Feminist Theory
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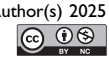

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Grief as feminist praxis: Love, loss and memory in resistance

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Abstract

This article examines grief, memory and love as feminist praxis situating intimate loss within the political context of Palestinian dispossession. In March 2025, I received the Emma Goldman Award in Vienna. This coincided with one of the most devastating periods of my life when weeks later, my father Najy Ajour died in Gaza amid genocide, still holding onto hope for reunion. While I carried recognition abroad, my family endured starvation, bombardment and loss. This collision between recognition and grief frames my argument: grief, memory and love operate as feminist praxis. Drawing on feminist scholarship, I propose a politics of memory that treats grief as insurgent, testimony as methodology and love as epistemology. Fragments he left behind, such as coffee saved for my mother and sisters, become wake work carrying memory and resisting erasure. By juxtaposing collective vulnerability in Vienna with the violence of colonization in Gaza, I emphasize the urgency of transnational feminist solidarity. This article advances feminist theory by positioning grief as a site of resistance, knowledge production and cross-border solidarity.

Keywords

feminist praxis, grief, memory, Palestinian lives, resistance, transnational solidarity, ungrievable lives, wake work

In March 2025, I travelled to Vienna to receive the award. My father was still alive then, if 'alive' can capture what it means to endure constant bombardment, hunger, displacement and the collapse of medical care in Gaza. He had been waiting for the Rafah crossing to open so that he could reunite with my mother, two of my sisters and their children in Egypt. The plan was for him, along with my other sister and her children who remained

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in Gaza, to follow after the first evacuation. But just days after my mother and sisters left, the crossing closed. He had even sent his clothes with them, believing his turn would soon come. He waited, holding onto hope that the genocide would end and the border would reopen. In preparation, he set aside three kilos of Arabic coffee for my mother and packed a tracksuit for the journey. During this time, I remained in contact with him, offering support and carrying the hope that the genocidal war would stop and he could finally travel.

When I returned to the UK, the fragile ceasefire collapsed and the war resumed. I could not share my joy and announce the award publicly or celebrate. How could I while my family and people were living under genocide and being starved and bombarded? I told myself I would wait for the war to stop before celebrating or announcing. But the war has not stopped. Instead, on 9 April only weeks after Vienna, I lost my father. He died displaced, hungry and in despair, still holding onto the hope of reunion. I had wanted to celebrate the award with him to make him proud. Colonization stole that possibility, just as it stole his life. This collision of recognition and agonized loss frames this article. I write to show how grief, memory and love can be feminist praxis: acts of resistance, forms of testimony and vehicles for solidarity across borders (Butler, 2004; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984).

Grief as political and feminist praxis

My father's death in Gaza was not simply the loss of a loved one; it was the culmination of layered violences: blockade, displacement, famine and genocide. His body bore the exhaustion of hunger, siege and the unbearable weight of waiting for a reunion that never came. To grieve him is to grieve the theft of possibility; the theft of joy, of family, of the right to travel and of the right to live and die with dignity. Judith Butler reminds us that not all lives are recognized as grievable, and that the political framing of certain populations renders their deaths unworthy of public mourning (Butler, 2004, 2009).

My own mourning makes this painfully clear. I could not whisper goodbye and could not attend his funeral. I could only watch a shaky video of his coffin while my relatives cried in my place. The most heartbreaking part was that I could neither see my father alive since 2014 nor see him after his death. Instead I saw his body digitally, death mediated through a screen. I grieved alone in shock and trauma, trying to comprehend the loss without a proper ending. Even that grieving was precarious, mediated by distance and haunted by fear that his body or even his grave might be desecrated amid the ongoing genocide. In Gaza, many could not bury their dead at all, with cemeteries overflowing and graves denied. In that cruel context, we considered ourselves 'lucky' that my father was buried that his body found a place in the earth. Yet even this 'luck' is political. It reveals how colonial violence extends into death itself, deciding who may rest, who is left unburied and whose mourning is denied. To name this, to insist on grieving him publicly is feminist praxis, a refusal to let colonial power dictate the terms of death, love and memory.

Suhad Daher-Nashif (2018, 2021) argues that colonial power in Palestine extends to the management of death itself, freezing corpses, withholding bodies, muting funerals and denying Palestinians the ability to mourn in dignity. My fragmented grieving is part of this wider colonial regime that seeks to strip death and thus grief of its social and political meaning. This enforced distance and fragmentation of mourning is what Butler (2004, 2009) names, a politics that denies Palestinians the dignity of being publicly grieved.

My father's death unfolded under conditions where even mourning is criminalized. His body had to be transported through dangerous roads and we feared that his coffin might be bombed en route, a reality that echoes Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2014) analysis of how Palestinian death is surveilled and criminalized, rendering funerals themselves precarious acts of resistance. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2020) calls this the 'necropenological' conquest of bodies and spaces of death, a colonial strategy that extends beyond killing to the regulation of mourning itself.

To grieve for my father then is to resist this conquest. Naming his death as a political crime and carrying his memory forward is feminist praxis, an insistence on love and memory as political force, a refusal to allow colonial power to erase him and a declaration that even in death Palestinian lives matter.

Palestinian grief is denied and this silencing is often gendered. As Daher-Nashif (2018) shows in her study of Palestinian women martyrs, mourning practices are actively muted to uphold colonial and patriarchal control. To mourn as a Palestinian woman then becomes doubly subversive. It challenges occupation and the gendered structures that seek to regulate emotion and memory. To weep publicly for my father and to name his death as a political crime is therefore not only an intimate act of love but also feminist praxis, a defiance against the colonial logic that seeks to erase him from history (Butler, 2004; Lorde, 1984).

Audre Lorde (1984) contended that emotions are not weakness but sources of survival and transformation. My grief for my father is not private but political affirmation. It insists that his life mattered, that his death is visible and that mourning can be radical when it resists demands for silence (Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984). Daher-Nashif's (2021) concept of 'colonial management of death' makes clear that even after life ends power continues to govern Palestinian bodies, disrupting mourning itself. My grief then refuses this management. It transforms sorrow into testimony and makes mourning an act of feminist insurgency. In this sense, grief becomes a feminist act because it refuses the privatization of loss that patriarchy and colonialism both demand. To grieve, testify and document love in the face of erasure is to create knowledge and solidarity. It is to transform mourning from a condition of isolation into a collective political language. Feminist praxis insists that love, memory and vulnerability are not marginal to politics but central to resisting domination.

Palestinian writers remind us that this praxis is deeply rooted. Mahmoud Darwish (2010) in *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* shows how sorrow is never merely personal but always bound to land, history and the silences imposed upon it. Devin Atallah (2023) reframes this grief as 'decolonial love', a practice of memory that resists erasure and reclaims relational life against colonial fragmentation. Atallah and Ihmoud (2024) likewise decribe

devastation in Gaza as an attempt to create world without Palestinians', yet insist that grief in itself becomes a living refusal, a form of love, memory and imagination that insists on presence against erasure. Refaat Alareer's final poem 'If I Must Die' (2023) transforms mourning into insurgent testimony; even death must 'bring hope' and 'be a tale'. Together, these voices illuminate grief not as passive suffering but as a feminist praxis of resistance, a politics of memory, love and testimony that defies erasure and insists on life.

Memory, testimony and love

After my father died in Gaza amidst the ongoing genocide, I held onto the fragments of his life that remained, three kilos of Arabic coffee for my mother and sisters, a packed tracksuit for a reunion that never came and countless small memories of his care, humour and presence. These objects and memories are not mere remnants but vessels of love, defiance and hope, carrying his life across borders of separation and blockade. They embody the hope that even amidst genocide and siege reunion might have been possible. Christina Sharpe (2016) describes this kind of remembrance as wake work, the ongoing labour of living with and through the afterlives of violence. In the Palestinian context, as Daher-Nashif (2018, 2021) demonstrates, even this wake work is constrained by colonial management of death. Bodies are withheld, funerals are muted and mourning is rendered precarious. To carry memory forward in such conditions is thus a radical act of feminist resistance.

To recall my father through these objects and memories is to engage in wake work as feminist praxis, asserting presence and carrying memory against structures that sought to silence him. His coffee and tracksuit, the small gestures of care that he had prepared, become testimony. They speak of longing for family and the cruel interruptions of life by siege and displacement.

My father was a celebrated figure in Gaza, a legendary footballer whose life brought joy and pride to generations. I was deeply moved by the number of articles and tributes written by friends and figures from the sports community, all celebrating his remarkable life, captivating personality, smile and unparalleled talent. In *Al-Quds* newspaper, the headlines included 'The miracle of Palestinian football has passed away' and 'Funeral of the superstar of the golden era, Najy Ajour'. A column article paid tribute with the title 'The legend, Najy Ajour, has passed away'. In *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, one headline read 'Sadness looms over the nation's athletes after the death of Najy Ajour, the legend of Palestinian football'. Another article in the same paper was titled 'The martyr of displacement'. There was also a headline: 'A commemorative football match held in honour of Najy Ajour's spirit'. In one survey, he was voted the best football player in Palestine over the past 50 years. He proudly shared every article written about him and often spoke to me about his achievements, inspiring me to pursue my own with the same passion. Remembering him as both father and national figure allows me to carry multiple layers of testimony; the intimate, the familial and the social and national.

I remember his stories of victory and struggle on the field and his pride in my achievements. These memories are inseparable from the grief of forced separation. Since 2014 I

had not seen him in person, communicating instead through calls and messages across borders, always hoping for reunion. On his last birthday, I sent him an old photo saying 'We'll take new ones soon'. He replied 'Inshallah. We will share the best moments together'. That day never came.

Even in his final days he preserved hope and care. Hours before his death he messaged my sister about a potential ceasefire. This hope, infused with love, patience and endurance, is an act of resistance in the face of colonial violence, hunger and denied mobility. Bell hooks (2000) reminds us that love is not soft sentiment but a radical practice, a political force that nurtures survival under oppression. Remembering these gestures now, I claim that love as feminist praxis: knowledge and resistance intertwined (hooks, 2000).

Memory is not passive recall but an active assertion of life and presence. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) emphasizes that lived experience is a vital source of knowledge. In carrying my father's memory, I resist the imposed silence around Palestinian grief, asserting that our dead matter, and that love, grief and testimony are themselves forms of knowledge production (Collins, 2000). The stories of his football career, his care for his family and his enduring hope become epistemological tools. They teach about resilience, solidarity and the everyday enactment of love and resistance even under siege. In carrying my father's memory against the systemic silencing of Palestinian grief, I resist the imposed erasure of his life and assert that love, grief and testimony are themselves forms of knowledge production (Collins, 2000).

My father's life and death highlight the intertwined nature of personal and collective grief. He died not from direct violence but from despair, deprivation and denial of medical care, a slow violence of siege and colonial cruelty. My grief is inseparable from the broader Palestinian suffering, reflecting the ongoing violence that shapes our daily existence and the political and epistemic significance of mourning. To grieve, remember and testify is to enact feminist praxis, to insist that those deemed ungrievable are seen, their lives accounted for and their love honoured across borders.

From Vienna to Gaza: Collective vulnerability and transnational feminist solidarity

In Vienna during the Emma Goldman Award coaching session, I sat with fellow awardees, feminist scholars and activists in a structured circle of vulnerability. We were invited to select images and reflect on their meaning in relation to our personal journeys and collective struggles. In my own reflection, I chose a series of cards capturing different aspects of my journey. One card depicted a home against a lavender field, evoking the layered meanings of home as a Palestinian, particularly in light of the destruction of my family home during the recent Gaza genocide (Ajour, 2023, 2025). Memories of displacement and loss surged through me, yet these spaces of reflection allowed me to situate my grief within collective feminist frameworks. Throughout the session we shared stories, wept together and bore witness to one another's vulnerabilities. Our tears carried histories of slavery, racism, Indigenous dispossession, colonial violence and gendered oppression (Ahmed, 2004; Davis, 2016; hooks, 2000). For a brief moment, we

released burdens typically carried in silence, recognizing the interconnectedness of our struggles.

When I returned from Vienna, reality struck with brutal immediacy. The fragile ceasefire collapsed, bombings resumed and weeks later my father's fragile existence ended in Gaza. While I had been honoured with an award my loved ones were being starved and slaughtered. My grief bridged these two worlds, the protected feminist space of recognition and the violent dispossession of home, revealing that vulnerability is never abstract; it is embodied and profoundly political (Butler, 2004, 2009).

Chandra Mohanty (2003) reminds us that feminism without borders demands attention to interconnected struggles across nations and histories. Angela Davis (2016) emphasizes the ties between Ferguson, Palestine and global resistance, and Nada Elia (2018) calls for solidarity linking feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles. These frameworks illuminate my experience. My father's death is not only a private loss but also part of a global struggle against racialized, colonial and patriarchal domination (Davis, 2016; Elia, 2018; Mohanty, 2003).

The tears in Vienna were not separate from my grief in Gaza; they were part of the same fabric of transnational feminist solidarity. My reflections, the cards I chose and the stories shared during the coaching session connected intimate vulnerability to collective struggle. My father's absence, my mourning and our shared release in Vienna demonstrate that grief and vulnerability are not weaknesses but the soil upon which solidarity grows (hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984). As recent scholarship highlights, transnational feminist solidarity must centre the experiences of those most affected by colonial violence, displacement and gendered oppression, particularly Palestinian women whose lives are often doubly constrained by occupation and patriarchy. Recognizing grief, memory and love as feminist praxis connects intimate personal loss to broader political struggles, reinforcing bonds across borders and emphasizing collective responsibility for justice and care. This solidarity must explicitly include Palestinian women, whose lives are disproportionately shaped by siege, displacement and gendered violence. Feminist praxis demands that we recognize their grief, resistance and everyday acts of survival as central to the global feminist project. Engaging with Palestinian women's experiences expands feminist theory by showing how grief, memory and love operate as forms of knowledge, resistance and transnational solidarity. By linking my personal mourning with the broader suffering of Palestinian women, I position grief not only as an intimate experience but as a site for feminist collective action, connecting local loss to global movements for justice (Abu-Lughod, 2007; Davis, 2016; Mohanty, 2003).

Conclusion: Towards a feminist politics of memory – carrying my father forward

Grief, memory and love are often relegated to the private realm, framed as personal experiences to be endured silently. Feminist thought, however, challenges the public/private divide, insisting that the personal is political (Collins, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). My father's death amid genocide in Gaza and the grief it left behind are not only a

personal tragedy but a site of political struggle, feminist knowledge and transnational solidarity.

The feminist politics of memory recognizes remembering the dead as both an act of love and an act of resistance. Under conditions of colonization where Palestinians are expected to vanish into silence, memory becomes insurgent. To testify, narrate and preserve fragments of life, whether in coffee, tracksuits, stories, photos, messages or gifts, is to challenge erasure and assert presence (Ahmed, 2004; Sharpe, 2016). Sara Ahmed (2004) contends that emotions circulate between bodies, shaping communities and struggles. When I grieve my father, I do so in connection with my people and feminist communities worldwide. Memory circulates, building solidarities and reinforcing interconnected struggles.

Grief is feminist praxis, a site of resistance, a refusal to let erasure prevail and a medium for knowledge production (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984). In carrying my father's memory, I carry the lives and struggles of those who, like him, have been denied recognition. To mourn is to insist on presence, and to testify is to claim power. Even in loss there is connection. The vulnerability I witnessed in Vienna during the Emma Goldman Award coaching session, the tears shared with fellow feminist scholars and the collective struggles across borders remind me that grief does not isolate; it links. Feminist solidarity grows from the intertwining of mourning and hope, intimate loss and global struggle (Davis, 2016; Elia, 2018; Mohanty, 2003).

This article, reflection and dedication are acts of feminist praxis asserting that grief is a feminist practice, that love resists erasure and that memory sustains both survival and struggle. Though I could not celebrate the Emma Goldman Award with my father, I carry him forward in every act of remembrance, resistance and solidarity. In grief we find strength in memory and connection, and in love the roots of a feminist politics that refuses colonial erasure, silencing and the theft of joy.

Dedication

I dedicate the Emma Goldman Award to my father Najy Ajour whose life was stolen not only by genocide but by blockade, forced displacement, famine, the denial of life-saving medical care and the cruel impossibility of our reunion after a long-forced separation since 2014 due to the blockade. The Emma Goldman Award, given by the FLAX Foundation to support feminist research and scholarship in Europe, recognized my work before my profound loss.

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