (1997). She calls it *Lordean rage*:

> [...] Lordean rage, as I conceive it, is a type that plays an important role in anti-racist struggle and is not necessarily destructive. [...] The targets of Lordean rage are those who are complicit in and perpetrators of racism or racial injustice. This type of anger is directed at racist actions, racist attitudes and presumptions (of people) that arise out of those attitudes. [...] Its aim is change. [...] Lordean rage aims for this kind of change – not

> destruction of the good or elimination of the other, but change in racist beliefs, expectations, policies, and behaviors that shape and support white supremacy. (2021, pp. 23-4).

She relies on four analytical concepts to distinguish different types of anger: target, action tendency, aim of the anger, and perspective that informs the emotion, highlighting that the target of Lordean rage is racism, the action tendency is to channel the energy into activism, the aim is social change, and the perspective informing this type of anger is the freedom of all people. According to Cherry, Lordean rage aims for change rather than destroying the other. Paytas succinctly describes her definition as: "a state in which one is highly motivated to fight for justice from an inclusive perspective" (2022, p. 148).

The other four kinds of anger that Cherry mentions have, to some degree, negative, hostile and aggressive components. 'Rogue rage' is aimed at injustices but it is not focused with precision to systemic targets; 'wipe rage' is experienced by people that do not tolerate different social groups, aiming at their elimination; 'narcissistic rage' is experienced by egocentric people who think everything is about their status; and 'ressentiment rage' has an reactive action tendency and it is commonly expressed by downranking the other. Lordean rage, however, is constructive because it is aimed at the right systemic target, has an inclusive perspective, and channels the energy only to the fight for justice.

Cherry follows Lorde on her aforementioned discourse and states that Lordean rage is useful if focused with precision and if it motivates the required action. It is metabolized anger, referred to by Cherry as a virtuous practice of channeling the power and energy of anger towards constructive goals and not towards harming the other (2021, p. 24). Furthermore, according to Cherry, Lordean rage is motivational because it has a goal for social change. The eagerness to change the injustice is what motivates one to act, while the self-belief in their ability to cause change and their optimism of a successful outcome are also motivational aspects of this type of anger.

Cherry's definition of motivational anger diverges away from not only the Western traditional perspective on anger but also from folk understandings of what

angry actions can be. Nussbaum herself accepts that hostile and retributive anger motivates one to fight. Anger is commonly accepted as highly motivational because of its negative components that are linked to hostility and tendencies to attack back (Fridja, 1987, p. 140), and not because of eagerness, self-belief and optimism. Cherry also states that anger is, in general, bound to negative components, except Lordean rage, which is positive, because it is a response to racism as a systemic phenomenon (p. 25). She adds that this type of anger also has a relationship with agape love (p. 92), stating that the emotions' components, which motivates one to fight, are positive components, i.e., are not linked to violent or vengeful thoughts. In this sense, Lordean rage is motivational not because of its antagonistic perspectives and tendencies to attack back, but because of its inclusive perspectives of freedom and justice, and because of its relation to love. According to her, the *natural* response to racism is likely to be freedom for all people and the aim is likely to be to change the world (2021, p. 25). Anger at racism would coherently consist in positive and constructive elements insofar it does not make sense to be angry at a systemic target and feel vengeful or narcissistic anger.

But it is controversial that antiracist anger would be *naturally* constructive and positive rather than aggressive and violent. bell hooks, in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (1995), also commits to an inclusive perspective as she criticizes systemic racism and aims at changing the structure in order to build a society in which everyone is free. Nonetheless, hooks describes antiracist anger as a 'killing' emotion that is so intense that it threatens to control her. In fact, she begins her book by describing a desire to murder a man who was racist to her friend. She argues for the political role of anger while accepting its intense, hostile and violent nature. To hooks, killing rage is an antiracist emotion that has the impulse to attack back but that can also be educated into a militant rage that fuels transformative actions: "Rage can be consuming. It must be tempered by an en-gagement with a full range of emotional responses to black struggle for self-determination" (p. 19). hooks maintains that anger has a political role in ending racism, and she emphasizes its motivational force, making a strong case for

militant rage, but she still accepts that anger's *nature* is consuming, hostile and even violent. Although it is necessary to link killing rage to a passion for freedom, this rage that is aimed at racial injustices is not naturally nor necessarily positive or tied only to constructive elements – it has to be educated or, yet, regulated in order to be constructive. In this sense, hooks distinguishes between the feeling of killing rage and the destructive actions that may proceed: "Many African Americans feel uncontrollable rage when we encounter white supremacist aggression. That rage is not pathological. It is an appropriate response to injustice. However, if not *processed constructively*, it can lead to pathological behavior" (p. 26, emphasis added).

Similarly, James Baldwin in *Notes of a Native Son* (2012) describes his anger as intense as a pounding in the skull and a fire in the bowels. He finds that his anger is so violent that it would end up killing him or making him kill someone else. To him, Black people face the burden of living in a constant state of anger and he also argues that this intense anger towards racism has to be educated. To Baldwin, one has to *learn* to control their anger and live with it consciously, otherwise it is a "chronic disease" that can be destructive to the subject (2012, p. 81).

Considering these antiracist authors, it is open to dispute whether or not antiracist anger is actually *naturally* bounded only to positive components. Cherry chose to emphasize Audre Lorde's perspective on anger, but as I have demonstrated, we have several antiracist authors that describe anger towards racism as aggressive, hostile and violent. Considering these perspectives, I want to point out that antiracist anger should not be considered *naturally* bound to positive components. Rather, we should consider antiracist anger to be consuming, aggressive and even destructive and we should be asking ourselves in which circumstances antiracist anger can be experienced as a constructive and non-hostile emotion.

In fact, anger towards racism frequently is *regulated* into a strategic anger. Historically, for prudential reasons, it is considered that Black people have to regulate and strategize their anger so they would not face fatal repression. James Scott (1990) has described this phenomenon when arguing for the hidden transcripts of oppressed

people in violently repressive societies. In these cases, Black enslaved women, when raising their children, often had to teach how to suppress their anger as a survival skill. Being able to hide the anger in repressive contexts was not only necessary but also a smart strategy. Baldwin has also pointed to the dangerousness of anger in a segregated society, to which Cherry herself calls this conscious anger as "useful anger" – one that, according to her, is linked to love and not to hate (2022).

Therefore, I suggest that we should not accept that anger towards racism is *naturally* bound to positive components, or even *commonly* bound to them. In fact, I take antiracist anger to be often experienced as a hostile emotion rather than a positive one. Laura Silva's recognitional view (2021a) supports my argument. According to her, anger's motivational effect is determined or at least influenced by key moderators. One moderator is the perceived changeability of the target of anger (p. 10). Anger aims towards epistemic change in the target but, when it is perceived that this aim would not be accomplished, the behaviour displayed by anger would probably be aggressive and hostile. These are called nothing-to-lose scenarios in which constructive forms of anger's expressions are blocked or probably inefficient. Cases of social injustice, Silva states, "are likely to often be quite similar to these nothing-to-lose scenarios. These are cases where dominant groups are often reluctant to give up power, where the anger of oppressed groups is caricaturized as excessive" (p. 16). In these cases, hostile or retributive behaviour can be instrumental towards the aim of recognition, or they can be intrinsic to anger since recognition is not considered as an option at all (2021a, p. 12).

Cases of racial injustice can be cases in which the target of anger is, in fact, willing to change their perspectives and, therefore, constructive and recognitional anger may be experienced. However, structural racism can also lead to nothing-to-lose scenarios. In this sense, antiracist anger should be considered, at least in some cases, an hostile emotion – an emotion that would have to go through a regulation process to be experienced as Lordean rage. In fact, Cherry states that people with Lordean rage are not saints or morally superior, but they have *learned* to use anger. She argues that we can all learn to use it in a positive way (2021, p. 29), indicating that it is experienced after

a regulation process. If this is the case, we have the same process that Nussbaum has argued for. Transition anger and some instances of Lordean rage would be instances of regulated anger, i.e., a kind of aggressive and hostile anger that was transformed into a positive emotion.

Cherry has predicted the argument that I have made regarding the similarity to transition anger: "note that this anger [Lordean rage] is transformative anger and not transition anger" (2021, p. 24). She argues that, different from Nussbaum's definition, Lordean rage does not need to transition to positive emotions in order to achieve its goals. She clearly states that rogue, wipe, and narcissistic rage are the kinds of anger that ought to be substituted with other emotions in order to reach progress (ibidem), but Lordean rage is already a type of emotion politically and morally valuable. On my perspective, Cherry takes transition anger to be a transition to other emotions, however, as I have emphasized in the section above, it is a misleading analysis[3]. Nussbaum's notion of transition anger does not necessarily constitute a *transition* into other emotions. Transition anger is, rather, one type of emotion that *follows* the Transition/regulation process in which one is turning from hostile anger into constructive thoughts (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 131). In this sense, by regulating their emotion, one can transition to forgiveness, to love, to compassion, to transition anger… or, yet, to Lordean rage.

4 The limitations of constructive anger

I have argued that Cherry's thesis on Lordean rage should be understood as a thesis of regulated anger. At a first analysis, it seems that my argument is based on the assumption that anger is intrinsically hostile. However, I do not need to commit to that general claim: I limit myself to defending that anger in contexts of oppression is hostile

[3] I have also analyzed Nussbaum's transition anger as a transition to other emotions in recent works (Bello, 2024; Williges, Bello, 2022). However, later on I took a closer look at her definition of the Transition mentality and I have found elements that demonstrate that transition anger is an emotion that follows the Transition process, rather than being the process itself.

due to key moderators highlighted by Laura Silva's recognitional view (2021a). The empirical studies Silva analyzes suggest that: (i) anger directed at groups and institutions becomes aggressive after communicative efforts have failed; and (ii) aggression is more typical in already hostile relationships. Silva also recognizes that:

> If real life cases of social injustice are like nothing-to-lose scenarios, then they involve key moderators that the experimental work has highlighted to play a determinate role in leading angry agents to act retributively: they involve targets of anger that are unwilling to change and that are likely to perceive the anger of the oppressed as inappropriate. Anger will therefore, in fact, likely be more retributive in cases of social injustice than in cases where the targets of anger are more receptive to anger's recognitional aims. (2021a, p. 16)

In order to further explore Silva's account of hostile anger, I will briefly offer an example to illustrate a nothing-to-lose scenario. My intention is not to exhaust the topic, but to indicate that hostile anger should be taken seriously as it is a common and justifiable emotional response in our society. I shall present to the debate Brazilian author Carolina Maria de Jesus, whose anger was determined by key moderators (i) and (ii) mentioned above.

De Jesus was a Black woman who lived in the Canindé favela and who narrates in her diaries the daily struggles she experienced as a single mother of three children living in poverty, highlighting the pervasive hunger that accompanied her and her family for most of their lives. Born only 26 years after the abolition of slavery in Brazil, de Jesus worked as a paper collector in the streets of São Paulo, and her life was marked by the profound, uninterrupted violence of a country that had never fully committed to racial equality. When the slavery was abolished, only in 1888, the recently freed people went to Brazilian cities to find work. As it was difficult to construct a financially stable life in a still very racist society, they started to work informal jobs and to build their little shacks on the top of the hills. Hence the existence of the favelas, where de Jesus lived while writing her first published work called *Quarto de Despejo* (2014). De Jesus refers to the favelas as the *garbage dump* of the city – a metaphor that underscores the

dehumanizing logic of a society that treats the poor as disposable. It is in this already hostile context that de Jesus has lived with hunger, anger and courage to fight.

De Jesus's works are valuable contributions to philosophy, political science, moral psychology, and literature. While I will highlight only a small portion of her legacy here, her writings offer much more. Her diaries revealed a violent Brazil at a time when the country was striving to present itself as a land of progress. Despite facing overwhelming societal barriers, de Jesus became one of the most widely read authors of her time. She began writing her diaries with the goal of exposing to the world the brutal realities of life in the favelas – and she succeeded. The high cost of living in Brazil and the resulting hunger are central themes in her work. In recounting the suicide of a neighbor, she writes: "What makes me sad is the suicide of sir Tomás. Poor man. He has killed himself because he was tired of suffering with the cost of life." She continues: "When I find something that I can eat in the garbage, I eat it. I don't have the courage to kill myself. And I can't die from hunger" (2014, p. 138). Through her diaries, she showed the world that a significant portion of Brazil was being devastated by hunger and neglect.

However, beyond serving as a powerful communicative tool, her writings also became a means of reflecting on her own frustrations as a *favelada* woman. De Jesus engages in deep self-reflection, questioning why some people are condemned to live as she does. She directs blame toward politicians, her neighbors, and anyone she can, but ultimately, her diary becomes a space to organize her thoughts and emotions. In her second published diary, she writes: "[...] I can't fight when I don't have what to eat. I prefer to write" (2021, p. 91). This sentence reveals how writing functioned as a survival mechanism and a way to channel pain and anger. Her writing can be understood as a form of emotional regulation.

However, de Jesus reveals her own ambiguity throughout her diaries, allowing the reader to see her in all her complexity: a woman who fights for those who cannot fight for themselves, yet also someone who makes many enemies along the way. Although writing served as a means of regulating her emotional state, her diaries also portray her as a deeply angry and often hostile woman.

> May 16th, 1958: I woke up nervous. Because I wanted to stay at home, but there was nothing to eat.
>
> ... I would not eat because there was too little bread. I wonder if I am the only one who lives this life? What can I expect of the future? A bed in Campos do Jordão. When I am hungry I want to kill Janio, I want to hang Ademar and burn Juscelino. The difficulties end people's affection for the politicians.[4] (2014, p. 35)

De Jesus experienced firsthand the opportunistic behavior of politicians who visited the favelas only to ask for votes and, once elected, quickly forgot about those who most needed their attention. She was always politically engaged and openly criticized politicians who failed to act on behalf of the favelas. Her anger toward them is not the kind of anger that holds out hope for peaceful dialogue – it is aggressive, hostile, and consuming. Every time she felt hunger or cold, she was reminded that her condition was a symptom of a country governed by those who neglect and abandon the *favelados*.

De Jesus' hostile anger is not a deviation from an ideal type of anger but a reflection of its limits under extreme conditions. Her life illustrates how, in contexts of chronic deprivation, racial injustice, and institutional abandonment, anger tends to be hostile particularly because her social context does not offer the possibilities of change by constructive, peaceful means. De Jesus is a paradigmatic example of Silva's nothing-to-lose scenario: her communicative efforts through writing were powerful, yet she lived in a society structured to ignore them. Her constructive anger would never be recognized, just as her very existence was denied. Her hostile emotional state was shaped by the hostile context in which she lived—and her case is far from unique. Many others endure extreme poverty and face pervasive, daily racism, all within a system where those responsible show no willingness to change. In such nothing-to-lose scenarios, forms of constructive and recognitional anger, such as transition anger or Lordean rage, are rarely accessible or sustainable.

[4] Campos do Jordão is a city in the state of São Paulo that was popular for its tuberculosis treatment centres. She refers to it as a place where one goes to die. Jânio Quadros, Adhemar de Barros and Juscelino Kubitschek were influential politicians in Brazil at the time. Juscelino was president in 1956, followed by Janio in 1961, while Adhemar was mayor of São Paulo from 1957 to 1961.

Introducing Carolina Maria de Jesus into this debate is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Rather, it is an effort to initiate the discussion by foregrounding the context of extreme poverty and intersectional oppression in which many people still live today. In the contexts she describes, peaceful dialogue and a willingness to change are not prevailing conditions. This brings us to an urgent and often overlooked question in the pro-anger debate: what should be done with hostile anger in situations of oppression? In cases where individuals face the brutal realities of a racist, sexist, and classist society – where each day is quite literally a matter of survival – expecting them to regulate hostile anger into a constructive emotion may be simply too much to ask.

5 Conclusion

My aim in this work was to demonstrate that the debate on political anger contains a significant gap: while constructive forms of anger are well defended, hostile anger is largely neglected. I have argued that Lordean rage constitutes a regulated type of anger, akin to Nussbaum's notion of transition anger. Although regulated anger can and should be defended as a valuable tool in resisting oppression, I have shown that we must also pay attention to hostile anger, particularly because it is a common emotion in contexts of oppression. My intention here was to emphasize that asking oppressed individuals to transform their emotional responses into peaceful emotions may be an unreasonable demand, and we should start turning our efforts toward recognizing the political value of hostile anger in the struggle for justice.

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