

ATOMIC



ALCHEMY

*A zine series on emotional transformation as
fuel for liberation in life and death*

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“And so I say here, to close,
remembering all the people we have
lost, the names too numerous to say
here, the fathers and sisters and cousins
lovers brothers friends, the ancestors we
claim for ourselves: may their memory
be for a revolution.”

— Sarah Jaffe, *From the Ashes: Grief
and Revolution in a World on Fire*



Nuclear Weapons Abolition and the Revolutionary Capacities of Grief and Love

ZINE #1

Lately, I've been so sad all the time, and then so angry all the time because I'm always sad. I'm sad because a handful of selfish, greedy, power-hungry people think they can play god because of their unimaginable wealth amassed through the exploitation, destruction, and death of people and planet. Witnessing constant avoidable death enacted through the most inhumane, vile mechanisms around the world has dug a cavernous well of grief in my soul, hollowing out my chest, the thin layers of my skin the only barrier from a complete undoing. I feel it so physically, so viscerally. The heavy weight of grief everywhere, crushing my heart so that each following death—whether that be in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, Los Angeles; whether it be a child, elder, plant, animal, dream—feels like *this is it, this is the one to cave me in and break me apart*. I want to scream until my throat is bleeding and I want to yell until my voice is gone and I want to curl up into myself so small until I cease to exist on this physical plane. Anything to distract from the grief of it all.

Except, trying to distract from the grief, to hide it, to pretend as if it doesn't exist, is a key factor in how this world of death-making has been able to survive for so long. Echoing the sentiment of journalist and author Sara Jaffe in her latest book *From the Ashes: Grief and Revolution in a World on Fire*, I've learned that grief is antithetical to the white supremacist patriarchal capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine that we call "Western civilization." When Death and its close companion Grief pay us a visit, they shatter the time and space of our reality, creating a new world from the shards of the old, big-bang style. Grief doesn't care for the linear, scheduled, fast-paced rules of the capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine; and, therefore, the capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine has refined its capacity to cut us off from our emotions, our humanity, consigning us to the category of "living dead" and dispersing us into the various death-worlds it requires to survive. A society made up of the living dead means its citizens do not question why things are the way they are, why they must die in order for a select few to hoard wealth and power.

Through this lens we can see how our grief is weaponized against us to keep us complacent. Despite inundating us with constant death, we are told not to grieve, that grieving is a distraction, unnecessary, a waste of time; that we must get used to it and move on, because that's life. Preventing opportunities to properly grieve creates these festering wounds for this capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine to poke and prod at our grief, further traumatizing us and making us ripe for continued exploitation until there's nothing left but a corpse for our loved ones to be preyed upon and overcharged to dispose of (if we're even afforded that shred of dignity).


But what if we refused to be turned into the living dead? What if we forcibly made space and time for our grief to wash over us, transform us, take precedence over capital and productivity? How might our lives, our material world, be transformed by our commitment to living life on grief time, as Jaffe describes it, and to understand that moving with the non-linear, time-travelling waves of the heartbreak we carry intergenerationally is a necessary component of building a liberated world? And, if we open ourselves up to the alchemy of grief, how might we transform the ways we live so that we are guided by the power of revolutionary love?

Grief is not, never was, and never should be, an individual, solitary act. To isolate ourselves in moments of deep pain and heartbreak is to let the system win because it feeds off our despair, loneliness, sadness, and fear. Jaffe, Gargi Bhattacharyya in their book *We, the Heartbroken*, and Cristina Rivera Garza in her book *Grieving*, all independently assert that grieving is a collective act, something that is done with others. Grieving gives you new eyes with which to view the world, and



because it renders us the most vulnerable, raw versions of ourselves, we are better able to see the world for all that it is—and all that it is not. Collective grieving can lay bare all the ways that our inability to properly grieve our dead has real-world consequences for our society as a whole. When we finally acknowledge how turning away from death, and therefore grief, has contributed to the construction of these death-worlds that are zombifying us, can we break the cycle of harm.

To carve out of everyday life space and time to come together and grieve is how we embody abolition, how we practice the liberated world we are building. This is emergent strategy in practice. This is what it means to embody the fractal, adaptive, interdependent, and decentralized nature of emergent strategy; to understand that our systems are a product of each of us and therefore our actions have the power to ripple out and transform the world around us.



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While it may appear that I've only discussed grief so far, as Sarah Jaffe puts it, "to write about grief is to write about love." Underneath the heavy weight of grief is deep, unending love for our dead who were taken and consumed by the capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine, robbing them of their lives and their right to die a good death. Cultivating a healthy relationship with grief opens us up to the power of love to traverse time and space, connecting us with our ancestors, filling us with the ancient wisdom that our dead never really leave us. Continuing to pour into our

relationships with our dead is what grounds us in the lands upon which we came—whether by force, flight, or the fight for a better future—and to learn from all that came before us what it takes to live full, abundant lives that will nourish the seeds of dying a good death.

Unfortunately, the system can—and often does—manipulate love to further its own hegemonic interests by "asphyxiat[ing] our desire to revolt and rebel," as Da'Shaun L. Harrison writes in the foreword to Joy James' *In Pursuit of Revolutionary Love: Precarity, Power, Communities*. For the system, to love is to endure the pain it inflicts upon you without question or protest.

Despite the capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine's efforts to bastardize the concept of love, Joy James reminds us love is vital to forging a liberated future. In particular, James provides for us the concept of revolutionary love. Revolutionary love is not all sunshine and roses; it's messy and hard at times, but it is motivated by deep care and concern for everyone, despite frustrations and betrayals. It is understanding that even if we don't get along, we all have the right to live abundant lives and die good deaths—and then take action to protect these inalienable rights.

This is central to revolutionary love, according to James. To embody revolutionary love is to engage with “radical risk-taking for justice.” It isn’t enough to acknowledge that we all deserve better; we must also be willing to take radical actions to build that better world. It also isn’t enough to continue doing the same things that we’ve been doing and expecting change.

As our government is dismantled from the inside, we’re being forced to confront the fascism upon which this country was founded. There may soon be little to do through the usual channels of action —“contact your representatives,” “co-sponsor this piece of legislation”—that will manage to make a material difference in the world. What if we tried more unconventional avenues for trying to materialize change in this dying world? What if we chose to face head on the untold grief caused by our misguided pursuits for nuclear domination? What if we made space publicly to collectively grieve, such that our leaders could no longer look away or co-sign more avoidable deaths? What if those harmed by the nuclear weapons industrial complex flooded the halls of power and forced our leaders to contend with the grief they’ve so haphazardly thrust upon us? We demand that you resurrect our mothers fathers daughters sisters brothers sons grandparents friends nieces nephews aunts uncles that you took from us because the capitalist-imperialist nuclear death machine that pays your salary decided that their life, their death, did not matter as much as global nuclear domination and a deposit in your bank account.

The dead are made up of those we have loved and who have loved us. They were real people robbed of their right to live fully and die well. It is for them that we continue the fight to build a new world. It is for our future ancestors that we continue to fight so that one day they may know what it feels like to live a rich life and die on their own terms. And it will be our grief and love that guide us through it all.

