NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

# Reclaiming a space for legitimate anger

Michelle Gonzalez | Sep. 12, 2012

*In a departure from the norm,* NCR *was sufficiently intrigued by a recent book to ask three of our younger married writers to review it. As a bonus, we asked the reviewers if they would mind introducing us also to their families.*

NCR *will publish one book review a week for the next three weeks.*
*-- Arthur Jones, books editor*

THE NEW FEMINIST AGENDA: DEFINING THE NEXT REVOLUTION FOR WOMEN, WORK, AND FAMILY
By Madeleine M. Kunin
Published by Chelsea Green Press, $26.95 hardback, $17.25 paperback

Every semester I stand in front of a group of undergraduates and introduce the intellectual journey we will take together throughout the next few months. As part of these initial class meetings we inevitably turn to personal introductions, where students and I say a little about who we are and why we are in this class. My intellectual and personal narrative inevitably includes my self-identification as a feminist. This comment is met most often with scrutiny and suspicion. I quickly have to define feminism and reassuringly inform them not to worry; I am not an angry feminist.

Perhaps the most liberating moment that came in reading Madeleine M. Kunin?s *The New Feminist Agenda* occurred on the first page when she admitted that she is a feminist and angry. Her book reminds us that while the women?s movement has made some major advances in the past four decades, there is much left to be done, and much more to be angry about. This anger is not only directed at society at large but the feminist movement itself, which for decades treated family issues as a taboo subject.

This anger must be constructive. I admit that I was overwhelmingly saddened as I read this book, for I recognized that I allowed myself to be stripped of my anger over social inequalities and injustice. I would add the word intention to her narrative. We must become more intentional in our everyday actions and political mobilization.

In the chapters that follow, Kunin paints a tapestry of the United States where both family and women?s issues

have been placed on the back burner. She offers insights from other nations, giving us the avenues to envision a different way of being and supporting women and children. She challenges the myth of American exceptionalism. Examining childhood education and the workplace as key sites for social transformation, she gives an often disturbing picture of the manner in which the U.S. has failed women and children. The book offers a realistic depiction of the diversity of contemporary families.

Kunin advocates for greater women?s leadership, particularly in politics, arguing that women leaders create more family-friendly policies. The workplace is also a space where women need to become proactive in creating more equal opportunities. She concludes the book with her vision of social transformation, calling for anger, imagination and optimism. This righteous anger needs to inform social change. We need to be able to imagine a different future for this country. Her third ingredient is perhaps the most challenging: optimism in the midst of our current struggles.

The overall call to action in the book is the need for the women?s movement to reclaim family values as values that ?strengthen families.? This is a rallying cry I can get behind. Progressive intellectuals and grassroots activists have allowed family values to be taken from us, though, as Kunin observes, we were quite eager to give up that cause. And while the unifying theme of the text is provocative, it is those small ?aha? moments I had while reading the book that stand out to me.

Her discussion of the need for more intentional women?s mentoring resonates deeply with me as the only woman in my academic department.

I share her sadness regarding young women?s rejection of the label of feminist. I become increasingly frustrated with my female undergraduate students who do not recognize that their very presence in a university is thanks to the women?s movement.

Kunin creates a space that acknowledges and legitimizes feminist anger. I am angry that women still make 77 cents to the man?s dollar. I am angry that women are not currently more represented in the political realm and in the leadership of Fortune 500 companies. I am angry that my students today are not grateful for the advances made by the women?s movement. It upsets me that I am constantly complimented on my ability to manage a full-time job and raise two young boys; my husband, who also works full time, is never acknowledged for his role in parenting. I am angry that I allowed myself to be convinced that my outrage was inappropriate and unconstructive. More importantly, however, this book persuasively argues that we should be all be angry regardless of our political leanings.

Madeleine Kunin has allowed me to reclaim my anger, and I hope she does the same for you.

[Michelle Gonzalez is associate professor of religious studies at the University of Miami.]

**Reviews of *The New Feminist Agenda***

- Reclaiming a space for legitimate anger [1], reviewed by Michelle A. Gonzalez
- Author cuts across gender lines and mommy wars [2], reviewed by Michele Saracino
- Instead of having it all, a call for all to have [3], reviewed by Heidi Schlumpf

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