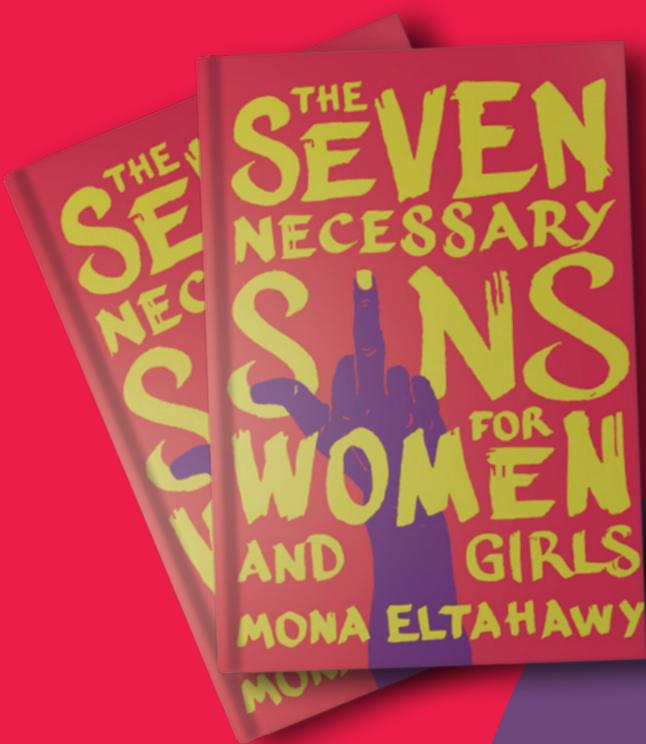




MONA ELTAHAWY'S CARTOGRAPHIES OF FEMINIST FURY



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While women are socialised away from expressions of their anger except under limited conditions, they are also conditioned to fear men's volatility.

I wrote this book with enough rage to fuel a rocket. I knew I had to write it while I was still high on the glory of beating up a man who had sexually assaulted me. Who was this woman I had become, who looks men in the eye, seizing their gaze with my fury until their fear tells me they understand not to fuck with me? I wanted to figure her out. For years I had been shedding shame and gaining fury. For years I had been thumping away at patriarchy, like a piñata hanging tantalizingly just out of reach. It was stubborn, but my tenacity and ferocity became my ladder. This book is my instruction manual for smashing that piñata (Eltahawy, 2019:1).

Thus begins Mona Eltahawy's *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*, a work of creative non-fiction in which intertwined aesthetic, political and situational registers produce important insights for feminist spatial imagining. Attentive to how patriarchal schemas are repetitively produced through wording, movement and mapping, Eltahawy intertextually theorises feminist fury. Literary and cartographic strategies are central to this imaginative project in which she calls attention to "the capacity of literature, not only to imagine the ways in which reality has been, or might be, interpreted, but also to affect the ways in which reality is *produced*" (Huggan, 2008:13, Emphasis in original).

Colonial mapping regimes continue to organise the world through, among others, militarised border controls, the threat of walls, visa requirements, and the questions that attach to whether certain bodies can ever belong in the locales over which they have legitimate bureaucratic claim. At the same time, however, those on whose lands, bodies and psyches these colonial knowledges were imposed respond in numerous defiant, disobedient, disruptive, mocking, and new ways to this history.

Feminist literary cartography recognises its world-making energies as developing "a language free of phallogocentrism" (Fincham, 2014:131). Cartography's longstanding associations "with surveillance and control", notwithstanding, it "has recently come to take on new significance for postcolonial theory, since writers may project spaces other than, or position themselves in the spaces between, those endorsed by dominant cultures" (Fincham, 2014:130). Eltahawy's literary mapmaking

project is disloyal to colonial and patriarchal dictates.

At times disruptive of and at other times attentive to the rules of these epistemes, Eltahawy is nonetheless engaged in an imaginative revisioning (which is to say literary mapping) of the world. Maps express "less their relation to a reality outside a perceiver than their reflection of that person's experience" (Fincham, 2014:131) and fantasy.

To what ends is Eltahawy's cartographic fantasy deployed? First, she evokes the worlds of the religious text, sacred site, and theological dictum to highlight how the political space-clearing they enact is in furtherance of patriarchal terrorisation and violation of women in identified ways. In presenting her reader with "the Gospel of Mona" (Eltahawy, 2019:10), the author redraws the borders of religious dictum in porous language that allows for feminist imaginative situation.

Second, she harnesses the claims made on her by competing geographies against nationalist and other containments. Eltahawy is a feminist situated in global locales that make competing demands for loyalty: US citizen, Egyptian, African, Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim. What writerly strategies are available for harnessing the power that comes from all these locations without yielding to their disciplinary regimes?

How does a feminist refuse to be rendered geographically, spiritually and culturally homeless by holding fast to loyalty only to her own freeing vision?

Third, Eltahawy's theorises feminist fury at the intersections of anger and justice. Here too, she enters a murky terrain given the traditions of thinking about anger, politics and change in the Western European philosophical tradition, Christianity, the sociology of emotions and other established epistemes. Here, an African Feminist charts distinct theoretical paths to anger against this backdrop, and below, I surface the text's peculiarities, overlaps and divergence from these other ways of thinking about anger and political change.

A brief return to this article's epigraph: Eltahawy's opening paragraph is necessary here.

Launching her project on a metaphor of energising rage, the scale of Eltahawy's anger is unambiguous in the epigraph to this article. It has the magnitude to achieve a spectacular feat: a celebrated, familiar, phallic image of conquest and cataloguing, within "a long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment" (McClintock, 1995:22).



Strikingly, Eltahawy's rage is not used to launch a rocket, but to act in violent self-defence and then to write a book. Hers is a lesson on the use of power: launching rockets, which is to say investing in phallic forms of relationality, is not inevitable. Both are forms of generating knowledge – the phallic one wielding power to further domination, and the latter ritualistic one an instruction manual for undoing patriarchal power.

The image of a woman beating the man who has assaulted her is counterintuitive in a patriarchal society. From the very onset, the scale of Eltahawy's project is ambitious: crisscrossing physical, planetary and temporal scales. It is a story which reappears in this text, each time characterised by clarity and liberating joy. Like smashing the piñata, in place of blinding fury, there is clarity of purpose, determination, strength and sweet reward. The repetition creates a pattern that reverberates and creates a new woman, one who is both "high" and furious. It also maps a new world.

Presenting a feminist vision, framed as both a manifesto and an alternative gospel, Eltahawy lists the following sins as necessary to a free life under patriarchal conditions: anger, attention, profanity, ambition, power, violence and lust. Only one – lust – is absent from the book's opening paragraph. The sins outlined in her book invite a defiance of scripts of acceptable femininity under patriarchy. On Eltahawy's invitation, "blaspheming against the god of Patriarchy" (2019:10) requires that women set free their anger in self-defence against patriarchy, command and retain attention, use language as they wish and this includes profanity at will, be unapologetic about their goals, release their anti-patriarchal power, deploy violence in their fight against patriarchy, and be active sexually desiring subjects.

Anger is the foundational sin: it makes the book possible and reappears in all the remaining chapters. It is an ever-present energiser for the author who tells British journalist Sirin Kale that she is motivated to write by "[w]hatever's enraged me that particular day" (Kale, 2021: online). Consequently, although each of the sins illuminates much about Eltahawy's feminist literary cartographic project, the sin of anger is the focus of this article.

WORDING AS MAPPING

In what follows, I trace the construction of Eltahawy's sin of anger, attentive to the intertextual tracing of her inherited contexts as well as envisioned post-patriarchal landscapes. I sketch the contours of what is an "instruction manual" (2019:1), "a manifesto" (2019:14)

and "the Gospel of Mona" (2019:10) to understand Eltahawy's deployment of powerful languages of religion, the sacred and sin to map anti-patriarchal planet-wide sensibility.

A gospel is a religious claim to truth with ambitious spatial reach across the boundaries of life and death, behaviour and thought, individual and collectives, and it lays a performative imprint on the body. An instruction manual demands compliance. A manifesto is a political statement of how to understand and change the world. Eltahawy knows that an instruction manual, a manifesto and a gospel are radically different kinds of texts and genres.

The difference between the angry toddler and the silent teenager are years of socialisation into fear, patriarchal intrusion and gendered shame.

At the same time, she is attentive to their separate and shared claims to truth and authority. All three are instructive: sets of rules and guidelines that set out how things *should* be done, each promises the delivery of a fantasy. Writing of a different African Feminist reading praxis, this time enacted by gender defying women's performance in an Eastern African context, Dina Ligaga (2017:223) underscores attention to genre, reminding us first, that "genres work within shared conventions" as well as of how reexamining the boundaries of genre "allows for meaning to weave in and out of texts in ways that signal their interwovenness with everyday life in Africa" (Ligaga, 2017:222-3).

In order to address "the trifecta of misogyny", which "connects the way in which the state, the street (society), and the home (the family) together oppress women and girls around the world" (2019:27), Eltahawy redirects the textual force of these three different genres in aid of a post-patriarchal fantasy.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MONA

Naming her second book *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls* makes easy associations with Christianity, a world religion, its mapping onto and reorganisation of the world, and its surveillance logics. Her first book, *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution* (2015) focused on the ways in Islam maps in patriarchal ways.

Rhetorically engaging religion as text and cartographic project stems from Eltahawy's recognition of it as a resource at her disposal. The ways in which religious texts construct and use stories is instructive. Strategically, Eltahawy recognises that to surrender religion is counterproductive to the project of ending patriarchy. Women have multiple relationships with religion: they have historically built it and have been erased from it, found solace and violence in it; across the world, they continue to claim it and energetically participate in its institutions in complicated and complicating ways. Eltahawy understands that a feminism that sidesteps religion is a feminism doomed to fail.

Christianity is an organisational system in which the number seven is a crucial literary mapping device. In that religion's Urtext, the Bible, there are seven deadly (or mortal) sins with accompanying seven virtues¹. The number seven is also a generative one, necessary for narratives of creation, miraculous intervention and renewal², all of which offer ready-made literary techniques for the writing of "the Gospel of Mona" as a standalone book, and as a gospel³.

The sins she constructs are not from the authoritative book but are creations of her feminist imagination. Like the Christian Biblical gospels, the Gospel of Mona outlines the differences between ideal behaviour and what is blasphemous. Unlike the Urtext, however, in Eltahawy's text blasphemy and sinfulness are encouraged in the creation of a world where girls and women are free. Anger is not accidental in a religious tradition and context where, "[w]hen men are angry and indignant, they are godlike, imitating Jehovah. The Bible tells us that it is better to dwell in the wilderness than with an angry woman" (Marcus, 1978:68). Eltahawy's sins defy patriarchy, they draw from women's "well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being" (Lorde, 1997:280).

For Lorde, as for Eltahawy after her, feminist fury is both energising and freeing. In *Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*, the origins of feminist fury lie in sexual violence and the female fear factory. Several contemporary studies of the erasure of women from public space in Egypt trace the ways in which women are violently, and constantly pushed out of lasting ownership of public spaces in Egypt across different epochs (Beblawi, 2016; Naber and El-Hameed, 2016; Zakariyah, 2019).

Specifically, although women roam the streets of the country, they are symbolically erased, and excluded from lasting claims to public space and from the making of Egyptian history. Dina Beblawi (2016) points to two linked ways, in which the Egyptian public is retained as masculine space. First is the erasure of Egyptian women's and feminist activists who have repeatedly taken over public spaces in pre-colonial, anti-colonial and subsequent key moments. This erasure sometimes goes hand in hand with assaults of their bodies. While these women play crucial roles in all revolutions, they are erased from the collective memory and historical record of these moments. Second are the ways in which public space is constantly reframed as dangerous for women in a variety of ways including physical, epistemic violence and the inscription of shame. Elsewhere (Gqola 2015, 2021), I have coined "female fear factory" to theorise how women and patriarchy's others are systematically primed to fear public spaces. These messages travel through threats of rape and bodily assault, through shame, "an effective way to keep women in check and [one that] often results in women curtailing their movement in a physical and psychological manner" (Gqola, 2015:79). The Female Fear Factory demarcates who may be violated and protects misogynists from the consequences of their violence, as Eltahawy's example of the sexual assault of women in sacred places, as the five-day-long trending of #MosqueMeToo demonstrates. It is enacted in individual performances in public spaces and symbolically to reinforce women's and girls' socialisation into fear.

The repetitive intrusion of sexual assault into women's and girls' lives creates a build-up of painful emotions resulting in shame, shock, and self-blame enacted as self-harm in different ways. It also produces a simmering rage that girls and women are often taught to bite down on and swallow. This is Lorde's "well-stocked arsenal of anger" whose reclamation from patriarchal conditioning leads to the eruption Eltahawy writes of.

¹ The sins are pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth. The virtues are chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility.

² The seventh day is the day of rest after the Creator made the world, there are seven days of the feast of Passover, Jesus feeds multitudes from seven loaves and seven fish, seven demons are driven out of Mary Magdalene, and so on. Catholics believe in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. All Christians hold dear the seven sayings on the cross and recall the injunction to forgive seventy times seven.

³ The gospels in the Bible are also called "books". Most of the gospels, or books, that are retained in both the Catholic and Protestant versions of the Bible are attributed to men. Even when author attribution is uncertain, a first person is usually provided as a way of identifying the specific narrative version being read. In this sense, then, "of" works here to designate either authorship (the book by Mona), focus (the book about Mona) or both. In the Bible, the name does not always correspond to authorship although it does accord importance.



However, such anger is neither straightforward nor inevitably embraced. Sara Ahmed invites us to adopt a stance that “challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals and that they come from within and then move outwards towards others” (Ahmed 2004, 25). Ahmed stresses that “emotions are not simply ‘within’ or ‘without’, but that they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects” (Ahmed, 2004:25). Emotions are political since “[g]ender, or the cultural experience of being male or female, is one of the factors shaping what and how we feel. Anger is constructed differently for men and women” (Fischer, 1999:10).

Since women are socialised to disown their own anger, women’s movements have always drawn on anger as a mobilising force, even if the historical record of women often stifles this feminist fury. Examples of this abound. In the iconic South African women’s march on 9 August 1956, at which 20 000 women marched on the highest office in the land, demanding apartheid president JG Strydom’s attention, these women chanted “Wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo, uzakufa! / When you strike women, you strike a rock, you will be crushed”. This angry rebuke backed by the mighty power of women’s collective strength to crush has been sanitised to a highly circulated image of women as rocks, thereby reinscribing patriarchal strength. With women described as rocks, and the rageful “you will be crushed/uzakufa” (literal translation: “you will die”) amputated, we have a passive, unemotive, stoic in place of women’s fury. Equally misleading is the English equating of “imbokodo” to “rock”, rather than the more linguistically accurate translation to “boulder”.

This dilution and eventual evacuation of women’s historical anger is not a South African or Egyptian phenomenon where similarly, “successive political regimes in Egypt produce and maintain a spatial culture of humiliation and inferiorization as a political tool of silencing, and oppressing women and opposition” (Zakarriya, 2019:113). Rebecca Traister (2018:xxvi) has remarked similarly of the US context which actively teaches against the recognition that “rage – and not just stoicism, sadness, or strength – were behind the actions of the few women’s heroes we’re ever taught about in school, from Harriet Tubman to Susan B. Anthony”.

Nor is this erasure of women’s anger as life force and engine for radical structural change limited to the arena of politics. In a multidisciplinary study of anger that interrogates the framing of anger in religious traditions such as Christianity, Kathleen Fischer (1991:1) reminds us that “[i]t is hard at times

to speak of spirituality and anger in the same breath. Are they not the antithesis of each other? In fact, anger is essential to spirituality. Losing anger’s passion condemns us to the status quo”. She goes further to link women’s collective anger to existence in “a world that generates anger and constricts its expression” (Fischer, 1999:1).

Such constriction is part of women’s socialisation away from anger, inculcating the illegitimacy of anger, highlighting its destructive power, and teaching women to fear their own anger and ultimately “how to silence their anger” (Fischer, 1999:7). For Eltahawy, as for Fischer, this process socialises girls and women into giving up a complex emotional life, swallowing their feelings, and, focusing outwards, and sublimating their own desires and interpretations of the world.

ANGER, AN ORIGIN STORY

In *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*, the author steps into a feminist tradition in which anger works against invisibilisation, and has fuelled collective political action for many generations of women who have historically recognised women’s anger against their oppression as “valid, as rational, and as not what we’re told it is: ugly, hysterical, marginal and laughable” (Traister, 2018:xxxii), in defiance of “the power of patriarchal taboos against women’s anger” (Kenney, 1996:65).

Below, Eltahawy (2019:15) spells out the birthplaces of this anger, beginning with it as legitimate response to the intrusion of patriarchal violent entitlement into two toddler girls’ lives.

“One day when I was four years old, a man stopped his car on the street under my family’s balcony in Cairo, pulled his penis out of his pants and beckoned for me to come down. He did the same to my friend who had been talking to me from her family’s balcony from across the street. I was so small I needed a stool to see my friend from above the balcony railing.

I was enraged at that man, even though I was a child. How dare he ruin our reverie; two little girls, happy, oblivious to the street below, which was mostly quiet and therefore perfect for our cross-balcony afternoon conversations. It was our time together. How dare he interrupt us?”

Chronologically next, Eltahawy (2019:1) relates another encroachment, experienced as a teenager thus:

“Once upon a time, in 1982, I was a fifteen-year old girl sexually assaulted twice at Islam’s holiest site in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, as I performed hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage that is the fifth pillar of Islam. I had never been sexually assaulted before, and I froze and burst into tears. I was ashamed and traumatized, and, most crucially, I was silent”.

Later still, Eltahawy (2019:18) would write,

“As I grew into my own adult Mona, over the next several decades, I would learn the many ways men interrupt and violate. If I were to use paint to mark which parts of my body men have groped, pinched, or otherwise touched without my consent, my breasts, my crotch, and my backside would be covered. But I am enraged the most, still, at that man who exposed himself to me and my friend”.

The difference between the angry toddler and the silent teenager are years of socialisation into fear, patriarchal intrusion and gendered shame. The difference between the silenced fifteen-year-old and the furious fifty-year-old who lashes out in self-defence is a deep resocialisation into feminist fury. It is the understanding that stems, in part, from other Muslim women sharing their experiences, and the slow realisation that “the men who had assaulted me had abused the sanctity of a sacred space to ensure the silence of their victim. They knew that no one would believe me” (Eltahawy, 2019:2).

In between the girl on the balcony and the woman who lashes out at the man who grabs her at a Canadian nightclub have been multiple sexual assaults as she outlines in the third extract. As an adult, when Eltahawy speaks about these experiences, she is either accused of contributing to the demonisation of Muslim men in an Islamophobic world or mocked and disbelieved in a variety of statements designed to inculcate shame. In other words, sexual violence induces silencing shame. When this silence is overcome, patriarchal responses are designed to reinscribe shame and re-silence.

Contrasting with these shaming statements, which perform secondary victimisation, are mostly other women’s responses when she shares on social media that she was assaulted, and invites other Muslim women to share their experiences of assault in sacred spaces under the hashtag #MosqueMeToo. The outpouring continues for five days, prompting her to write “[r]eading their stories undid something

that had broken in me as that young pilgrim in 1982 that I thought I had stitched together” (2019:3).

Sexual violence is isolating. Reading the stories of other women’s violation over several decades fortifies her anger at the scale of the problem and patriarchal violence. Citing examples from different parts of the world, as well as studies that show the ways in which patriarchal violence moves along very similar lines in societies that superficially have little in common underscores the justification for anger and women’s collective self-defence (as explored in the chapter dedicated to the sin on violence).

While women are socialised away from expressions of their anger except under limited conditions, they are also conditioned to fear men’s volatility.

CONCLUSION

The sins outlined in Eltahawy’s second book invite a defiance of scripts of acceptable femininity under patriarchy. At the same time, Eltahawy understands – and repeatedly recognises – that while women are oppressed by patriarchy, there are significant differences in the power accessible to and exercised over women’s lives. While women are socialised away from expressions of their anger except under limited conditions, they are also conditioned to fear men’s volatility. Although all women have reason to rise up in anger against patriarchal violence, the ascription of anger to Black women, for example, has often been used as justification for murdering white supremacist misogyny as well as violence from Black men. It has also been demonised as a way to shame North American indigenous women into silence against men similarly classified.



Eltahawy begins her story of anger as a necessary sin by anchoring it with belief in her anger as a little girl in that balcony scene, as an invitation to her women readers to reclaim that anger and use it against patriarchal intrusion and violence. As a toddler, she believes she can shoo away the man who exposes himself with her slipper. She is standing at the boundary of the private home and the public in which the adult man exposing his penis and beckoning to her is emboldened by the existence of the female fear factory. Anger is a legitimate response that must be claimed and amplified to fuel a response against such patriarchal intrusion.

Anger is a necessary sin because “[i]n the male construct of brute force, we were taught that our lives depended upon the good will of patriarchal power. [...] And if we accept our powerlessness, then of course any anger can destroy us” (Lorde, 1997: 283).

Anger is women’s arsenal against such powerlessness. Anger is also a sin because “the discouragement of women’s anger – via silencing, erasure, and repression – stems from the correct understanding of those in power that in the fury of women lies the power to change the world” (Traister, 2018: xxviii).

In the Gospel of Mona, women and girls are dissuaded from forgiving seven times or in any multiples of sevens. Instead, akin to Rachel Flower’s recognition that “forgiveness” as Biblical, colonial and nationalist demand from indigenous women in Canada, and across the world is unjust, Eltahawy redraws a world through feminist fury as that which needs to be oriented “around a refusal to forgive”, where such “[r]efusal is a political practice that is in opposition to statist forms of recognition, but also in conflicts over interpretation” (Flowers, 2015:33). Flowers insists such refusal, anchored in rage, is both ‘negation’ and ‘affirmation’ – negation of the wounding violence and attendant structural force, including accusations of “threat to an imagined community” levelled against women speaking out against violent oppressed men (Roy, 2008:320); and affirmation of feminist fury.

In the hands of a feminist literary cartographer, anger becomes energising, necessary rage emboldening sinful women to remap the world with the generative force of feminist fury.

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