

preface

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, as we reeled from mounting death counts, a series of drastic lockdowns, sudden massive shifts to online teaching and learning, and inadequate information about the virus, we also began an urgent conversation within our editorial collective about feminist approaches to understanding our new condition. Given the sudden physical constriction of our social, work, and activist lives, it felt important to reach outward rather than retreat into the concerns closest to home. Such a task entailed exploring geographic and policy differences in response to the pandemic around the globe. It meant asking who got to stay home, who was obliged to work outside the home, and what “home” meant for those vulnerable to family coercion. It also required closely tracking new meanings that were being forged — how societies deemed specific kinds of work “essential,” how physically maintaining distance (now termed “social” distancing) was practiced, and why mask-wearing seemed controversial. The *Feminist Studies* editorial collective decided to craft a call for short commentaries that would reflect a range of feminist research, analysis, and experience around the globe. The result is this special issue. We intend it not only to serve as an intellectual hive — a buzzing collection of ideas — but also as a personal resource that inspires readers by demonstrating feminist responses to these unprecedented times.

This issue of *Feminist Studies* foregrounds the staggering social inequalities that have been thrown into relief by this pandemic. Scholars examine how care work and social reproduction are valued, both within the home and beyond. Activists describe projects focused on survival and mutual aid, including those that predate the pandemic. Finally, the collective slowing down, or pause, has allowed space for reflection. This issue reflects these varied dimensions of feminist responses. The first group of articles focuses on the effects of the pandemic on home, work, and organizing spaces. The second group presents a range of activist responses around the globe. The third and final cluster of articles closes with creative practices of self-care.

We begin by setting the stage with a short story that captures the paranoia of the pandemic. Heather Fowler's "The Carrier" inhabits the milieu of a person who unknowingly serves as a carrier of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It recounts how this person, a generic urbane self-satisfied city-dweller, proceeds through the early weeks of the pandemic blissfully unaware of the damage they cause. It is a parable about how individualism can obscure one's sense of interdependence.

Our first cluster of articles on the effects of the pandemic opens with Amita Baviskar and Raka Ray's "COVID-19 at Home: Gender, Class, and the Domestic Economy in India," which unpacks what the pandemic has meant for the deeply gendered and class-inflected distribution of domestic labor. They elaborate how, in India, class and caste divides produce starkly different experiences of the pandemic. In effect, the authors underscore how "home" means very different things across multiple social locations and offer particularly poignant observations about the pandemic's effect on migrant workers. Andrea Quinlan and Rashmee Singh's article "COVID-19 and the Paradox of Visibility: Domestic Violence and Feminist Caring Labor in Canadian Shelters" focuses on how the "home" is not always a refuge, turning to how those in coercive relationships experience it as a violent space. Noting the serious increase in domestic violence during the pandemic, they focus on how domestic violence-prevention work is debilitated by pandemic-related restrictions in Canada and point to the urgency of providing greater support for such work. In "Crises Collide: Capitalism, Care, and COVID-19," Juliet Allen, Daniella Jenkins, and Marilyn Howard explore the impact of the pandemic on essential workers in the United Kingdom. The authors share data on how Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) workers have

been especially hard hit given their overrepresentation in “key worker” roles. They track why and how BAME women and communities have been more at risk of contracting and dying from the virus. In “Crisis, Care, and the Terror of Uncertainty,” Maisam Alomar discusses the historically exploitative nature of care labor in the United States, elaborating on its racialization and the precarious working conditions wrought by the pandemic. Shaneda Destine, Jazzmine Brooks, and Christopher Rogers’s “Black Maternal Health Crisis, COVID-19, and the Crisis of Care” lays out specifically how Black birthing parents in the United States have been especially vulnerable during the pandemic because of racist mistreatment and inadequate care. Elora Halim Chowdhury further explores the topic of precarity by asking: who has the privilege to practice social distancing? In “The Precarity of Preexisting Conditions,” Chowdhury describes the coercive way in which Bangladeshi garment workers have been forced to return to factories during the pandemic, often without access to protective equipment.

Our next cluster of articles turns from the effects of the pandemic to activist responses. Constanza Tabbush and Elisabeth Jay Friedman argue in “Feminist Activism Confronts COVID-19” that, although the economic downturn caused by the pandemic has severely affected women, it has not curtailed feminist activism in Latin America. They describe how deep-rooted digital methods have produced an unprecedented response at the levels of policy as well as “solidaristic actions in low-income urban neighborhoods.” In “‘We Are in Quarantine, but Caring Does Not Stop’: Mutual Aid as Radical Care in Brazil,” Carolina Moraes, Juma Santos, and Mariana Prandini Assis detail one such example: a network of care called Tulipas do Cerrado created by a street sex workers’ collective in Brazil’s capital. They argue that such mutual aid demonstrates how practices of care create “a survival strategy.” Alexia Arani also explores mutual aid projects that have “blossomed” in response to both the pandemic and police brutality. Engaging in ethnographic work among sick and disabled people in San Diego, California, Arani cautions that such projects have had ambivalent and adverse effects for those who were in need of care prior to the pandemic. In “Reinventing Socio-Ecological Reproduction, Designing a Feminist Logistics: Perspectives from Italy,” Tania Rispoli and Miriam Tola examine Bergamo, the region in northern Italy hardest hit by the pandemic. They point out how activists there have more forcefully centered

the importance of social reproduction and offer examples of “radical care” projects that address basic survival and health needs. Erica S. Lawson, Florence Wullo Anfaara, Vaiba Kebeh Flomo, Cerue Konah Garlo, and Ola Osman also center women’s social reproductive labor in response to the pandemic in “The Intensification of Liberian Women’s Social Reproductive Labor in the Coronavirus Pandemic: Regenerative Possibilities.” They feature the virus containment work carried out by Women’s Peace Huts in Liberia, a country with previous experience of virus containment during the Ebola epidemic. Zainab S. Cheema offers an ecological critique in “It’s the Same Cause: Climate Change and COVID-19 in the Perspectives of Environmental Feminist Activists.” Drawing on interviews with Jörg Hellkvist, a representative of Sweden’s chapter of Fridays for the Future; Logan Atkinson Burke, the executive director of the Louisiana-based Alliance for Affordable Energy; and Anoka Primrose Abeyrathne, a Sri Lankan disaster relief and sustainable agriculture activist, Cheema argues that environmental feminists have both tactical and analytical wisdom to offer in response to the pandemic. We close this section by drawing a contrast between feminist responses to the pandemic and those of authoritarian, right-wing male leaders. In “Unmasking Masculinity: Considering Gender, Science, and Nation in Responses to COVID-19,” Eve Ng shows how Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Boris Johnson, and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei each deploy similar gendered tactics that reject science. Ng contrasts their approach with the more effective strategies used by women leaders such as Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, Angela Merkel in Germany, and Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan. Ng analyzes practices such as refusing mask-wearing, isolationist trade policies, and rejection of public health guidelines as forms of hegemonic masculine behavior.

Our final cluster of articles offers suggestions on practices of self-care as resistance: Altheria Caldera’s “Challenging Capitalistic Exploitation: A Black Feminist/Womanist Commentary on Work and Self-Care” calls for slowing down to more meaningfully attend to health and well-being in the face of precarious working conditions. Caldera narrates how a Black feminist *theory in the flesh* approach allows her to challenge the effects of capitalist exploitation in her life. Anita Girvan, Baljit Pardesi, Davina Bhandar, and Nisha Nath’s “Poetics of Care: Remedies for Racial Capitalism Gone Viral” recounts their method of using poetry prompts to build solidarity in their scholarly collective. A practice of self-care that

they had initiated before the pandemic, the poetry prompts grew into something more significant as the pandemic unfolded, allowing them to nurture each other's spirits and remediate the effects of working as women of color in institutions of higher learning. We close our issue with a meditation by Judy Rohrer, "'Where Life Is Precious': Intersectional Feminism in the Time of COVID-19," which explores the poetics of breath in this political moment. Contending as we are in the United States with both a virus that debilitates the respiratory system and anti-Black police brutality, the slogan "I can't breathe" takes on a new resonance. It is imperative to dwell on the preciousness of life, to focus on why and how societies distribute this preciousness unequally, and to reclaim the preciousness of life everywhere.

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