

Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

— JAMES BALDWIN

AS I BEGAN THIS BOOK during the summer of 2014, the human community witnessed systemic repetition of unjustified cruelty with exhaustion and frustration. We watched white police officers in Ferguson, Missouri and Staten Island, New York murder two unarmed Black men: Michael Brown and Eric Garner. We watched a rich and powerful professional football player, Ray Rice, beat his wife, Janay, unconscious in an elevator. We watched the Israeli government mass murder over 2,000 Palestinian civilians in Gaza. It quickly became apparent that the methods we have developed collectively, to date, to understand these kinds of actions in order to avoid them, are not adequate.

As a novelist, in order to create characters that have integrity, I apply the principle that people do things for reasons, even if they are not aware of those reasons or even if they can't accept that their actions are motivated instead of neutral and objective. Using this principle to examine those events, I have to ask myself what the white police officers, the wealthy football player, and

the militarized nation state *think* is happening that produces and justifies their brutal actions. As video and witness accounts attest, neither Michael Brown nor Eric Garner did *anything* that justified the way they were treated by the police. Eric Garner sold loose cigarettes and Michael Brown walked down the street. Both men tried to offer the police alternatives to cruelty. Eric Garner informed the police of the consequences of their actions on him, when he told them eleven times, while in an illegal chokehold, “I can’t breathe.” Michael Brown raised his hands in a sign of surrender and said, “Don’t shoot.” But something occurred within the minds, impulses, and group identities of the white police officers, in that they construed the original non-event compounded with these factual and peacemaking communications as some kind of threat or attack. In other words, these policemen looked at *nothing*, the complete absence of threat, and there they saw threat gross enough to justify murder. Nothing happened, but these people with power saw *abuse*.

We know from security camera footage taken in a casino lobby and elevator that Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice and his wife were having a quarrel. As much as we don’t like quarrels with our partners, and wish they wouldn’t happen, disagreement with one’s lover is a normative part of human experience. It is impossible to live without it ever taking place. Intimate disagreement is, as they say, *life*. Yet, Ray Rice experienced normative, regular conflict that exists in every relationship, family, and household in the world as so overwhelmingly unbearable and threatening that he hit his wife, knocking her unconscious, and dragged her limp body by the ankles out of the elevator, leaving her lying inert in a hallway. He looked at normative, everyday conflict, and responded with extreme cruelty. He looked at the regular, even banal, expression of difference and saw *threat*.

The Israeli government has kept the Palestinian Gaza Strip under siege since 2005. This has made daily life unbearable for its inhabitants. In the late spring of 2014, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu escalated pressure on the already suffering Palestinians, and some factions within Gaza responded with rockets that were of such poor quality they had only symbolic impact. The Israeli government re-reacted in turn to this response with over fifty days of aerial bombing and ground

invasion, causing mass death and massive destruction of literal, cultural, and psychological infrastructure. The Gazans were reacting to a state of injustice that the Israelis had created. The Gazans were *resisting*. They were refusing to go along with unbearable and unjustifiable treatment. The Israelis experienced this resistance to ongoing unfair treatment as *attack*.

Brown and Garner did absolutely nothing but be Black. Janay Rice expressed normative conflict. Gazans resisted unbearable treatment. In all of these cases the police, the husband, and the nation overstated harm. They took Nothing, Normative Conflict, and Resistance and misrepresented these reasonable stances of difference as Abuse. From the most intimate relationship between two people, to the power of the police, to the crushing reality of occupation, these actors displayed distorted thinking in which justifiable behavior was understood as aggression. In this way they overreacted at a level that produced tragedy, pain, and division. It is this moment of overreaction that I wish to examine in this book. My thesis is that at many levels of human interaction there is the opportunity to conflate discomfort with threat, to mistake internal anxiety for exterior danger, and in turn to escalate rather than resolve. I will show how this dynamic, whether between two individuals, between groups of people, between governments and civilians, or between nations is a fundamental opportunity for either tragedy or peace. Conscious awareness of these political and emotional mechanisms gives us all a chance to face ourselves, to achieve recognition and understanding in order to avoid escalation towards unnecessary pain.

Methodology

I ground my perspective in the queer: I use queer examples, I cite queer authors, I am rooted in queer points of view, I address and investigate concerns and trends in queer discourse. I come directly from a specifically lesbian historical analysis of power, rooted generationally in Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, in which sexual, racial, material, emotional, colonial, and gender dynamics were seen as continuous and interrelated. Audre, in particular, in her classic *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, which

she called a “Biomythography,” addressed the question of genre directly by simply inventing her own. So I continue the tradition of creative writers using non-fiction to address their observations, feelings, contexts, histories, visions, memories, and dreams. It is a category of the literature of ideas that stands apart from academia, and yet is useful to it and frequently incorporated into classroom reading, serving as a subject of academic analysis and inquiry while not being a product of it.

I also grew up in feminism, in which the meaning of the private sphere is organic to the meaning of the larger frame of power, and one is understood as consequential to the other. So to see and then examine the relationship of individual anxiety to its geopolitical expression is an historically consistent impulse. In the contemporary moment, this lens enables me to recognize the transition of “gay” from a severely oppressed, once broad category of people, to the more recent phenomenon of select sexual minority sectors getting access to the state’s punishment apparatus, often based in whiteness, citizenship, normalizing family roles, and HIV negativity. The implications of these shifts are informative to all who are able to learn from queer experience. This trajectory from oppressed to oppressor is central to the content of this book. Just as unresolved, formerly subordinated or traumatized individuals can collude with or identify with bullies, so can unresolved, formerly subordinated or traumatized groups of people identify with the supremacy of the state. In both cases, the lack of recognition that the past is not the present leads to the newly acquired power to punish rather than to the self-transformation necessary to resolve conflict and produce justice.

My range of consideration is broad. Queer intellectuals and artists are no longer required to stay within our subject ghetto. We no longer have to choose between queer subjectivity and the world. The world, at least the world of ideas, now understands that the two are integrated. In some arenas I can claim “expertise,” but in others I have something deeper to offer. As an artist I offer the reader an eclectic way in. I do not practice the “one, long, slow idea” school of thought. Instead, through three decades of books, plays, and movies, I have evolved a style of offering the reader many, many new ideas at once. Some of them will stick, some will be rejected, and some will be grappled with in a manner

that creates even newer insights on the part of the reader. Historian Nan Alamilla Boyd helped me to understand that my lack of academic training makes me literally “undisciplined.” This news was very freeing, and a gift I wish I had been handed decades before. I now am able to ask you to read this book the way you would watch a play: not to emerge saying, “The play is right!” but rather to observe that the play reveals human nuance, contradiction, limitation, joy, connection, and the tragedy of separation. That the playwright’s own humanity is also an example of these unavoidable flaws. These chapters are not homogenous. As a creative writer I have long understood that form should be an organic expression of the feelings at the core of the piece. Each chapter here serves a different function and that is represented in its tone, genre, style, and form. Some are journalistic, some analytical, some are speculative, others abstract, some are only feelings. As a novelist, I know that it is the cumulative juxtaposition that reveals the story.

This is not a book to be agreed with, an exhibition of evidence or display of proof. It is instead designed for engaged and dynamic interactive collective thinking where some ideas will resonate, others will be rejected, and still others will provoke the readers to produce new knowledge themselves. Like authentic, conscious relationships, truly progressive communities, responsible citizenship, and real friendship, and like the peace-making that all these require, it asks you to be interactive.

Facing and Dealing with Conflict

The examples of racist police violence when nothing is happening, men beating their female partners unconscious in response to normative conflict, and the mass murder of civilians when acts of resistance against intolerable conditions are taking place, are all extreme but daily acts of injustice. By the time these cruelties occur, the situation is already completely out of control. For that reason, I am interested, in *this* book, in examining the phenomenon of overstating harm where it begins in its earlier stage as *Conflict*, before it escalates and explodes into tragedy. Disaster originates in an initial overreaction to *Conflict* and then escalates

to the level of gross *Abuse*. It is at the Conflict stage that the hideous future is still not inevitable and can be resolved. Once the cruelty and perhaps violence erupts, it is too late. Or at least requires a level of repair outside of the range of what many of us will do without encouragement and support.

Conflict, after all, is rooted in difference and people are and always will be different. With the exception of those natural disasters that are not caused by human misdeed, most of the pain, destruction, waste, and neglect towards human life that we create on this planet and beyond, are consequences of our overreaction to difference. This is expressed through our resistance to facing and resolving problems, which is overwhelmingly a refusal to change how we see ourselves in order to be accountable. Therefore how we understand Conflict, how we respond to Conflict, and how we behave as bystanders in the face of other people's Conflict determines whether or not we have collective justice and peace.

At the center of my vision is the recognition that above all, it is the community surrounding a Conflict that is the source of its resolution. The community holds the crucial responsibility to resist overreaction to difference, and to offer alternatives of understanding and complexity. We have to help each other illuminate and counter the role of overstating harm instead of using it to justify cruelty. I suggest that we have a better chance at interrupting unnecessary pain if we articulate our *shared* responsibility in creating alternatives. Looking for methods of *collective* problem-solving make these destructive, tragic leaps more difficult to accomplish. People who are being punished for doing nothing, for having normative conflict, or for resisting unjustified situations, need the help of other people. While there are many excuses for not intervening in unjust punishment, that intervention is, nonetheless, essential. Without the intervention that most people are afraid to commit to, this escalation cannot be interrupted.

In other words, because we won't change our stories to integrate other people's known *reasons* and illuminate their unknown ones, we cannot resolve Conflict in a way that is productive, equitable, and fair. This is why we (individuals, couples, cliques, families, communities, nations, peoples) often pretend, believe,

or claim that Conflict is, instead, Abuse and therefore deserves punishment. That the mere fact of the other person's difference is misrepresented as an assault that then justifies our cruelty and relinquishes our responsibility to change. Consequently, resistance to that false charge of Abuse is then positioned as further justification of even more cruelty masquerading as "punishment," through the illogic at base of refusing accountability and repair.

While people are punished at every level of human relationship for doing nothing, for normative Conflict and for resistance, simultaneously we have the overwhelming reality of actual violence and real Abuse. There is an enormous existing literature that analyzes and quantifies actual violence and real Abuse. There are political movements like Black Lives Matter and Palestine Solidarity that respond to this real violence and actual Abuse. And on the individual and family level there is a financially and culturally significant Recovery Industry with books, podcasts, videos, workshops, and a wide variety of practitioners and healing practices. Because discourse on actual violence and abuse and the recovery process is already embedded in the commercial and cultural realm, I am not going to repeat that information here. Instead, in *this* book I am looking at something quite different. Without in any way minimizing the role of violence in our lives, I am looking, *simultaneously*, at how a heightened rhetoric of threat that confuses doing nothing, normative conflict, and resistance with actual abuse, has produced a wide practice of *overstating harm*. And that this overstatement of harm is often expressed in "shunning," a literal refusal to speak in person with another human being, or group of people, an exclusion of their information, the active obstruction to a person being heard and the pretense that they do not exist. I am examining the inaccurate claiming of "abuse" as a substitute for problem-solving. I make plain how this deflection of responsibility produces unnecessary separation and perpetuates anxiety while producing cruelty, shunning, undeserved punishment, incarceration, and occupation. The title of this book, *Conflict Is Not Abuse*, recommends mutual accountability in a culture of underreaction to abuse and overreaction to conflict. I am motivated to separate out the cultural phenomena of overstatement of harm from harm itself, because this separation is necessary in order to retain the

legitimate protections and recognitions afforded the experience of actual violence and real oppression. This book offers many, many examples that I hope will help clarify the negative consequences of conflating Conflict with Abuse.

Positive Change Can Happen

Because I have participated in, contributed to, and witnessed progressive paradigm shifts, I know from the fact of my own lived experience that, while perfection is never achievable, positive change is always possible. Resolution doesn't mean that everyone is happy, but it does mean that perhaps fewer people are being blamed for pain they have not caused, or being cast as the receptacle of other people's anxieties, so that fewer people are dehumanized by false accusation. Or as Matt Brim suggests, that when we are in the realm of Conflict, we can move from the Abuse-based construction of *perpetrator and victim* to the more accurate recognition of the parties as *the conflicted*, each with legitimate concerns and legitimate rights that must be considered in order to produce just resolution.

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, people with HIV were among the most oppressed people on earth. In addition to oppression by race, geography, class, gender, and sexuality, they faced a terminal illness for which there were no known treatments. They had no laws of protection, no services, no representation, and received no compassion. Their lives did not matter and their prognosis was unabated suffering and inevitable mass death. Millions suffered and died without care, comfort, or interest, vilified by cruel projections, neglect, and unjustified exclusion and blame. They were systematically shunned, their experiences and points of view viciously excluded from policy, representation, dominant cultural mores, and law. I witnessed this firsthand.

Only when people with AIDS and their friends intervened against the status quo and forced an end to the shunning by forcing interactivity through zaps, sit-ins, initiated agendas, actions, interruptions, shut-downs, exposes, research, and demonstrations, did systemic progress begin to be made. The state theorized this unwanted insistence on appropriate treat-

ment as an act of violation, calling it “disorderly conduct” instead of resistance, an illegality to be punished and stigmatized. They shunned people with AIDS and therefore did not hear what they had to say to about how they were being treated. As a result, thousands of arrests took place of people trying to save lives, many of whom fought passionately until the day they died. In other words, it was the mistreatment and shunning of people with HIV that produced their illegality. If the powers that be had invited people with HIV into their halls and said, “We have a conflict here. Therefore we need to sit down together and solve it,” people with HIV would not have had to do civil disobedience, for which they and their supporters were arrested by the police. It was the shunning that made them have to do this. It was the immoral shunning that criminalized people with HIV.

Today, we understand that those people’s acts of resistance were necessary, heroic, and socially transformative; that just because they were forbidden to speak doesn’t mean that they were obligated to obey those unjust orders. As a consequence, the experience of being HIV-positive has changed dramatically for many, though absolutely not for all. Attitude, treatment, laws, public opinion, social responsibility, and representation have been transformed in significant ways. The two primary obstacles in place now are stigma and economics: the greed of pharmaceutical companies and health care industries in a context of global capital. What remains to be addressed is a question of political will so that existing effective treatments can be extended to all regardless of nationality, location, or class. Today, the renewed stigma of HIV criminalization looms. It relies on the fundamental dynamics addressed in this book: *The conflation of Conflict with Abuse, and the overstatement of harm as a justification for cruelty*, even while revolutions in attitude, and the experience of HIV, evolve simultaneously.

It is clear from history that progressive cultural and political advancement is not natural or neutral and does not occur on its own momentum. As Jim Hubbard and I showed in the film he directed and we co-produced, *United In Anger: A History of ACT UP* (2012), these changes for people with HIV/AIDS, within one generation, were accomplished by radical, effective, creative, and diverse political activism on multiple fronts. Change

requires awareness to propel a transformation of attitude. Once there is even a glimmer of awareness, it implies the ownership of an injustice, and a consequential responsibility for its solution, which must be expressed through behavior, not just feeling. Yet, as was learned by the AIDS crisis, significant attitudinal change, while inhabited by many, is propelled by a *critical mass*, a small diverse collection of individuals with focused intent and effective action who rise to the occasion to literally change our minds.

In the summer of 2014, the Palestinian people of Gaza were slaughtered by Israelis in the face of worldwide abandonment. Palestinians are, today, among the most victimized, scapegoated, and attacked people in the world. I watch as their suffering and mass murder is propagandized through pervasive dehumanized representations that falsely position them as “dangerous” when, in fact, they are the ones endangered and in desperate need of outside intervention. Although I quote extensively from Palestinians in Historic Palestine and the diaspora in this book, I do want to start with a piece Jewish journalist Amira Haas wrote in July 2014 in the newspaper *Haaretz* addressed to her fellow Israelis:

If victory is measured by the success of causing lifelong trauma to 1.8 million people (and not for the first time) waiting to be executed at any moment then the victory is yours and adds up to our moral implosion, the ethical defeat of a society engaged in no self-inspection, wallowing in self-pity over postponed airline flights and burnishing itself with the pride of the enlightened.

Haas identifies the key elements found in many group supremacy formations, whether families, cliques, or nations. It’s what Canadian Jude Johnson names “meritocracy, entitlement, enemy mind.” One group deserves the right to be unquestioned and they are entitled to dehumanize the other whom they misrepresent as “a threat” while using this distortion as the grounds for self-congratulation, indifferent to the pain they cause and the long-term negative consequences of their actions.

While every context has its specificities, I remember when people with AIDS were universally treated as dangerous pariahs, inherently guilty, accused of being predators, excluded, silenced, and threatened while being refused research, protection, or

kindness and therefore condemned to suffer and die in the millions. Many of my friends numbered among them. Many more are haunted for life by the specter of that suffering. There can never be a direct comparison, only the resonance of historic memory, but I know that the persecution, mass death experience, and abandonment of Palestinians, justified by similarly aligned false representations, unjustified claims of Abuse, the projection of Trauma caused by others, Supremacy ideology, and distorted thinking, can all be transformed. But first these constructions have to be recognized. Any pain that human beings can create, human beings can transcend. But we have to understand what we are doing. This transformation also requires a critical mass, a small, effective, focused, and inspired group of people who can combine clear moral thinking with the taking of responsibility, as expressed through direct challenge to brutality and organized action. It can be a small group of conscious friends helping a person conflating Conflict with Abuse find alternatives. It can be two family members who don't jump on an unethical bandwagon falsely construed as "loyalty." It can be a vanguard of activists in a city, or a minority stratum in the world who object to victimization and intervene to create change. In a society, this can be a few thousand or even hundred people. In one person's life, or the life of a family or community, it can be two friends.

Tom Bartlett, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in July 2015, memorialized the massacre at the Bosnian town of Srebrenica by reviewing some recent research by social psychologists studying conflict resolution. The findings seem obvious, and yet are rejected by many people. "More contact between groups reduces prejudice," Bartlett concludes. "The status of the groups must be respected as equal. Those in authority must be supportive. The contact must be more than superficial." A meta-analysis of 515 studies involving a quarter of a million people concluded that

intergroup contact fosters "greater trust and forgiveness for past transgressions." The effects are evident regardless of gender, age, religion, or ethnicity. They seem to hold even when the contact is indirect—that is, you are less likely to be prejudiced against a certain group if a member of your group is friends with a member of that group. A 2009 study

published in *American Psychologist* found, somewhat incredibly, that simply thinking about positive interactions with a member of another group reduces prejudice. Imaginary contact may be better than none at all.

Yet over and over again, self-righteousness and the refusal to be self-critical is expressed as dominance reliant on the ability to shun or exclude the other party. Those seeking justice often have to organize allies in order to force contact and conversation, negotiation. Trying to create communication is almost always the uphill struggle of the falsely blamed. And entire movements are structured around the goal of forcing one party to face the reality of the other, and thereby face themselves. And of course this power struggle over whether or not opposing parties will speak is an enormous smokescreen covering up the real issue, the substance of what they need to speak about: namely, the nature of and resolution to the conflict.

In the realm of geopolitics, that human impulse to end cruelty and create repair is represented, in one example, by the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement founded in 2005. This is a non-violent global movement rooted in the action of withholding economic, academic, and cultural support from the Israeli war machine to force basic human rights: the rights of refugees, the right to free movement, the rights of basic autonomy. This is an achievable goal reliant on community conscience and action, and towards which consumers, students, churches, employees with pension plans, artists and performers, and companies with investments must contribute. For Americans who oppose these cruelties and dishonorable actions, one goal is ending US military funding for Israel's occupation of Palestine.

This book starts in the most intimate realm of personal difference that confuses anxiety with threat: sexual fear, domestic disagreement, individual projection of past experiences onto the present, or lack of support from friends and family to dismantle distorted thinking. It then moves on to the second tier: the relationship between overreaction and the state and the responsibility of community to help individuals progress towards repair without capitulating to the power of the state. It is here that we find the roots of the problem: Overstatement of Harm, False Accusations of Blame, Punishment for Resistance, Projec-

tion, Shunning and Exclusion, Group Bullying, Bad Groups, False Concepts of Loyalty, Cruelty over Accountability, Distorted Thinking/Mental Illness, and the stigma around acknowledging it in people we love or could love. It is in the personal realm of people we know, institutions we interact with, and authorities we empower that these transformations can be made. Right now, the state and shallow group relationships collude to escalate Conflict and obstruct repair. As I try to show over and over again, refusing to be self-critical in order to solve conflicts enhances the power of the state. We can resist this process. As individuals, we have enormous power in the ways we abandon the scapegoated, or instead stand up for them. We have power to change the ways we encourage shunning and instead do the work to facilitate communication. Simple shifts in personal behavior and their expressions in political structures of power, produce changing public norms which can make huge differences in individual and collective experiences.

For example, when I was sixteen in 1975 and faced the brutality of my parents' homophobia, I went to my high school guidance counselor. He told me not to tell my classmates that I was a lesbian because they could shun me. In other words, instead of intervening, he upheld the distorted thinking, unjustified punishment, and exclusion. Today, when I hear about familial homophobia from my students, I connect them to relevant aspects of the LGBT community, provide alternatives in my classroom, and offer to speak to their parents, i.e., to intervene and stand up to brutality in order to protect its recipient and transform their context. I do this in the midst of a critical mass of other teachers taking the same action, and in this way there is a paradigm shift, where the school that, in my case, was part of the oppression system can become part of the resistance and solution. This is the kind of step that I am asking for, and which I believe is possible both inside and outside of institutions and with friends. The move from complicit bystander to active participant for change is the same kind of attitudinal shift that many of us went through in relationship to people with AIDS, and must go through in relationship to Palestine. But I am not asking for this on a disaster by disaster basis, but rather as a shift in our collective mindset. By differentiating between Conflict and Abuse, we

can become advocates with our friends, families, communities, workplaces, localities, religions, and nations against scapegoating and shunning on the small and large scales, and contributors to a group dynamic of accountability and repair.

In this book, I bring fifty-seven years of living and thirty-five years of writing to a critical conclusion: that from the most potent potential for intimacy between strangers, to intimate domestic moments between lovers, to the claims of the state on its citizens, to the geopolitical phenomena of mass murder, we witness a continuum. Namely, false accusations of harm are used to avoid acknowledgment of complicity in creating conflict and instead escalate normative conflict to the level of crisis. This choice to punish rather than resolve is a product of distorted thinking, and relies on reinforcement of negative group relationships, when instead these ideologies should be actively challenged. Through this overstatement of harm, false accusations are used to justify cruelty, while shunning keeps information from entering into the process. Resistance to shunning, exclusion, and unilateral control, while necessary, are mischaracterized as harm and used to re-justify more escalation towards bullying, state intervention, and violence. Emphasizing communication and repair, instead of shunning and separation, is the key to transforming these paradigms.

PART ONE | *The Conflicted Self and the Abusive State*

Chapter One lays out the fundamental differences between Conflict and Abuse in the realm of the heart, the intimate: the flirt, relationships, households, and surrounding friendship circles. Here we begin the conversation about what happens when Conflict is wrongly represented as Abuse in the personal realm, and how the new technologies corrupt potential affections, understandings, negotiations, and love.

In Chapter Two, I enter the arena of the state, learning from the work of anti-violence advocate Catherine Hodes to understand the difference between Conflict and Abuse in relationship to social service providers.

Chapter Three begins the application of these ideas by examining an expression of *overstating harm* in which the police are

called or the state is invoked in matters where Conflict is misrepresented as Abuse. In trying to understand how the police became the arbiters of our relationships, I look at the historic evolution from the creation of the Feminist Anti-Violence movement in the 1960s to contemporary state control of the domestic realm. How resistance politics became part of the state apparatus of control, often using the same words. I examine how differences in race and class impact contemporary legal and social approaches to intimate partner abuse, and how the individual's inability to problem-solve serves the interests of the state.

Chapter Four expands these foundations through the surprising example of Canadian HIV criminalization, showing how the “moderate” presentation of a neoliberal society can cover up extreme scapegoating of Conflict, and exploitation of sexual anxiety initiated and aggravated by the state itself. Here I examine some ways that governments collude with citizens to misdirect anxiety (from Latin *angustus* meaning “narrow”) into claims of criminal wrong.

PART TWO | *The Impulse to Escalate*

Once this relationship between overstating harm and the Abuse by the state is established, I start to unravel some of the reasons why people are compelled to escalate. The centerpiece of this dynamic is the role of “bad” groups in encouraging bullying and shunning instead of peacemaking. Escalation is the key consequence of refusing to problem-solve or negotiate, and it demands our attention as a central obstacle to peace and justice.

In Chapter Five, I examine how Traumatized behavior and Supremacy ideology resemble each other, how both produce distorted thinking that seeks unreasonable levels of control over other people and does not tolerate self-criticism or difference. I propose a release of the stigma around recognizing mental illness, distorted thinking, and anxiety, and suggest that they be publicly and commonly recognized as contributing sources of this intolerance and control. And I try to look at the cultural denial of these manifestations of distorted thinking as a strategy for the enforcement of dominance.

Chapter Six further deepens this discussion by taking up the contemporary concern with “triggers,” i.e., the moment of escalation, especially in sequence with shunning. Here I look at four diverse systems of thought that all recognize the trigger + shunning sequence as the centerpiece of injustice and pain: Traditional Psychoanalysis, Contemporary Psychiatry and its commercial counterpart Pop Psychology, Mindfulness, and Al-Anon, the counterpart to Alcoholics Anonymous focused on partners and families of Alcoholics. I examine how each of these perspectives understand the role of the “bad” group (couple, family, community, friends, religion, nation, peoples) as enforcers of escalation driven by overstated harm. I look at how these divergent systems of thought unite by offering what Stephen Andrews calls “realignment” from “bad” groups, and centering delay as a method for avoiding unjust escalation.

In Chapter Seven, I examine the role of the family as a dangerous place of production of this group-based negative loyalty, male control, and violence. I suggest that the rising legitimacy of some LGBT people in relationship to the state through the traditional family structure reinforces some of the problematic aspects of that structure. And how, in particular, the assumptions of the mother role remains antithetical to power sharing, even in the queer family, and its relationship to the state. This alignment between family and state makes us increasingly complicit with a governmental apparatus of punishment that does not address the actual sources of conflict, and instead relies on overreaction instead of repair.

PART THREE | *Supremacy/Trauma and the Justification of Injustice: The Israeli War on Gaza*

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I represent the first three weeks of the Israeli war on Gaza as witnessed from afar through social media in the summer of 2014. I analyze it as a production of all the elements discussed and accrued throughout the book. I will show how refusal to take responsibility for participation in creating both Conflict and Abuse and unilateral false stories about one party’s righteousness in combination with the negative bonds of the “bad” group, reinforced by shunning and propelled by both

Supremacy ideology and Traumatized behavior, produce what Israeli historian Ilan Pappé calls “incremental genocide.”

In the Conclusion, I explore how people with social commitments have a special responsibility to intervene to end shunning, facilitate communication, and do the work to reveal complex views of human behavior as we practice self-criticism and stand up to negative groups. I detail the tasks and gifts of real solidarity towards peacemaking and its necessity for those of us with visions for a better future. “The Duty of Repair” belongs to us all, but especially to those who claim access to a social conscience.

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