

Diversity Thoughts: Hatred Habituation? Another Anti-Semitic attack

April 29, 2019

Dear colleagues:

I am shocked and humbled by my own numbness or under-reactivity in response to the shooting at a San Diego synagogue on the 7th day of Passover this past Friday, 4/26.

A person died and several others were wounded because they were Jews observing the holiday in a place of worship.

Pittsburgh (when 11 people were shot during Sabbath morning services on 10/27/18) was just 6 months ago. How can I relativize (trivialize?!) this act (not as deadly as Pittsburgh), when the spirit of hatred and intention to obliterate Jews for being Jews is the same?

Let us remind ourselves that such murderous violence is outrageous, making the world one step less hospitable for the diversity many of us value and that we thought the United States of America stands for. Let us remember that the intention of the shooter was to kill more than one person. Let us also remember that there are many more like-minded people like him. Let us also be realistic that we have only experienced the tip of the iceberg from the effects on many minds by specialized social network "bubbles" which have brainwashed diversity out as a value and replaced tolerance with prejudice and hatred, which can easily cross over into murderous action.

My slowness in reacting also makes me think about the insidious path injustice, violence and tragedy can forge in our individual and collective psyches. With repetition of senseless violence, we become duller, less reactive, more habituated, and little by little, outrageous acts become more normal and we accept the new state of affairs. Is this what occurred during the 1930s and 1940s rise of antisemitism and nationalism in Germany and other parts of Europe--for many, a frog response to warming water until it boils you dead?

How do we avert the dulling of our outrage in the face of crimes and hatred that are becoming more common? African Americans dying for driving while black? Getting shot for wearing a hoodie while black or holding a carver's knife while Native? Muslims being aggressed, suspected of terrorism, attacked, recently killed in Christchurch, New Zealand? Trans women being beaten and killed for showing their true identities? (and many more.)

This reminds me of some of what Dr. Joy DeGruy proposes in her excellent book "the Post Traumatic Slave syndrome" (2017) -- and her talk at a recent Seattle Town Hall I had the fortune to attend. By internalizing oppression, we help maintain its effects trans-generationally.

Today I want to remark that we are neurologically programmed to habituate and desensitize to stimuli that recur and don't kill or injure us personally. In fact, this is a pathway for healing by which exposure to stimuli helps retrain the amygdala to become less afraid and reactive. The problem is that trauma that becomes chronic can become insidious as we internalize and normalize its oppression. Have any of you worked with patients/clients recovering from domestic violence trauma who still feel gas-lighted post-facto, as if it was somehow their fault?

How do we avoid habituation to and introjection of hatred and trauma?

To what degree is "going on with normal life" after an atrocity a way to assert that we will not succumb to terror (like much of Israel lives), and to what degree is normalization the beginning of deadly habituation?

Thanks for reading this late-in-the-day reflection. Rather than perfecting it, I am choosing to get it out to you for conversation promptly. Thank you.