

Grief to Resistance

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2018

a review of

Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief, ed. Cindy Milstein. 37 essays, 412 pp. with 32-page color insert. AK Press, 2017

Rebellious Mourning is an ambitious edited volume by Cindy Milstein with enormous depth and breadth of highly relevant and timely cross-cultural case studies. This work by Milstein (sole author of *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*, AK Press) represents her third edited book project.

Since emotions are a seriously-neglected factor in the exploration of radical political sentiments, and because sadness and loss are nearly-universally ignored in scholarly and non-scholarly literature, it was with tremendous enthusiasm that I sat down to review this courageous work that examines the loss and mourning driving global activism. Milstein's edited work of international perspectives transcends fear and superficiality to give voice to those in mourning who have suffered enormous human loss as a result of the consequences of modernity.

Authors such as Mari Matsumoto (Fukushima), Claudia Rankine (race relations and civil rights), Nidia Melissa Bautista (the Disappeared of Mexico), David Gilbert (AIDS in prison), and many other diverse contributors confront the role of authoritarian state and non-state actors and the senseless loss of life brought about as a result of the nefarious systemic arrangements attributed to greed, apathy, suppression, and a penchant for violence.

Perspectives are clearly multi-generational, historic as well as contemporary, verbal and nonverbal (through graffiti and other visuals), and embedded in wildly-vacillating ethnic and cultural settings; and yet are somehow naturally-integrated through a shared sense of chilling authenticity that can only be made possible through intimate accounts of the heart-breaking injustices chronicled in pages of this tightly-woven project.

The portrayals are uniquely delivered by activists with a distinct flair for framing these carefully-selected, episodic massacres and other tragedies, within a social justice ethos that is unrelenting in its direct and confrontational indictment of clear and unambiguous grounds for resistance.

In this pursuit of these polemics, difficult questions arise.

For example, in documenting disappearances of grandchildren, Andalusia Knoll Soloff asks, "How long can people sustain collective grief?" In his treatment of Palestinian martyrs, Budour Hassan asserts, "The policy of taking dead hostages, imposing conditions on their release, and the psychological torture and blackmailing of their families constitutes layers of Israel's necropolitical regime of dispossession."

In struggles in Oaxaca documented by Harmony Hazard, the author states, "Conflict between individuals, like the head of a mushroom, is the only visible part of a dense underground structure called the mycelium, which is the community in which conflict grows. Like conflict, every death is linked with the long, intertwined roots of the community, and it's impossible to know how deep and how far the impact of death reaches."

In her closing chapter, Cindy Milstein finally confesses, "In other death sites across the cemetery that is Europe, one can see much evidence of ghosts who, too, strived to do the work of grief. Only because we fight—against losses that shouldn't happen [...]. We fight not only for a quality of life. We struggle for a quality of death."

Despite these profound portrayals of loss and despair, the book stops short in delivering the revolutionary fervor I hungered for. Though this work may very well offer an important pastiche of painful narratives and vignettes brought on by a variety of individual and institutional arrangements deeply impacted by power and privilege, the project is a little too heavy on the mourning, too light on the rebellion.

Anyone sympathetic to an anarchist or other social change perspective will find themselves yearning for more transformative rage, vengeance, or other constructive catharsis so important for the consciousness and enlightenment needed for systemic reform or revolt.

Contributing authors made no direct link between state violence and the toll on human life, to the need for reform, revolt, rebellion, or permanent abolition of the polity.

Since sadness and despair are often important phases in the development of a consciousness of political resistance among youth and adolescence, the book can, nevertheless, be extremely useful for younger audiences who often turn these deep, unfamiliar sentiments of modern mourning inwardly in self-destructive ways (such as addiction or suicide).

The depth and breadth of human emotion among the politically-enlightened portrayed in these pages remains, nevertheless, an important conduit to human empathy. Yet the articulation of emotion is a far cry from rebellion, and we must be careful in unpacking these important concepts.

For now, we can embrace this collaborative project of grief and categorize the pain elicited by this colorful collage of comrades as a crucial phase in fostering humanity's rebellious developmental potential.

Yet without the prime element of rebellion promised in the title, aren't we risking idolatry of painful emotions, or worse, the therapeutic interventions that give us indulgent permission to fixate incessantly on them?

Lisiunia (Lisa) A. Romanienko is the author of *Body Piercing and Identity* (2011) and *Degradation Rituals and Our Sadomasochistic Society* (2013).

She is a Taoist anarchist who has lived in several anarchoprimitivist squats in Eastern Europe and traveled extensively throughout five continents. She teaches at Kean University and resides in the mountains near the Canadian border with her cat, Thor.

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