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Meridians 21:2 Feminist Mournings

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Editor's Introduction

.....
As it stands, death shapes the horizon of life.

—Susanna Seigel

Yet, absence is a form of presence and an active shaping of the now:
in memory, in mourning, and in melancholia. Presence is similarly an
absence from elsewhere or else-when.

—Wambui Mwangi
.....

When the guest editors of this special issue approached me with their proposal in summer 2020, the world was just a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic but we had already lost over one hundred thousand people in the United States—and nearly half a million people globally. Our family, social, school, and work lives were upended as we moved in and out of “shut-downs” of the institutions and spaces we lived our lives in as we had known them in order to contain the virus’s spread. We were also in the throes of the national (and global) reckoning over anti-Black violence and police brutality that George Floyd’s murder by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin inspired. Moreover, four years of an autocratic presidency had wreaked havoc on our legislative, judicial, and executive branches, peopling them with actors bent on undermining—if not destroying—these cornerstones of U.S. democratic governance from the inside. Those malignant forces also overtly empowered the conservative and regressive sectors of the general population who feel aggrieved by the hard-won victories of social justice movements against racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, misogyny, etc., going so far as to rally them to insurrection and

sedition. At the same time, we could no longer ignore an increasingly urgent global climate change crisis made manifest in raging wildfires, destructive hurricanes, unprecedented flooding, deadly snow storms and freezing temperatures, devastating earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and droughts. In sum, since we were grieving so many losses—past, present and future—a *Meridians* special issue on mourning made obvious sense.

However, I hadn't thought about how mourning could be feminist until I read Guest Editors Kimberly Juanita Brown and Jyoti Puri's proposal. To them, feminist mourning moves beyond individual and/or collective grief over what has been lost to "contend with the social and political conditions that exacerbate death" and dying. In other words, feminist mourning politicizes and historicizes the disproportionately high impact and negative experience of loss of life has on those who belong to vulnerable communities, identities, and social statuses. Thus, I not only grieve the nearly one million COVID-19 deaths recorded in the US and 5.8 million deaths worldwide as of this writing, but as a feminist of color I mourn the injustice inherent in the fact that poor people, Black/Indigenous/People of Color and women have borne the brunt of COVID-related illness, disability, death, and dying.¹ Feminist mourning calls us to move through and beyond personal grief's vale of tears and sorrowful lamentation to collective commemoration and creation of possible futures. In other words, feminist mourning is deeply political.

Accordingly, I am awed by the fact that this year's Elizabeth Alexander Creative Writing Award winner, "Daughtersong Diaspore" by Barbara Jane Reyes, coincidentally exemplifies feminist mourning's innovative invocation. This powerfully lyrical, English-Tagalog bi-lingual poem also speaks to my heart, for I am a too am a daughter grieving a diasporic mother mostly lost to dementia. Like Reyes, I wonder "how to navigate the passage of this motherbody"? Where will home be once she is fully gone? What use is there for my mother-tongue without *Mami* as my interlocutor? And then, the guest editors' call to feminist mourning reminds me that she will be gone but her voice remains and will join that of other Dominican feminists whose calls for self-determination have echoed across the seas and continue to inspire their daughters to action.

Finally, I take this opportunity to commemorate the recent passing of my mother, Elena María Candelario Cáceres (January 24, 1938–July 28, 2022), whose life exemplified Dominican Feminist *Luchadoras* and

survival. She was irreplaceable, is irreplaceable, and will be forever missed. May she rest in power.

Note

- 1 It is true that as virus COVID-19 is inherently indiscriminate, but socio-cultural and political-economic orders put minoritized groups in harm's way as part of a world system that shields dominant groups from the pandemic's fullest measure of harm. In fact, global elites have benefited from the pandemic. By the end of 2021, billionaires "collectively own 3.5% of global household wealth, up from slightly above 2% at the start of the pandemic in early 2020" (John 2021). That is, they have nearly doubled their wealth during the same two years that have cost so much for so many.

Work Cited

John, Mark. 2021. "Pandemic Boosts Super-Rich Share of Global Wealth." Reuters, December 7. www.reuters.com/business/pandemic-boosts-super-rich-share-global-wealth-2021-12-07/.