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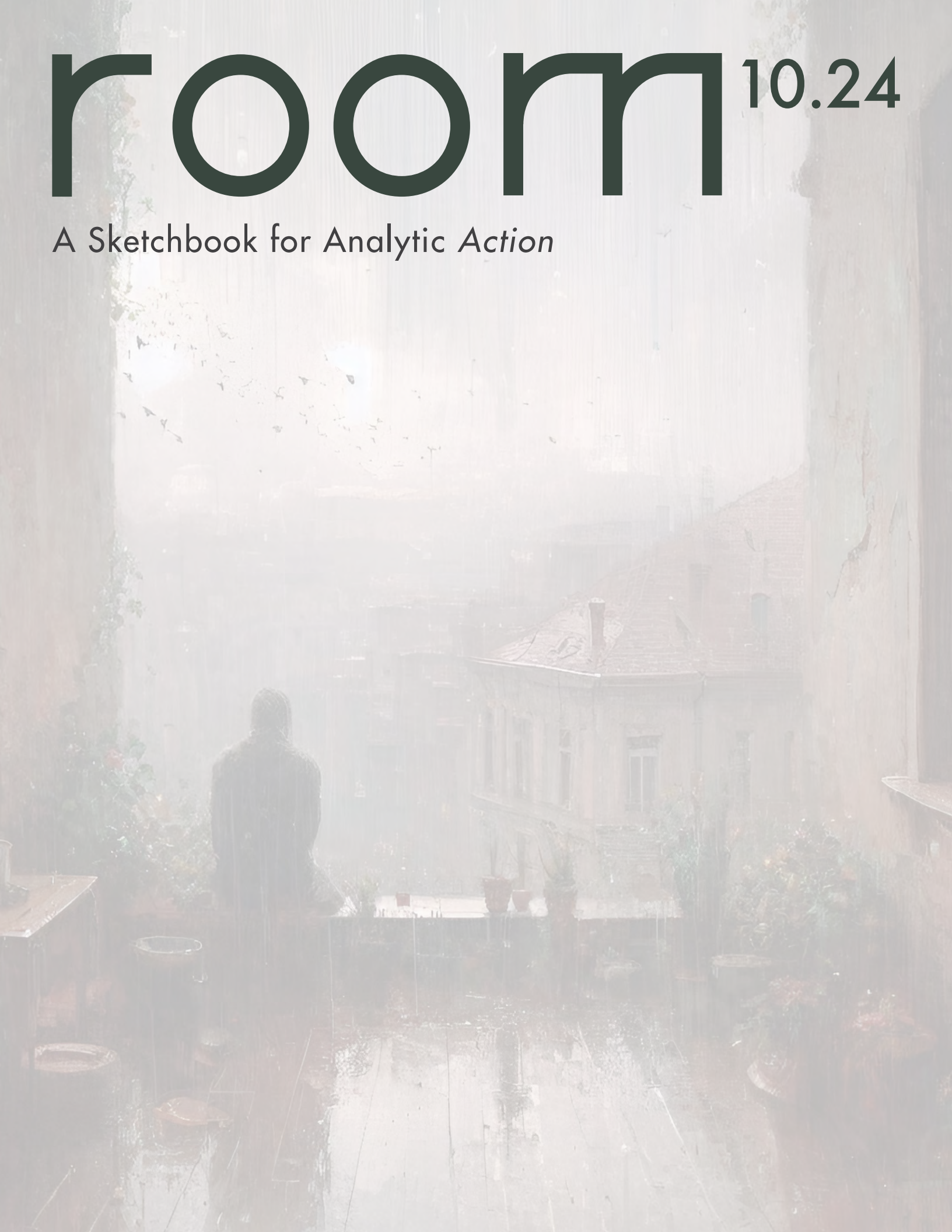
A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*



ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action* is an open, global, public forum in which individual experience shared through essays, art, creative writing, poetry, and community projects enrich our understanding of the social and political world. We believe that the exquisite singularity of individual expression has universal relevance. *ROOM*'s unique approach offers greater familiarity with psychoanalysis as a lens for social discourse.

Cover photo by Manuel Angel Egea

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A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*
— 2018 Gradiva® Award for New Media —

INTERNATIONAL PSYCHOANALYTICAL ASSOCIATION
— 2023 IPA in Culture Award Winner —

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CIPS CONFEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETIES

CFS Contemporary Freudian Society

IPTAR Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research

ICP+P Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy + Psychoanalysis

NEW DIRECTIONS
WRITING WITH A PSYCHOANALYTIC EDGE

Contributors

Ali Asadollahi, an award-winning Iranian poet, is the author of six Persian poetry books. Asadollahi is a permanent member and the former secretary of the Iranian Writers' Association (founded in 1968). His poems and translations are published/forthcoming in *Bellingham Review, Consequence, Denver Quarterly, Epoch, Guernica Editions, Hayden's Ferry Review, The Los Angeles Review,* and others.

Stefania Baresic is an Italian-born psychotherapist living in Toronto, Canada. She operates a private practice, supporting adults struggling with the intersecting effects of developmental, multigenerational, historical, and social trauma. In her work, she integrates relational psychodynamic psychotherapy with the principles of a body-focused approach. She is a graduate of the Centre for Training in Psychotherapy in Toronto, a rigorous six-year training program in psychodynamic psychotherapy. In adjunct to her practice, she also works at the Centre as a faculty assistant and as a graduate fellow, leading seminars for first- and second-year students in the Foundation Phase of the program.

Katie Burner, LICSW, LCSW-C, has been a psychotherapist for more than a decade, and currently maintains a private practice that serves the Washington, DC, region. She is a member of the Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, from which she graduated in 2023.

Karim G. Dajani, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist and a training and supervising analyst at the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis. He specializes in working with issues related to cultural dislocation and displacement. His research and writing include publications on the links between cultural systems and the unconscious of individuals and groups. He sits on the editorial board of the International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies. His recent works include a special issue dedicated to the social unconscious, and an upcoming chapter on race and ethnicity in contemporary psychoanalytic theories and praxis that will appear in the third edition of *Textbook of Psychoanalysis*.

Sue Grand, PhD, is faculty and supervisor at the NYU postdoctoral program in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. She is the author of *The Reproduction of Evil: A Clinical and Cultural Perspective* and *The Hero in the Mirror: From Fear to Fortitude*. She is the coauthor of the recently published book *Transgenerational Transmission: A Contemporary Introduction*. She is also the coeditor of two books on transgenerational transmission, and two books about relational theory. She is on the editorial boards of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and *Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society*. She is in private practice in New York and New Jersey.

Susan Greene is an interdisciplinary artist and clinical psychologist. Her practice traverses cultural arenas, including video, new media, public art, and murals. Her work focuses on the psychologies of space, intersections of trauma, creativity, memory, resilience, and resistance. Sites of her fifty-plus public art installations span Occupied Palestine's West Bank and Gaza, refugee camps in Lebanon, the San Francisco Bay Area in California, and Olympia, Washington, where she directs the Olympia-Rafah Solidarity Mural Project. In 2001, Greene founded Art Forces, an international art, activism, and research project. Greene holds an MA in Interdisciplinary Arts from San Francisco State University and an MA and PhD in Clinical Psychology from the Wright Institute, Berkeley, California. Susan Greene has a private psychology practice in the San Francisco Bay Area and is a Palestinian American Research Center and Fulbright fellow.

Richard Grose, PhD, is a psychoanalyst who is a member of *ROOM*'s editorial board and book review editor for *ROOM*. He is interested in how culture and psychoanalysis can illuminate each other. He has a private practice in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in Manhattan.

Shifa Haq is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and assistant professor of psychology in the School of Human Studies, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi. She is an associate editor in the journals *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* and serves in the IPA Migration and Refugees subcommittee. Her book, *In Search of Return—Mourning the Disappearance in Kashmir*, was published in 2021. She writes about psychoanalysis, violence, and mourning.

Michael Krass is a psychoanalyst and the president of the Contemporary Freudian Society. He is also on the board of directors of *ROOM*. He has presented extensively on psychoanalytic perspectives on neurodiversity and on addressing impingements on the analyst's containing function. He has had several book reviews and essays published in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* and *Division/Review* and is particularly interested in the perversity of everyday life, that which hides in plain sight. He has a private practice of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and supervision in Falls Church, Virginia.

Mary B. McRae is a psychologist in private practice in New York City, where she works with clients dealing with depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. As a professor of applied psychology for twenty-seven years, her scholarship has involved a psychoanalytic and systemic study of authority and leadership in groups and organizations with a focus on issues of difference such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, culture, and sexual orientation. Her work involves the study of experiential learning where participants learn by being actively engaged, exploring interpersonal and group processes as they occur. Her publications include articles, chapters, a book titled *Racial Cultural Dynamics in Group and Organizational Life: Crossing Boundaries*, and an educational video titled *Group Dynamics in a Multicultural World*.

Nancy Prendergast is a corporate attorney, mother of four bilingual children, and grandmother of ten. She regards the family she and her husband of fifty-one years have created as her proudest accomplishment, better than her membership in the United States Supreme Court Bar. She is writing a memoir about her violent, abusive childhood in a white-collar family where she succeeded because of the love of her grandmother. Her legal career has taken her from New York City to Santiago, Chile, to Washington, DC. She is now retired in Annapolis, Maryland. She is a proud graduate of the New Directions in Writing program, where she continues to be a permanent alumna.

Eyal Rozmarin, PhD, is a psychoanalyst and writer. He was born in Israel-Palestine and now lives in New York. He writes at the intersection of the psychological and the social-political about subjects, collectives, and the forces that pull them together and drive them apart. He is co-editor of the book series Relational Perspectives in Psychoanalysis and on the editorial board of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. Eyal teaches at the William Alanson White Institute and the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California. His upcoming book is titled *Belonging and Its Discontents*.

Sara Mansfield Taber is author of the award-winning memoir *Born Under an Assumed Name: The Memoir of a Cold War Spy's Daughter*. She has also published *Black Water and Tulips: My Mother, The Spy's Wife*, two books of literary journalism, and the writing guides *To Write the Past: A Memoir Writer's Companion* and *Chance Particulars: A Writer's Field Notebook*. Her many essays and reviews have appeared in publications such as *The American Scholar* and *The Washington Post*. A practicing social worker and psychologist with a specialty in cross-cultural human development, she has coached writers and taught writing workshops at universities and writing programs for the past three decades. For the last five years, she has been facilitating "Writing for Resilience" workshops for a wide variety of highly stressed communities around the world.

Kara Walker was born in Stockton, CA, in 1969, and raised in Atlanta from the age of 13. She received her BFA from the Atlanta College of Art (1991) and her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (1994). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship Award in 1997, and the United States Artists Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship in 2008. She was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2012 and became an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy of Art in London in 2019. Her work can be found in the collections of prominent institutions worldwide, including Kunstmuseum Basel; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Tate, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among many others.

Aicha Bint Yusif grew up in the Lower Galilee. Aicha عائشة means "she lives" in Arabic. She holds a degree in English literature and honors interdisciplinary program and is currently studying medicine. She mainly writes poems, and her works appear in *Rusted Radishes* (Beirut) and *World Literature Today* (NYC), among others. She is passionate about languages, embroidery, and running.

Contents

PHOTO: DAVID PISNOY

Hattie Myers
hattie@analytic-room.com

Toward a New Collectivity

A sensation of my neighbor's misfortune pierces me and I begin to comprehend
In this dark age the bond of our common fate and a compassion
more real than I was inclined to confess

— "On the Beach," Czesław Miłosz

In Kara Walker's words, "history is the oft-repeated fable; power is the oft-repeated script." From Walker's art in **THSLNWN: In the Colorless Light of Day**, to Karim Dajani and Eyal Rozmarin's conversation in **Speaking of Home: An Intimate Exchange on Israel-Palestine**, *ROOM* 10.24 is a testament to our collective heartbreak and resilience. Exactly one week after the 2016 US election, we created *ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action*. We knew that to "live out," in Sartre's words, "that unbearable, heart-rending situation known as the human condition in a candid unvarnished way," we needed to do it together. For the last eight years, *ROOM*'s worldwide community has engaged in a collective struggle for recognition and authenticity across generations, culture, and political pressure. Now, just one week after the re-election of Donald Trump, *ROOM* 10.24 could not be more prescient.

Aicha Bint Yusif's poem, **Bread and Salt**, which opens this issue, harkens back to the place in Dante's journey where his ancestral grandfather forewarns the pilgrim that in exile he will come to know the bitter salt of another's bread, and the hardship of climbing another's stairs.

Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
Lo pane altrui, e com'è duro calle
Lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale

In *their* journeys of exile, the Israeli analyst Eyal Rozmarin and the Palestinian analyst Karim Dajani, as they have come to know one another, have experienced the salt, not of bread but of tears.

"As much as we love each other," Dajani says, "there are ways that we actually cannot hear each other."

"I'd like to really emphasize Karim's last point," responds Rozmarin. "It really happens that the two of us reach a place of understanding with each other and then we have to start again. And I think those little slips, those little mis-hearings happen because underneath—on both sides—there is the fantasy that both of us have: *You do really want to kill us*. And it's not just a fantasy."

Their deeply analytic work illustrates how there are aspects of ourselves which are only available for us to know through conversation with another.

While Dante's fantasied relationship with his paternal ancestor may have been a comfort to him, the relationship Stefania Baresic has to the fascist grandfather she never knew is not. In **Portrait of My Grandfather in Uniform** she writes, "I can't contain the sadness. It feels desperate and raw. It comes from a place within where reason and thought have a hard time claiming their role. It is a place that houses my shame." The complex interplay between personal histories and collective experience is manifest throughout this issue.

Mary B. McRae and Katie Burner describe the impact familial and cultural inheritance has had on their lives. In **Notes from a Sharecropper's Daughter**, McRae acknowledges that when she moved north to become a psychologist, she wanted nothing more than to forget her Southern childhood. Decades later, after caring for her mother in the throes of dementia, McRae writes

to remember the mother she had and whom she is now determined to keep. In her essay, **Degrees of Separation**, Katie Burner writes of her determination to leave. Growing up in the Church of Latter Day Saints, she found that deconstructing her faith gave her "grounding and patience" to be with her patients and helped her to bear the "crushing weight" of an "internalized misogyny that ran so deep [she] didn't even know it was there."

The intergenerational resilience and trauma McRae, Baresic, and Burner describe are seeded within different social soils of politics and culture. In their essays, Sue Grand, Nancy Prendergast, and Michael Krass take the soil samples. They don't just explain how misogyny and racism become entrenched societal perversions; they offer solutions. In **Fascism's Erotic Register**, Grand shows how leaders like Trump, Putin, Modi, Hitler, Franco, Mussolini, Orban, and Salazar arouse society's misogynistic and heteronormative desires. All authoritarian leaders, she explains, construct the category of "deviance" and it is down to us to liberate the powerful anti-fascist force that resides in the so-called "deviant."

Are women "deviant?" Nancy Prendergast, lawyer and grandmother of 10, describes in **The Accidental Activist** how she organized after the 2016 election. Her neighborhood group of "Like Minded Women" has grown into a national group of women and men. Turning their "outrage into action," they have been lobbying, postcarding, canvassing, donating, and promoting women leaders for the past eight years.

But what happens when the fascistic powers are unconsciously internalized—when *we* are *them*—liberation isn't so simple. In **Stemming the Flow: Racism in White America**, Michael Krass describes the oozing power of forbidden satisfaction derived from the domination of others that runs rampant through white America. Confessing to the damage we have wrought and the pain we still cause will require a "tectonic cultural shift," he warns. The forces against the loss and mourning that this will entail are immense.

Shifa Haq's **Bare Life** describes the liminal divide between "the favored and the damned," particularly with regard to colonialism. She is awakened by vampire dreams leaving her to wonder if she is "perpetuating her own private caste division in which [she] must protect [her]self against the ones condemned to starve." Haq's stereotopic vision grasps the tragic divides that exist simultaneously in herself and in her country. In **Six Short Poems on the Iran-Iraq War**, Ali Alsadollahi' writes of a different liminal divide—the one between life and death.

Imploring us to notice the various ways in which "the relationship of oppressed people to their oppressors always involves a prohibition against seeing or being seen," Richard Grose's essay **Can You See?** is a prelude to Susan Greene's community project **I Witness Silwan**. In this community project, Greene turns this "prohibition against seeing" on its head. The eyes, painted on buildings in East Jerusalem by children and artists, gaze steadfastly at the oppressed *and* the oppressors.

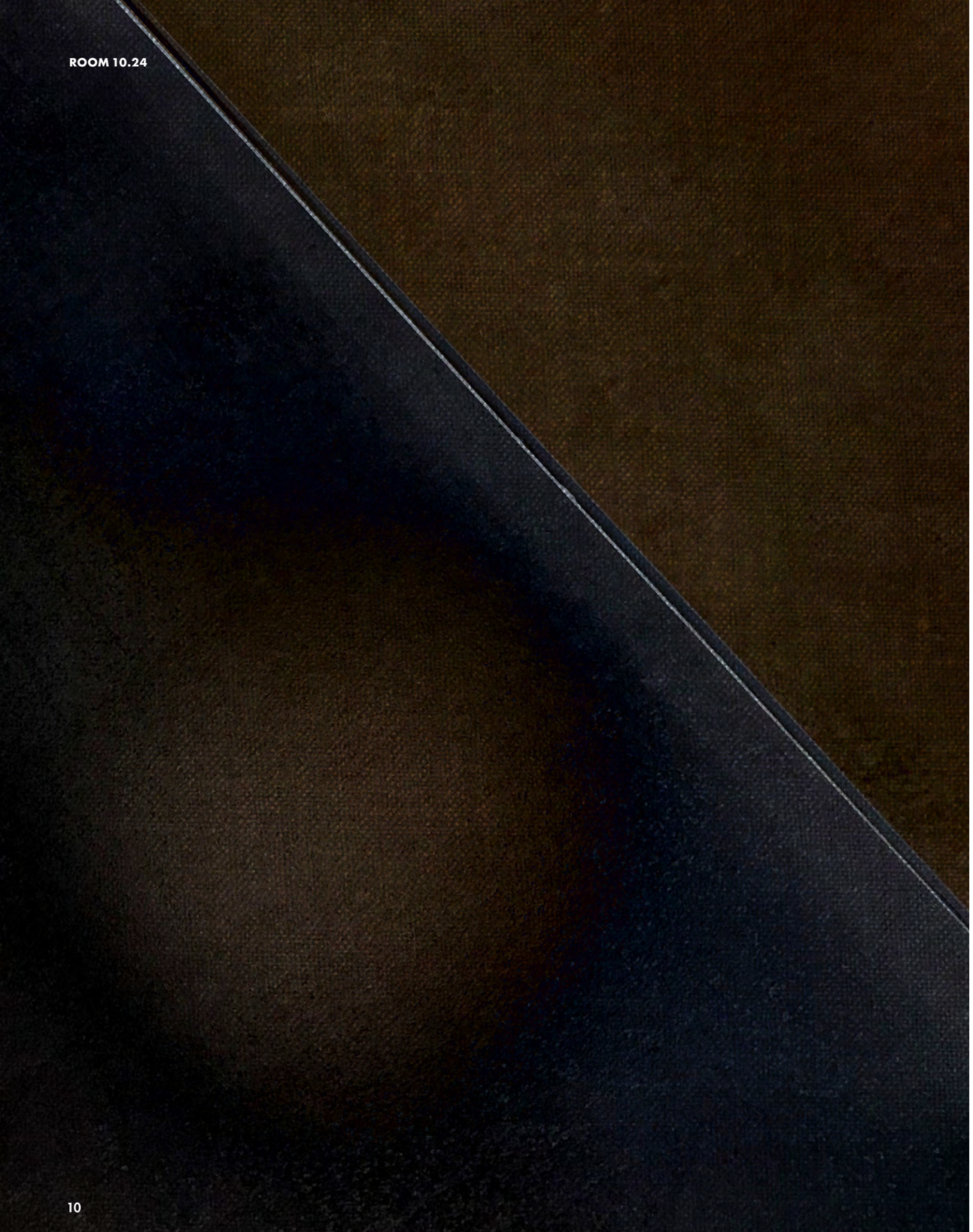
There are days when it is impossible to grasp the full implications of authoritarianism, racism, or even the mass destruction of an entire people. We stop seeing. We debate the words themselves: fascism, white supremacy, genocide. Ta-Nehisi Coates suggests that we suppress the network of neurons that house the soft, humane parts of ourselves. Freud recognized how much we resist knowing what we cannot bear to face. *ROOM* 10.24 speaks to those parts of ourselves that, in the words of the poet Czesław Miłosz's "we aren't inclined to confess."

For the last eight years, *ROOM* has honored the courage it has taken all our contributors who have dared to make themselves known. We are committed to making space for new ways of seeing and for individuals who remain underheard. Toward this end we are launching a new "room" on our website called We Are the Light. Initiated by Sara Taber, activist, and author of **The Afghanistan Story**, We Are the Light will be publishing stories, art, and poems by women living in countries where they do not have rights to their voices or their futures.

"Our stories," Dajani tells us, "had very little in them structurally that allowed recognition of the other. We came together through a collision course of history, and now we're bound together for eternity, yet we know nothing about each other's lived experience and hearts."

Rozmarin asks, "How can we have an identity that is not steeped in injustice? How to change?"

However we find each other after the 2024 election, *ROOM* remains committed to bringing the margins of our communities to the center, and mapping new ways to heal our suffering and destabilized world. ■



Bread and salt

Sar fe ben-na khobez w meleh[1]
One year and two months—
Spacious fields of wheat and endless skies of white salt
falling like snow,
making our wounds cleaner and sharper,
albeit more painful.
Sar fe ben-na khobez w meleh
He says with his northern accent, longer at the end,
Sweet around the edges,
Almost edible like fresh bread *sitti* used to make on Fridays.
Before she died last May, she told me:
Be good. *Kone mleha*[2].
Did *mleha* come from *meleh*?
Sar fe ben-na khobez w meleh
What good is bread and salt, if there's no olive oil?
Olive trees, shade, roots, black tarp, omelet sandwiches for breaks
And olive pearls falling like sweet rain that waters our love?
Sar fe ben-na khobez w meleh
That's how things are, with time. Everything is inevitable.
Maktob in two nights and one day.
I write so I won't have it written, I tell him, We're different.
But we're also similar by the time the sun sets,
Huddling together, finding home in each other, across the Mediterranean.
Whispering:
A home is built with bread and salt.

1 There was bread and salt among us

2 Be happy

Stefania Baresic
stefaniabaresic@rogers.com

PORTRAIT OF MY GRANDFATHER IN UNIFORM

There is a photo, almost hiding behind the others, on the mantel of my fireplace: a man posing in uniform, sitting proudly on a beautiful white horse. The photo is taken from the ground, so this man is looking down from his height. I can't quite see his eyes, hidden in the shadow cast by the hat; a half smile seems directed right at me, but it does not register as inviting, as if it was not meant to connect, rather to keep at a distance. His stance is elegant, impeccable. He looks handsome, and he seems aware of it. There is, however, something unconvincing about him; an emptiness, a sadness . . .

A detail both odd and tragic in my eyes, the horse's head and tail are cut off from the image, as if the only worthy, interesting subject was the man seated on it, the horse a mere prop.

This man is my mother's father. His own mother, a woman very dear to me, is my great-grandmother. With her I associate my felt sense of motherly tenderness, of a loving hug; my cellular memory of a welcoming safety, in her abundant and multilayered traditional Dalmatian clothing, rigorously black for widows, swishing around me as I take my first baby steps. I am part of her bloodline. And her son, my grandfather, is wearing a Fascist uniform.

It hits me as if I was apprehending this for the first time. And again, I can't contain the sadness. It feels desperate and raw. It comes from a deep place within where reason and thought have a hard time claiming their role. It is a place that houses my shame.

My shame, with the collective shame of my family.

(Toronto, February 2020, Journal Entry)

I WONDER WHAT IT DOES TO A PERSON to feel that underneath a formal, stiff uniform they are wearing, metaphorically speaking, a stained and tattered undershirt.

By association my mind travels to this one morning in elementary school, in a small provincial town in southern Italy; I am eight or nine years old. It is picture day. I have two headshots from that day, same pose. One is taken with my immaculately white smock with a perfect blue bow. The other is with a pink sweater which had seen better days; it is too tight and too short for my small body and it is missing its prettiest feature, three buttons in the front. It gained instead a sloppy repair on one elbow; my grandmother wasn't very skilled with thread and needle. I can still feel my heart sinking when our teacher asked us to take our smocks off and my painfully useless attempts at pulling the sleeves down. The two photos captured my internal state, my eyes sparkling with pride in one and then glazed with sadness and shame in the next.

Today I love expensive, well-tailored pieces of clothing, and I understand why. But what are they trying to hide? What frailty in my sense of self are they scaffolding?

I wonder about my grandfather and his uniform, *that* uniform; what was *he* trying to hide? Perhaps his Slavic heritage and who knows what other personal developmental and intergenerational trauma; after all, his life was defined by two worldwide wars.

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My maternal family comes from Dalmatia. During World War II, that coastal region of Croatia was ruled by the Italian regime of Mussolini. The Fascist nationalistic propaganda was particularly active on the borders where Mussolini's Italy was meeting other ethnic and cultural reality. A systematic and relentless campaign of ethnic erasure was carried out against any Slavic and Rom minority, seen as ignorant and barbaric, under the pretense of assimilation and inclusion into the "superior" Italian culture. Under the Fascist anti-Slavic campaign, Italian replaced the Croatian language in schools, theaters, in government offices; Slavic names were altered so to sound more Italian. My grandfather changed his last name and joined the Fascist party; he worked in a nonmilitary position, as the driver of the Italian ambassador stationed in his hometown. When war ended with the Fascist Italian defeat, Slavic families like mine had turned into a strange hybrid; the older generation hardly spoke Italian, while their children and grandchildren had attended exclusively Italian schools. Faced with the choice of which nationality they wanted to belong to, some families opted to stay in the newly formed socialist Yugoslavia; others, like mine, surrendered their Croatian nationality and opted to leave for Italy, where they were placed in various refugee camps across the country. With the local partisans taking revenge on anyone who had sided with the Fascists, my grandfather fled to Italy first, alone. From Italy a few months later he emigrated to Australia. The rest of the family, his mother, his wife, and children, left Yugoslavia too late to reunite with him; he was already gone and they decided to settle in Italy.

My grandfather's choice caused much pain and changed the destiny of my family. But I never heard a word of blame directed at his memory, by his wife or his children. On the contrary, they never spoke of his choice as a *choice;* he was seen as a victim or a tragic hero in his own life. During war and persecution, whether suffered or witnessed, the mere physical survival becomes the ultimate task and a reason for pride.

But perhaps seeing reality this way also provided a protection for all his family from the painful realization that he had in fact abandoned them; and perhaps that they all had in fact, with him, abandoned their own freedom to express their ethnical heritage. It is as if by absolving him from his responsibility in his choices they would be absolved as well and this way spared from having to face the grief for what was done to them.

In the midst of my own emotions, I felt with a heavy heart the plight of my grandfather's situation. Was he secretly troubled by his choice, or was he too in the midst of it to even be able to see critically the gravity of what was happening around him and in other parts of Europe? Or was he feeling the weight of it but chose to deny it?

Was he trying to protect his family from retaliation, by subscribing to the Fascist's anti-Slavic ideology? Is this why he changed his last name to its Italian version; why he sent his children to an Italian school; why he avoided speaking Croatian himself; why he enlisted in the party?

Sadly, as I look at my grandfather's image, I struggle to recognize a glimmer of these possibilities, no matter how much I wish they were consciously present in him; there is something in his stance that does not convey an intellectual struggle, a sign of emotional ambivalence and uneasiness regarding the uniform he was wearing. I understand my subliminal acknowledgment of this absence as the source of my uncontainable sadness when I look at his image.

I recognize the seed of that absence in my younger self as well, when in the grip of my defenses I distanced myself from an *other* with all my disowned shame around my own vulnerability; in the way I was a mother to my child, when unaware of my own dissociated self-states, I shared with them the heavy anxiety of my emotional inheritance.

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The devastations of World War II in the former Yugoslavia, the hunger, the terror, the displacement, the loss, were not etched only on the labile nervous systems of the older generation in my family. From their position of being emotionally unaware of the effects of the continuous trauma they lived and emboldened by their actual physical survival, they told a story of "pride and strength," which, while providing a useful scaffolding for going on living their day-to-day life, also kept them blind to their devastating emotional damage, and us, the younger generation, chained to distorted absolute truths, captives of our own unexplored fears, of questions never answered and never asked. A price we paid for "belonging."

Today, however, my effort to *understand* is less around my grandfather's choice and the practical repercussions it had on my family, although in itself significant, and more around what made that choice a "viable" option in the first place and how it endured in the future generations in different mental manifestations.

Christopher Bollas[1] says that the pathology at the source of the Fascist ideology can be traced to a fascist "state of mind" which arises from a simple thought, an idea which becomes "total" and rigidifies into a conviction aimed at eliminating any sense of vulnerability and malaise of the psyche, flattening complexity and ambivalence and avoiding self-doubt, uncertainty, intellectual interrogation, and emotional struggle. This way, disowned, vulnerable, shameful parts can stay dissociated. The intellectual and emotional genocide of the most vulnerable and humane parts inside our psyche seems to mirror the intellectual and physical genocides we have perpetrated historically as human beings against our own.

Bollas reminds us that a fascist state of mind can and does coexist alongside liberal thoughts and a democratic mind in each of us; becoming aware of the ways it comes alive and active in us can help facilitate the return to a democratic order, in our own psyche and in our external world.

I know something of this state of mind Bollas is talking about, in the narcissistic rigid defenses in my family, in the shame transmitted from one generation to the next. I recognize as familiar that impulse, when vulnerable, to side with the stronger and most powerful; in projectively distancing from the other for their/my weakness.

I am aware of the tone of my narrative; entranced by this reflection, I speak as if in a war zone. I am not, but my family was, and their fear lives on in my cellular memory. Can this awareness alone be enough? ■

1 C.Bollas, The Fascist State of Mind, in "Being a Character. Psychoanalysis and Self Experience." Routledge, NY.

Kairm Dajani
karimdajanisf@gmail.com

Eyal Rozmarin
eyal.rozmarin@gmail.com

Speaking of Home:

An Intimate Exchange on Israel-Palestine

PHOTOS (LEFT AND OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT): KAREN KORNBLUM

On Monday, October 21, 2024, *ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action* released a recording of a conversation between psychoanalysts Eyal Rozmarin (Israeli) and Karim Dajani (Palestinian), moderated by *ROOM*'s Editor in Chief, Hattie Myers. With an urgent focus on Israel-Palestine, these two psychoanalysts engaged in a powerful and tender conversation showing how unconscious process underlies political-cultural realities and individual misunderstandings. This is a curated transcript of the event which was recorded at the Psychology & the Other conference on July 14, 2024, hosted by Boston College and Northeastern University in London. It is available to view at analytic-room.com/speakingofhome.

HATTIE MYERS

I'm a psychoanalyst from New York and the editor in chief of *ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action*. We are grateful to Psychology & the Other for giving us this opportunity to be with you today. In this symposium, we want to think with you about how history suffuses us, between the river and the sea, between what we know and what lies outside of our conscious awareness. Our hope is that by looking at impact of the unconscious during political violence and over generations of trauma, we will find some common ground. The hardest lift, as Karim and Eyal have found, is finding empathic connection. We'll begin with each of them sharing with us what Eyal calls their "milk stories"—where they each have come from.

KARIM DAJANI

For centuries my ancestors lived in Palestine. During the War of 1948, when Israel became a state, my parents, Naida and Khanum, were expelled from Jaffa. Psychologically, they were stateless and dispossessed from their land and place of origin. They lived among a large group of diaspora Palestinian intellectuals in Beirut. On June 5, 1967, another fateful war erupted. Israel attacked Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. For the first five days of the war, Arab media broadcasted an imminent victory. My father believed the borders would open. He believed his return to Jaffa was imminent. His worries turned to his books. How could he take them all? My mother was pregnant with me and had three little children to care for. She put her foot down, telling him to focus on how to transport people and essential furniture. He despondently started giving his books away, donating and selling them.

On June 11, news began to filter that we lost everything. As my mother tells it, our house was full of people. My father was sitting with a large group of men on the balcony. They were listening to the radio when the real news broke that the Arabs lost and the rest of historic Palestine had been occupied. The men broke into sobs. They cried and wailed. Some of them fell to the ground and rocked back and forth in a fetal position. My mother retreated into a room by herself. Amidst her tears, she turned to her fetus [me] and instructed me to come out different. She wished for me to possess the capacity to understand this devastation, to not fall for lies. To find a path out of this morass—for us as a family and for us as a people. I was assigned an impossible task before I was born.

The story we were told was that in the 1890s, a movement called Zionism was born that aimed to establish a Jewish state, an historic Palestine. The Jews needed a place to go due to intense persecution and discrimination. They had lived for millennia as a stateless people like we are living now. They gave the world many intellectuals and artistic gifts. We were taught that in a world of dispossession, the only real possessions that cannot be taken away are your mind, your intellect, and your spirit.

The Jews came prepared with the intention to take our land. We were taught not to forget the injustice that occurred, to remain faithful witnesses, and to cultivate a spirit of smooth, steadfast resistance. For the first fifteen years of my life in Lebanon, my lived experience of Jews was of soldiers with superior military equipment who were intent on killing me. I did not know or interact with a Jewish civilian until I immigrated to the United States.

As my life became intertwined with many Jewish colleagues and friends, what has become clear to me is that I did not grow up knowing much about the people who came to take our land. I did not know much about *their* culture and *their* collective. The stories we were told were missing an elaboration of the other's lived experience.

How do we interrupt the ruin and destruction in order to begin something new?

EYAL ROZMARIN

I am not sure at this point what it means for me to be "Israeli" or who I am representing here. At the same time, I am Israeli as a matter of collective identification, and I do speak as an Israeli. I don't really have a choice. Being Israeli is part of myself, as much as it is part of myself to be the child of my parents.

Karim Dajani's parents, Khanum and Naida, are pcitured at Naida's graduation from the American University of Bieruit in 1967.

Eyal Rozmarin's grandmother Shoshana (pictured, front row, third from right) with other European immigrants to Palestine.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF EYAL ROZMARIN AND KARIM DAJANI

So an Israeli, here with a beloved friend who is Palestinian—which puts us in a wild kind of relation, because my assigned-at-birth collectivity has been harming my friend's people since its inception, with increasing ferociousness, to the present atrocity in Gaza.

My grandmother Shoshana was born in 1910, in a little town outside Pinsk. They were eleven siblings, one brother, ten sisters. She immigrated to Palestine in 1933 by herself. It was a family decision. As she told the story, she was the prettiest of them all, and so most in danger for being kidnaped by the Cossacks. She forged a new life as an agricultural worker. She wed a young immigrant from Lithuania. In 1937 they had my mother. In 1941 he died from TB. In 1941 she also lost touch with her family. We assume they were all killed in one of those forest ditches that the SS made the Jews dig by themselves before shooting them in, town by town, as the German army swept into Russia. This is how they did it before the extermination of the Jews was industrialized.

I think often about my grandmother's annus horribilis. What was it like to become a single mother in British Palestine, to lose touch with your family, dreading that they all died. My grandfather's brother reappeared after the war bearing an Auschwitz number. No one else survived.

My grandmother passed many years ago, but she lives inside me. How she built a life for herself, had three husbands, made a living making dresses and renting rooms in her apartment by the beach. I reminded her of her brother, I reminded her of her first husband. I was chosen to carry her dead into the world of the living. She taught me how to sew. I used to sew dresses for my mother. She left me her apartment by the sea. It is the only thing I own in Israel.

There was also my nannie. We called her Rachel the Tripoltani—because she was from Tripoli in Libya. She was a big, warm woman, with golden earrings and golden bracelets that chimed when she danced with the pots in the kitchen. She used to make us couscous and mafrum . . . Rachel also had on her arm an Auschwitz number. At some point, the Nazis started clearing up the Jews of North Africa as well.

I feel my task is to figure out how I can keep the visceral-identity roots that I have in the territory of Israel-Palestine, where my grandmother Shoshana found refuge and built the modest life she left to me, where

Rachel also ended up. Neither had anywhere to go back to; neither would want to, even if they could. I have lodged in me their sense of precarity and necessity, their energies and hopes too. How to not betray them, how to keep the place they left me, while ending the immense harm and repairing the massive damage that their predicament, turned into a violent nationalism, keeps inflicting on my Palestinian compatriots? How to have an identity that is not steeped in injustice, how to change?

HATTIE

Maybe we can begin by talking about what your experience is like being with each other, hearing these stories which I know you have heard before.

KARIM

There's so much that needs to be said. It's impossible for me not to feel sorrow, not to feel a protective impulse when I listen to Eyal. It's impossible. And that's one of the things that I think is really important to emphasize here.

Our stories had very little in them structurally that allowed recognition of the other. We came together through a collision course of history, *and now we're bound together for eternity*. We know nothing about each other's lived experience and hearts. That has been a very illuminating part of this process. And for me, I'll speak just for myself, we clearly developed an affectionate bond early on in our conversations, which has allowed us to do something that I don't think has been done before, which is to analyze each other.

We've been involved in some kind of process of mutual analysis, and in that process we've learned that as much as we love each other, there are ways that we actually cannot hear each other. And we're reaching out to each other for help, really, so that we can hear what the other is saying. Here is one example of that. When I first wrote the introduction you just heard, the part where my father was imagining that he would finally get to go home, Eyal's immediate response was *What are you going to do with the Jews who are living there?* I responded that my father was going home to the house he was born in.

But the thing is, what I heard Eyal say was *Your father was going to Jaffa to kick out the Jews and kill them.*

EYAL

I didn't say that.

KARIM

What Eyal actually said was *What are you going to do with the Jews?* That's a very big difference. But I literally heard him say, *You're going to kill us, you murderers*. Actually he was asking me a very legitimate question. He was thinking about Shoshana and his family.

Here is another example of that. Yesterday, Eyal had something to say to me that he had been holding on to for a while. But before we got to that, Eyal said to me, *You know, we're surrounded by people that want to kill us. Israel lives in a world where everybody wants to kill us.*

And I had to stop him and say, *But Eyal! Israel has peace treaties with the majority of the Arab nations! Israel enjoys a great deal of stability among sixty or seventy percent of its surrounding neighbors. And yet the story, or the thing that keeps repeating, is that everybody wants to kill you!*

These little distortions, when analyzed, open up a bit of a space to make some links, but that space is very precarious. It goes away immediately, and it has to be re-created. So we need to recognize that we are in a zone where we need to create a state of mind that is necessary if we are to be able to think together. Thinking is not possible when we're living in the kind of world we're living in now.

EYAL

I'd like to really emphasize Karim's last point. It really happens that the two of us reach a place of understanding with each other and then we have to start again. And I think those little slips, those little mis-hearings happen because underneath—on both sides—there is the fantasy that both of us have: *You do really want to kill us.*

And it's not just a fantasy. That's what makes it complicated. I come from a country that is built on something between ignoring and eradicating the fact that there is another people living in that country. Karim's parents are dying to go back home but if the borders open that means there will be no Israel. So then I ask, *Well, what about us?"*

And Karim says, *I don't know, but you have to leave your house*. And then I say, *So then what? Shall we go to camps?*

And he says, *Maybe camps.*

And then I say, *Okay, camps again!! Two generations later.*

So there is all this back-and-forth between us, even as we love each other and we are constantly trying.

There is a zero-sum game in the unconscious. Every time we speak, we bond, bond, bond, and we don't see each other for two weeks, and when we talk, those little slips are there again. And underneath it all is the fantasy of annihilation. What we've been trying to think about throughout these months, separately and together, is how do you change that? What hope do we have?

And we both have friends, even scholar friends who say, this is not the time to do this, when collectives are under genocidal attack, whether in reality like the Palestinians in Gaza or for the Jews in Israel who feel, correctly or not, that they are in danger of extinction. At times like this, collectives coalesce and it's very hard to reach across to one another. I have come to believe less and less in the notion of mutual recognition across collective borders. I am thinking that our job is to rearrange the collectivity. We must come *together* and fight for this. Karim and I—we are the new collective. We do not belong in different groups.

KARIM

Just yesterday Eyal said to me, *It's important for you to take responsibility for the Palestinian collective, to take responsibility for the decisions Palestinians have made that have contributed to the situation that we're in.* Eyal said, *You know that the Palestinians have had decidedly failed leadership,* and he said that I should take a stand publicly. He said I should work with my collective publicly and privately to address this issue. And two things happen when he says that. One is that I flare up with rage, and the other one is that I can't agree with him more. I flare up with rage because Palestinians who lead, for the most part, have been assassinated or are in jails, being tortured. I have a recurring nightmare that that is my fate.

So to Eyal I say, *We Palestinians need two things. First, we need you to stop killing us. Like, now! And second, we need you to actually give us something so that we can take responsibility. Give us back the people that we need. Stop killing the people that we need. Prove to me in some way that we have a partner in peace.*

See, this idea, that we don't have a partner in peace, is one that plagues the Palestinians because in our view Israel has not been for partner for peace at all. We need actions. We need goodwill actions. We need actions that that give us the necessary fodder to turn to our communities and ask them to give up things that are extraordinary: Give up the impulse to kill when you've been killed; give up your right to your homes when they've been taken away; accommodate a new reality that is here to stay; accommodate it in a way where you actually interpenetrate it and live with it, create with it, live, work, dance, and die with it.

So I cannot agree more. But I'm not in a position right now to turn to my collective and ask them to give up anything. We need to work on it and we will—but we can't without help.

EYAL

This was the hardest thing for me, to say what I said to Karim yesterday.

I have been traveling for a month with all kinds of ailments and pains, but after I said it to him, all my pains went away. I was really containing something that I felt I had to contain because I don't feel I can come with any requests or demands on behalf of my people when we're doing what we're doing . I don't think it's fair or right to turn to Karim and say, *Well, you have to do something too.*

At the same time, I know that my friends who live in Israel who protest week after week for months now, for cease-fire, for the demise of the Israeli government say, *Why don't we see any dissent on the Palestinian side?* I have answered many, many times why: *Because you can't expect someone being demolished to dissent. You can't ask them to have a full-on, mature political debate when they live in either a concentration camp or in a destruction zone. It's not fair. You can't do that.* So I've been shutting up for a long time. Because I feel I must. I have no right. But also, if we want to be on the level where we recognize each other and we build something together, I cannot do it from a position of one hundred percent responsibility, which is one hundred percent agency, which basically erases Karim as nothing but a victim. That's the place where I find myself as an Israeli. I don't necessarily want Israel to continue as it is. I believe in a binational state at some point—I just don't think it's realistic right now. So I think what we are trying to do is to work with what we have, with the collective unconsciouses that we have, and to see what's possible.

What's necessary in a place like this is to recognize that there is, on the other side, lets say, people who want to reinforce that we are here, we are your partners. And on both sides the feeling is we have no partners—they are attacking us and killing us—which is all true.

So how do you create a feeling out of this demise to show

that there are people on the other side who want to work with you? There has to be some responsibility-taking—some form. That was what we got to yesterday.

KARIM

I actually felt very appreciative that we got to this because you don't need to treat me like a victim. You don't need to treat me like an infant. True, we are on the lower end of the vertical. True, there's a lot that is working against us. But we are not victims entirely. And I appreciated the agency and giving it to me to think about and respond to. I trusted you more. You know, before we went to dinner, I was talking to Karma, and man, we got totally paranoid about you.

HATTIE

Karma is Karim's sister.

KARIM

Karma is my sister, was here yesterday, and we had dinner with her and she and Eyal totally fell in love with each other, which was very cute. But before we went out, Karma and I were having a total paranoid fantasy.

EYAL

Well, what was it?

KARIM

It was a completely elaborated fantasy that you were beaten up by some Israeli agents that were telling you that you needed to abort what you're doing with me and that you are a traitor and that you are doing the best you can not to harm me. Then you spoke what you spoke and the fantasy became clear.

EYAL

What do you mean, it became clear?

KARIM

It became clear that it was a fantasy! And some contact, some exchange is needed for the concrete to disaggregate. I trusted you but I could see you were holding something from me. And to me that means danger. And you told me what you were holding. I could feel it.

HATTIE

Perhaps this is a good place to open this up for discussion. Your experience as an audience is very much what my experience has been when I have heard these two talk—we are coming into the middle of a conversation that has been going on before we got here and will continue to go on when we leave. It's been such an honor for us, for all of us, to enter into this middle. I'd like, now, to open the space for all of you listening to share your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and questions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

First, I just want to thank you both. You are bringing affect into this conversation in a way that is deeply meaningful. What happens to us individually as well as our collectives shapes what we're able to hear. When we are unwilling to hear something more or something different from someone, it is because we expect them to speak in a particular way.

Q&A SPEAKER 1

I am from India and hearing you has been a profoundly moving experience. Thank you for your honesty and for the bravery that you've shown to be present with your affect, and bringing it out in all of us. I want to share a small anecdote. When my wife and I were traveling through Paris, we went to a restaurant to have dinner, and the owner said to the cook in Hindi, *Our people have come; put a lot of spice*. Later we came to know that he was from Pakistan and he said *"apne log,"* "your people." What are your thoughts?

KARIM

Pakistan, India, and Palestine were partitioned the same year, and it was a catastrophe on both because it is one people.

Q&A SPEAKER 2

I'm a psychoanalyst from San Francisco and I also want to thank you guys. I've been following your conversation and in my experience it's our own subjective individual influences that very much impact our positions and our feelings, and explains why there are so many collapses and projections. There is an iterative experience that you're describing of paranoia that can open up space and then become paranoid again. And that's very much happening both in my practice, with friendships, and in my own personal life. It's very moving to hear you bring your personal experiences to bear and to talk generationally about the traumas that your families and your collectives have suffered. It's such an important reminder to all of us to locate ourselves in where we belong, where we come from, our identities, so to help us re-knit collectives and create something new. I think this is a very hopeful idea.

EYAL

I want to say something to that. One of the big problems of the Jewish collectivity in Palestine and the Palestinian in the diaspora is an intense attachment to our collective trauma and how we let the collective trauma bond us together. This is the glue, the inability to give up some of it and not let it define who you are and who's against you. This is a hard thing to do but this is also something we both have to work on. The thing is, when I tell about my past, I don't want to be attached to the trauma. But I have numbers from Auschwitz. I don't know what to do with it. So this is the place I'm torn, and Karim is torn also with his story and everything they have lost. I don't want to live with it but it's in me. I think that's part of the struggle: how to not let the trauma define you while it is defining you.

KARIM

Eyal and I have a collective friend that we both love very much, Orna Guralnik. And Orna's thought a lot about ideology. If you read my work and just change the word *culture* to *ideology*, she and I are saying almost the exact same thing. Is it possible to create an ideology or a culture that is not rooted in ethnicity? It's a real question. Can there be a genuine collective based upon a shared ideology? Does that run as deep as blood? I don't know; it's a question.

Q&A SPEAKER 3

Thank you. I repeat the gratitude that everybody else has mentioned. What is sticking for me is a deep sense of hopelessness and embeddedness. Both of you are speaking from a place of autonomy and agency. And yet the situation is so deeply embedded and co-opted by stakeholders (or apparent stakeholders) globally. You are embedded in a process that, from its very beginning, has used individuals and cultures and ethnicities. Israel and Palestine has become a hook upon which postcolonial fears and racial injustice hang. I see the two of you working so hard as individuals and as points within our communities, but also clobbered by projection, projective identification, much in the way narcissistic parents use their children as objects. How do you sit with it? Not just with what you have to hold as individuals but also what it seems the whole world is holding and talking about through you—through what's happening on your ground.

KARIM

I have this belief, I think, that Israel-Palestine is the navel of the world. And I think that if we don't get it right, we will break the world. I am just one speck of dust. You know what I mean? And maybe it's because I'm Palestinian, but one of the things that I'm really into is freedom, freedom with a small *f*. So what I am doing here is engaging in an act of freedom in an overly deterministic, dark, most likely completely destroyed world. But on the way there, I shall raise my head. Have a thought, and make an exchange that is mildly meaningful or profoundly meaningful to me. That's it, really.

EYAL

Yes. And to what you said—for those of us who are psychoanalysts and relational, there's a lot of talk about the third. There is no third. The third is America, the UK, the EU. It's what you said. They are not really "thirds" because they are invested. They have stakes. We are alone. We are exploited or used for geopolitics of it. Israel is exploited with arms and money and the Palestinians in different ways. We seem to be more safe, but we're not, in the long run anyway. So to return to what Karim said, we are it. We cannot hope for help from the outside. There is no umbrella of world order that is going to come and help us. The world order is pitting us against each other and using us. And we need to turn around from these exploitations and projections as much as we can. *We* need to solve the problem. There is no third. There is only us.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I'm from Germany. I went to Israel to train scientists on their communication and leadership skills, and I was impressed with the strength of the women with families and children who were facing all kinds of difficulties. I value facing what is in front of me, and my impression was that there was more of that in Israel; I appreciate that also in the session here. Thank you for demonstrating this courage to face what is impossible to face. I believe, as you also just said, that we are in this together. It's just very much concentrated and evident, in this geographical location.

Q&A SPEAKER 4

I am a student and I never met someone from the Middle East until I came to this international campus where there are people from all over the world. It hit me like a breaking point when I heard Eyal say, *Where should the Israeli people go?* And then Karim heard, *Yeah, you want to kill all the Israeli people*. You know, we can feel the pain from both sides. And that's when it springs. My question, as a student leader, is how can we de-escalate the conversation when one person's sentence can feel like an attack and you don't want someone to feel uncomfortable in a conversation?

KARIM

I went to a school called St. John's College, where we read the "great books" around a table. And I often thought, because I was coming from Beirut, *Wow, we're sitting here and talking about things that people are shooting each other over*. I think an ethos of nonviolence can be helpful there, because you can see this moment as a moment of inner violence that is actually breaking things apart inside the individual and between individuals. And to try as much as possible to impart the value of dwelling in that space with an ethos of dialog and an ethos of facing violence without flinching with an aim to transform it. Try to push the group of people to tolerate the discomfort for just a little longer. And when it fails, you shouldn't feel bad. When it works, you should feel elated because it's most likely going to fail. You know what I mean? It really is most likely going to fail. But it is an act of freedom to take a stance to say there is an ethos of nonviolence, there's an ethos of dialog that I would like to cultivate with the group as much as possible And maybe one way to do that is to tolerate the discomfort a bit longer until something new comes. And if it doesn't come, a new day will come.

EYAL

I would add something that is difficult when you haven't been broken down like us for decades. There is an unconscious; we don't ever hear exactly what's being said. Everything we hear triggers something and it goes in our unconscious and then meaning is created. So you never hear right. Even us—we don't hear each other well. So maybe if there's a way to tell people, "Listen before you even start—you are going to talk and what is happening in this conversation is not just in your awareness. You will go to places you don't even know and you will hear things that are not being said sometimes."

When you have this kind of triggered reaction, think, *What is the trauma or what is happening to me?* It's very hard to do in a group, but sometimes when somebody gets very upset, you can slow things down and say, "What do you think just happened that you heard something that felt very offensive? Let's think about it for a minute." Sometimes it's enough to change something—just the recognition that you're not quite hearing what was said. That you are triggered.

Q&A SPEAKER 5

I am a theologian in New York City with an academic background in peace studies. And first of all, just as others have said, thank you for being so real with this. The holding of space and silence between your comments gives room to the other, and to yourselves. You've pulled on a sacred thread of displacement, of migration, of forced displacement, of chaos, and of war. It reminds me of my own displacement from the civil war in El Salvador and being undocumented in the US. John Paul Lederach, who was one of my mentors in peace studies, has worked with conflicts worldwide. In his earlier work, he wrote about reconciliation, but in his later work, he wrote about the impossibility of it.

He came to use Tibetan singing bowls as a way to think about friction—the way that resonance and communication can lead to some natural frequencies. This requires containers that can hold that friction together in order for them to sing at that natural frequency. And so my question for you is this: What is that container that allows you to engage at those natural frequencies? On a very practical level. What is that container that holds both of you and how quickly does that fall apart for each of you?

KARIM

The container is actually a meeting that occurs every two weeks, over Zoom. What builds during our separation has a place to go. And there's enough maturity and affection—we are psychoanalysts, after all, so we talk to each other—we feel free to speak. That's why when Eyal was not free to speak, he had symptoms and I thought that he was the enemy. I read it right away that something was wrong. Here's the thing. I didn't give him the benefit of the doubt, that he was struggling with something that, in essence, was about protecting me. I thought he was struggling with something that, in essence, was about killing me.

EYAL

Actually, in your fantasy, even though I was recruited by the Mossad, *I was protecting you.*

KARIM

Yeah, yeah. That's interesting. In my fantasy, you're protecting me. The affectionate bond held, but I'm like, *Oh, he's become useless—they beat him up and they gave him instructions*. And this whole thing is going to fall apart. And I felt really sorry for him because I knew it broke his heart. Like, that's really what I thought. It is really interesting. And it dissolved as soon as he said what he needed to say to me. But yes—you are right—there has to be a structure where meetings occur. Just like a psychoanalysis, there has to be a frame. And there has to be a willingness to speak, and that's really hard because it does take an affectionate bond and some trust and the other person's dispositions and abilities. Which we were fortunate to have been able to develop.

EYAL

So that's going to lead me really beautifully to my final comments. The more time that goes by, the more I think there are two forces. There is the death drive and the life drive: eros. And we're working with eros. We're trying to love each other, we're trying to connect, to be together.

And I think we manage to do it. We fight the fantasies, the destruction, the paranoia—that's the death drive. We're trying to live to find life together. The other thing I want to mention is the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró, which I'm sure you know. There's a lot of love in the field for Fanon right now—and Fanon is incredible, but I don't think he gets it completely right about decolonizing when it's about us, because we're not just colonizing. We are also refugees and we have nowhere to go.

So I searched how to think about this and I found Ignacio Martín-Baró, who was an educational scholar and theologian. In the context of El Salvador, he was interested in understanding how the indigenous majority of the population could be liberated from the colonial Spanish white people, who were the minority but controlled everything. He believed there was an ideological spell that the elite managed to cast that tells the majority of people, *This is the kind of people you are: You have no real energy and you're not industrious* and so on. And the people believed this ideology.

So the way to get out of it was what he called "de-ideologizing." To go to people and say, *What you believe in is something that some force is trying to persuade you of, and it's not true. Get your own consciousness. Get your own sense of collectivity, and then you will be something else.*

I think that this is our task as the new collective: to de-ideologize our people from spells and projections, and to create a new kind of collective identity that is not created by the old Zionist ideology of the elites, or by the traumatized Palestinian ideology. Whatever is empowered, is authentic, *that* is built on who *we* are, not them.

HATTIE

Karim, are there any concluding thoughts you would like to add?

KARIM

I do want to add something. One of my students read our correspondence in *ROOM*. She's from Lebanon. She is taken by your ideas. She's taken by my ideas. But she said, *I absolutely hate Rozmarin's claim that he's indigenous*. That was the thing that stuck to her. And I was about to write her back saying this is a very complicated issue. So let me, let me just say this here. And it might be more than I can say, but I'm going to say it anyway:

The people in Israel-Palestine, and their descendants, are not going anywhere. Everybody is there to stay and everybody is there to return. ■

CLICK HERE, SCAN THE QR CODE, OR VISIT ANALYTIC-ROOM.COM/SPEAKINGOFHOME TO WATCH THE FULL CONVERSATION.

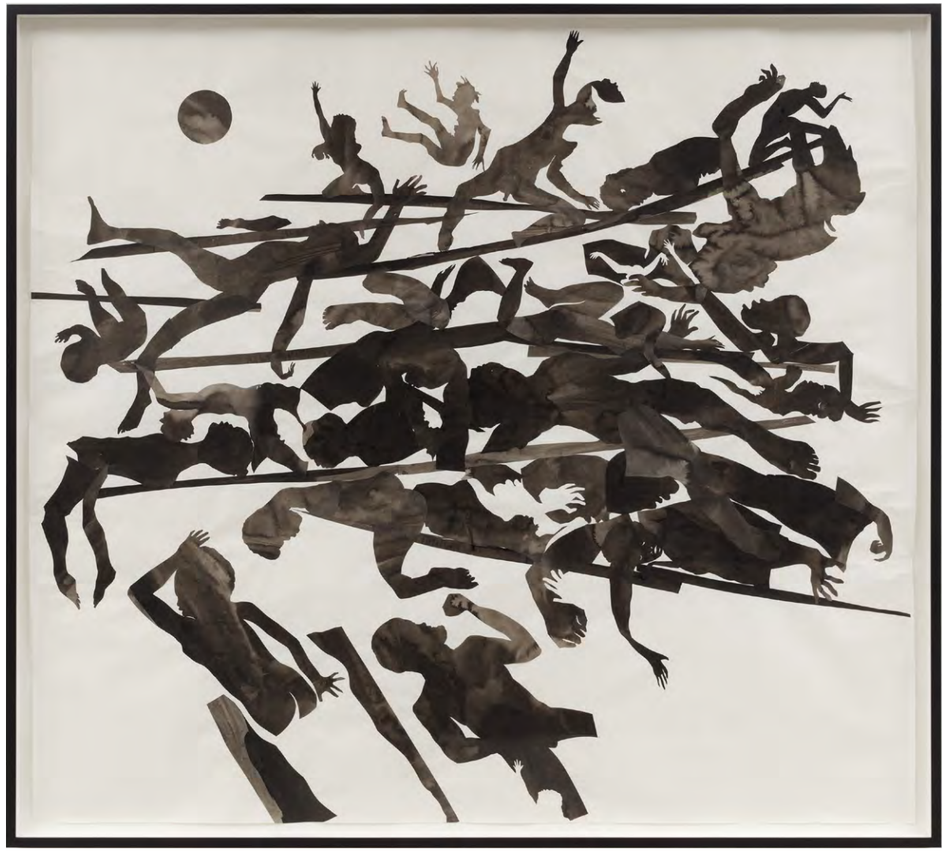
The Shiftless Countryside of Emancipation, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
78 3/4 x 89 3/8 inches (200 x 227 cm)

The High and Soft Laughter of the Nigger Wenches at Night, in the Colorless Light of Day

Kara Walker has consistently interrogated the legacy of American myth making as it manifests through systems of race, sexuality, and violence. Her work leverages satire and archetypes to needle at the dominant narratives and prevailing dissonances of the United States' own self-conception. In Walker's work, the impulse to allegorize is thrown into stark, panoramic relief: history is the oft-repeated fable, power is the oft-wielded script, and her subjects are the preeminent players.

Since the start of her career, Walker's monochromatic silhouettes have featured in scenes characterized by unfettered mayhem and darkly humorous referentiality. For her newest body of collage works presented here, Walker began by ignoring her own usual conventions, instead embracing the pleasure of color and creating formal compositional rules. Strokes of sumi-e ink and Gansai watercolor cast a mélange of shades over the cut-paper figures, effectively elevating the silhouette's fundamental reduction of form with new dimensions of hue and texture. Arranged in a tangle of overlapping limbs and brushed contortions, Walker's subjects appear closer to an abstracted landscape rather than coherent representation of bodily forms.

Through this, her large-scale collages intend to consider the role of the sublime in landscape art, and the romantic longing for some pure, organic natural order—paving over any individual or group that stands in its way or questions its logic. In contemporary political contests, such fantasies appeal to a return to nature while simultaneously looking towards an increasingly technologized, "post-work" future. The locational words in Walker's titles further allude to this mythic sense of place and expansion. In a chromatic swirl of earthen pigments, her collage figures have become the topography, both compositional subject and setting upon which such towering ideals of freedom and individual determination are put forth.



The Inert Scenery of Self-determination, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
79 x 87 3/4 inches (200.7 x 222.9 cm)

The Torpid Vista of Individualism, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
78 3/4 x 57 7/8 inches (200 x 147 cm)

Promise Land, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
2 parts, 88 1/4 x 157 1/2 inches
(224.2 x 400.1 cm) overall (unframed)

Ascent of the Sybarite Women, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
78 1/8 x 78 3/4 inches (198.4 x 200 cm)

Jonestown on Day 1, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
72 1/4 x 73 1/8 inches (183.5 x 185.7 cm)

Throw Me Anywhere, 2024
Watercolor and graphite on paper
12 1/4 x 16 1/8 inches (31.1 x 41 cm)

Preaching to the Converted, 2024
Watercolor and graphite on paper
12 1/4 x 16 1/8 inches (31.1 x 41 cm)

Last Embrace, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
58 1/2 x 39 inches (148.6 x 99.1 cm)

The Lazy Landscape of Freedom, 2024
Watercolor on cut paper on paper
72 1/4 x 90 1/2 inches (183.5 x 229.9 cm)

SCAN THE QR CODE OR CLICK HERE FOR MORE OF KARA WALKER'S ARTWORKS.

The High and Soft Laughter of the Nigger Wenches at Night, in the Colorless Light of Day is on view at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. in New York City through December 14, 2024.

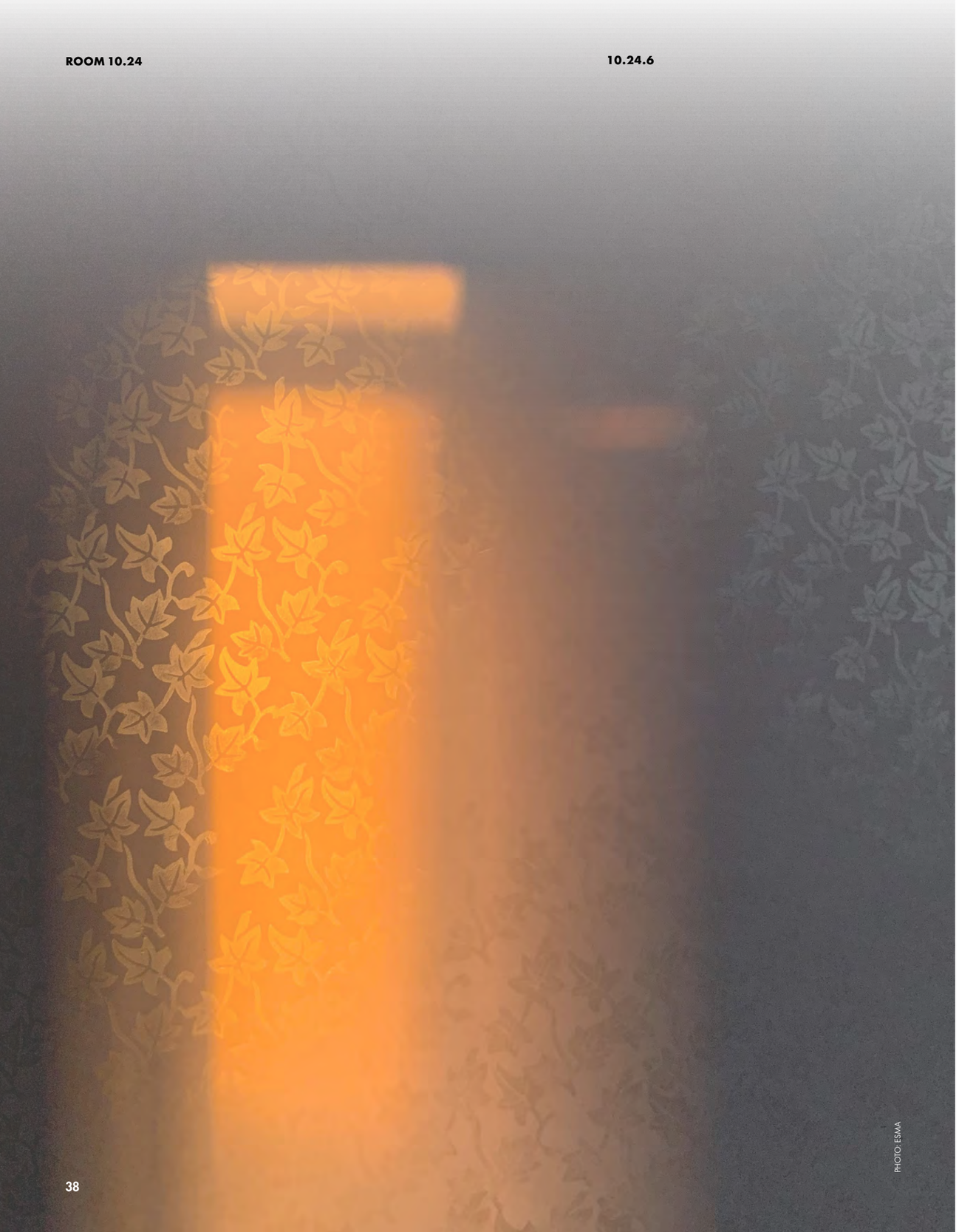


PHOTO: ESMA

Mary B. McRae
mm13@nyu.edu

Notes from a Share-cropper's Daughter

AS LONG AS MAMA KNEW THAT SHE had me, had given birth to me, I still had my mother. Her words and her spirit could continue to be my foundation. Dementia on hold. I walked through the door of Mama's apartment, a one-bedroom on the seventh and top floor of a senior citizens building in Brooklyn. The seniors there called it the penthouse floor, a likely place for Mama, who sat upright in her burgundy recliner facing the door. A small, sturdy frame, shrinking with age, moist cinnamon skin, preserved well with Vaseline petroleum jelly. She was of the generation of Black women who wore wigs every day, escaping the rituals demanded to maintain kinky, curly Black hair. Mama was what we called a proper lady, although she discreetly dipped snuff every day, Railroad Mills, blue-and-white label. At the time many women in the rural South dipped snuff, a small ball of powdered tobacco tucked in her right jaw. Mama sat with a Maxwell House coffee can to spit in near her chair. She washed it out first thing every morning. Even with dementia, she dressed every day in a cotton print house dress, a brunette wig, Ella Fitzgerald style, and a little red lipstick.

"Hey, how you doing? What you up to?" I asked as I entered. She looked up and smiled as I entered but did not say anything. I moved in closer. "Do you know my name?"

Mama looked up at me. "I can't call your name right now, but I do know that I had you." I took a deep breath; I wanted to hug her, but she was not the hugging type. I feared that one day she would not know me, that she would be with me in body, not the familiar spirit that had given me such strength to do all that I had done.

I smiled. "Well, since you have claimed me, I can tell you my name is Mary, your sixth child, and your baby girl." I sat on the arm of her chair, throwing my legs over her lap. "Don't you want to show your baby some love?"

"Well, I hate you," she replied, pushing me away with seemingly newfound strength. She stuck her tongue out at me with a slow and sly smile, indicating that her keen sense of humor, her ability to take something in and turn it around was still intact. I moved away, poked my lips out, as if I was about to cry. Demonstrating the pain she had inflicted on me, I placed my hand on my heart. "Lord, help me 'cause my mama don't love me no more." I never questioned whether Mama loved me or not; I knew in my heart, soul, and mind that she would die for me. I think that all of my brothers and sisters would say the same thing about Mama.

When Mama began to show signs of mental decline, my sister Bettie took her for a visit to a psychologist for a battery of tests to determine cognitive ability. Mama was still feisty and made it difficult for the psychologist, who seemed to have little cultural awareness. When he asked her what day it was and what state they were in, she responded: "You a doctor and you don't know that. You asking me something that you supposed to write down first." Mama did not believe in sharing much with strangers, and if she thought that they thought that she wasn't smart, she made a point of acting dumb; she enjoyed messing with their minds. She was too frustrating for that doctor, who did not seem to have the patience or interest in trying to develop a relationship with a proud uneducated southern African American woman with a wicked sense of humor.

Dementia is a mask that slowly covers and encompasses body and soul. It started with forgetting something on the stove, the fire alarm going off, making her famous sweet potato pie and something not tasting right because she forgot the butter or eggs. It was hard for her to take in her forgetfulness. She was losing her independence slowly and she did not like it. She refused to talk about it, and for a while we joined in her denial. Until it kept happening—calls in the middle of the night when she got up to have a snack, forgot to turn the stove off, and the fire alarm went off, yet again.

We slowly began to apply for and obtain services for Mama—a home attendant to shop, cook, do light cleaning, and help with personal hygiene when necessary. There were three of her seven children in a position to assist her, Bettie, Clint, and me. The others had moved back to North Carolina. Bettie moved in with Mama so she would not be alone in the evenings. I managed Mama's finances, and Clint, whose auto shop was nearby, stopped by during the week to check on her. Mama did not appreciate my method of paying bills once a month. She liked to pay her bills when they arrived. She told my sisters, "Y'all done put a shit ass in charge of paying my bills."

Thereafter, I would walk into her apartment stating, "The shit ass is here to pay your bills. Aren't you lucky to have me?" It became the family joke, the most highly educated relegated to the status of shit ass. I knew that it was important for Mama to be in charge of her own life as long as she could. The struggle was how to help and allow her to do that while maintaining a schedule and way of life that I felt comfortable with. I did not want to become the angry daughter, begrudging what I felt was my responsibility to a parent who had loved and cared so well for me.

As Mama declined, Daddy took up the role of patriarch, parent in charge. He called and checked on his children more often, orchestrated gatherings at his apartment, where he taught me to play poker. Daddy and Mama had separated after thirty years of marriage and remained on friendly, even caring terms for another forty-three. In Daddy's last years, he spoke to me more about his mistakes as a husband. He was a tall, dark, handsome, charismatic man who loved to flirt. He was of the generation that believed a "man" was expected to sleep around while staying in the role of husband and father. He preferred women who were considered loose, sexually free, who hung out in after-hours joints, and drank corn liquor, unlike his Christian wife. My parents never considered divorce; they learned to live separate lives.

Daddy was first a sharecropper, then a factory worker at Burlington Mills in North Carolina. As a migrant to New York, he found a job in a printing factory, joined the union, and worked there until retirement. We lost Daddy on May 20, 2010. He died of heart failure at the age of ninety-two in his bed as he wished.

Mama did not take in his death until one evening at her apartment. We were sitting at her kitchen table eating when I said something about life after Daddy's death. All of a sudden, Mama gasped, "What?!" She finally got it. The interesting thing about dementia is that there are those moments of clarity, where the afflicted person comes to life with all the vitality of the past. It is so short, like the blink of an eye. From that moment on, Mama ate less and seemed to begin her descent into the unknown world, following her husband of seventy-three years. Now she could not live without him.

We had Daddy's going-home service in a Brooklyn funeral home with the blues songs he loved playing during the viewing, before taking his body for burial in Wagram, North Carolina. Daddy looked like he was proudly sleeping, chin held high. It was at Daddy's burial that I recognized the honor given the dead regardless of their color and background in Wagram, our hometown.

Mama died five months later. She came to pick up her children at my sister Annie's farm house in Maxton, in a white hearse, followed by a long limousine. The hearse moved slowly down the dirt road. The procession was led by the county sheriff on a motorcycle with flashing lights, this being a part of his role in the small town. Spring Branch Baptist Church sat back from the road. It used to be a white wooden structure; now it was brick, not much larger, but modernized. The church was filled with family and friends when the immediate family arrived. I attended Sunday school, got religion, and was baptized by this church in a creek the old-fashioned way, dressed in white holding hands as we sang "Take Me to the Water to Be Baptized." I even sang on the children's choir and fell in love with the music and the preaching in the Black Baptist Church at Spring Branch.

I sat with notes in hand, staring, holding my emotions with tight control. The usher touched my shoulder and pointed to the microphone. It was my job to thank the pastor, the church, community for all of their support of our family during our time of grief. To let them know how special it was to have Mama's going-home service at a church where she and her family were members for generations. It was at her funeral that I started telling others of Mama's sayings and their value to me and my sibling. *"Child, it's not what you say; it's how you say it." "If you take one step, the good Lord will take two."* Holding on to Mama's sayings keeps me close to her spirit, helps her to live on in me.

When the sheriff led the funeral procession to the graveyard, there were at least thirty cars, lights on, as far back as I could see. As we moved down the road, all cars that were not a part of the procession pulled over and stopped until the entire procession passed. When we got to the intersection, there was an officer blocking traffic. The young white officer stood with hat on chest, head bowed, as the hearse passed with the body of a former Black woman sharecropper and domestic worker. Could he be the son of the man whom my family worked for as sharecroppers? The white boy who called Mama Hattie, not Miss Hattie like all the Black children?

At the gravesite I looked over and pointed out the house across the road to my son; it was once the home of our family. The house was boarded up, showing its age. As a child, I played in this graveyard with other children. The pain and joy of those memories, owning our first house before losing it and migrating to New York.

Not remembering difficult times or suffering is like dementia, a fear of repetition. I am the baby girl, the sixth of seven children, a sharecropper's daughter. I was too young to be of much use in the fields, so I started school in August. My parents and older siblings worked in the fields until harvest in November. As a teenage migrant to New York City, I wanted nothing more than to forget my past. I worked hard to lose my Southern accent, dressed less country, dropped Maybelle, my Southern name, never told anyone my first job was picking cotton. I wanted and needed to assimilate, to feel like I belonged.

As the first generation of my family to obtain a college education, I now feel tasked with remembering. I have walked by faith into unknown territory, using my intellect along with the memory of my parents, whose shoulders I proudly stand on. ■

PHOTO: JOCELYN MCRAE5

Michael Krass
mkrassphd@gmail.com

Stemming the Flow: Racism in White America

The best lack all conviction while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity

—*William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," 1920*

Deep within the Earth it is so hot that some rocks slowly melt and become a thick flowing substance called magma. Since it is lighter than the solid rock around it, magma rises and collects in magma chambers. Eventually, some of the magma pushes through vents and fissures to the Earth's surface. Magma that has erupted is called lava. … If magma is thick and sticky, gasses cannot escape easily. Pressure builds up until the gasses escape violently and explode."

—*United States Geological Survey*

AN OMINOUS, DESTRUCTIVE FORCE, a social "MAGmA" is oozing and lapping its way across the American landscape. It is spreading out indiscriminately, its ash creating a fog world where what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is a lie become merged and indistinguishable from one another. In Yeats's words, "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/The ceremony of innocence is drowned."

MAGmA's tidal force in the United States may be impossible to stop and may take a very long time to recover from. As a psychoanalyst I would suggest it is evidence that the United States is a group that is failing to contain the split-off and has evacuated parts of its members.

In this essay I argue that one of the many causes of this phenomenon is the ways in which white Americans—in particular, white liberal Americans—perversely disavow the ubiquity of internalized and structural racism. By white liberal American, I am referring to the group of white Americans for whom being racist is most ego-dystonic, who are most likely to be ashamed of their racism and most likely to seek to disidentify with racist intentions and wishes. A psychoanalytic perspective promotes awareness of oneself that includes the parts of ourselves that we hate and that are frightening or disturbing; the parts of ourselves that don't match up with our ideal image of goodness. A number of psychoanalysts and writings about race have argued persuasively that racism against people of color is ubiquitous among white people, that it is in many ways *definitional* to being white in America. They have suggested that racism acts like a perversion enabling us a forbidden source of satisfaction which is derived from having a sense of domination over others. But many who are white American liberals aren't convinced. Either we protest this idea openly or agree but allow it to slip out of our minds.

The recent backtracking by many universities and corporations on DEI initiatives that had been created and/or encouraged following the murder of George Floyd is evidence on a societal scale of the lack of conviction among white people who are ostensibly anti-racist. This lack of conviction, to my mind, reveals an unconscious wish to maintain a status quo built on racist fantasies. In either case, within institutions or within individuals, racism gets projected outward.

But where does it go? Projecting racism outward requires someone or some group primed to receive the unwanted "split-off" parts, by virtue of their vulnerability with respect to their psychology, their situation, or relative lack of power. These off-gassed parts fill the unoccupied cavities of a society's shadowy realms. The pressure builds until it "pushes through vents and fissures" those parts of our society that, through willful neglect, have been allowed to rot, to come apart at the seams. So then who better than the white working class, a group whose economic and cultural needs have been increasingly ignored, dismissed, devalued, and othered by those who identify as white liberals as embodied by the Democratic party?

The word "woke" has come to represent something cartoonishly performative, a condescending attitude of being holier-than-thou and of knowing better. But, just like the dismantling of DEI efforts at many institutions, just like electing an openly racist white man to the presidency following the country's first Black president, and just like the brutality of Jim Crow laws following the criminalization of slavery in all of the US, enemies of anti-racist efforts seek to remove their bite, their urgency, and the courage involved in making them by caricaturing and libeling them. However, the richness and multiplicity of the word and its variations are essential to making societal shifts in taking on unconscious adherence to racism that is ubiquitous among white people. Take the impact of the murder of George Floyd as an example. For many white people, viewing the video footage of a white policeman unhurriedly and unabashedly murdering a Black man in front of a group of Black witnesses while the victim cried for his mother woke them from a self-induced slumber. In the wake of this event, many of us awakened to the living nightmare that people of color experience on a daily basis in the US. And like mourners at a wake, many of us, perhaps for the first time, gazed at the dead body of a Black man, a mother's son, murdered by a white policeman. As Freud told us in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), to mourn we must contend with our fantasies of murdering the dead, with enjoying the triumph of being the one who has lived. Many white people, in that pivotal moment, saw with horror and shame the racist murderer in ourselves. Many of us recognized the need to unblinkingly face the people we kill by our complicity in a racist system, a system that could make such an unabashed murder possible. Many of us started a long-overdue process of mourning the devastating impact of our complicity, of the ways we enact our own nightmares, creating a nightmare for an Other.

But such tectonic cultural shifts generate great volatility. As we see in psychoanalytic treatments, every step toward greater self-awareness, toward mourning the damage and pain one has wrought, is met with a counter-resistance of corresponding or, perhaps more frequently, greater intensity. Seeing the white community as a group, as a multifaceted organism, the surfacing of taboo unconscious wishes and impulses would be expected to create such a violent counter-resistance. And this has come to pass.

The resistance is more apparent in those who are unashamed of their explicit racism, like the prototypical wealthy white couple in polo shirts and khakis wielding their assault rifles at people—many of them people of color peacefully protesting for racial equity while daring to walk by their suburban home. But it is *also* present, perhaps more perniciously so, in those of us who attempt to fight racism, those who actively try to contribute, to be allies in creating a safer and more fair world for people of color, or in those of us who are unwilling to keep in mind the omnipresence of their own racism.

In the face of seemingly inevitable destructiveness, we can feel ourselves losing conviction to address this destructiveness—one which has its origins in our own minds and hearts. It is of urgent importance now to form an emotional wall against the impact of this destructive resistance. This wall would be fortified by the reclaiming of the internalized racism and other forms of murderous othering that is unconscious and disowned. It is a basic Freudian tenet that the ego is strengthened when what is unconscious and forbidden becomes conscious, becomes available for examination. If we wish to have the strength, the conviction, to stem the flow of the MAGmA, we must recognize how our unconscious desires contribute to society's racism. ■

Sue Grand
drsuegrandphd@gmail.com

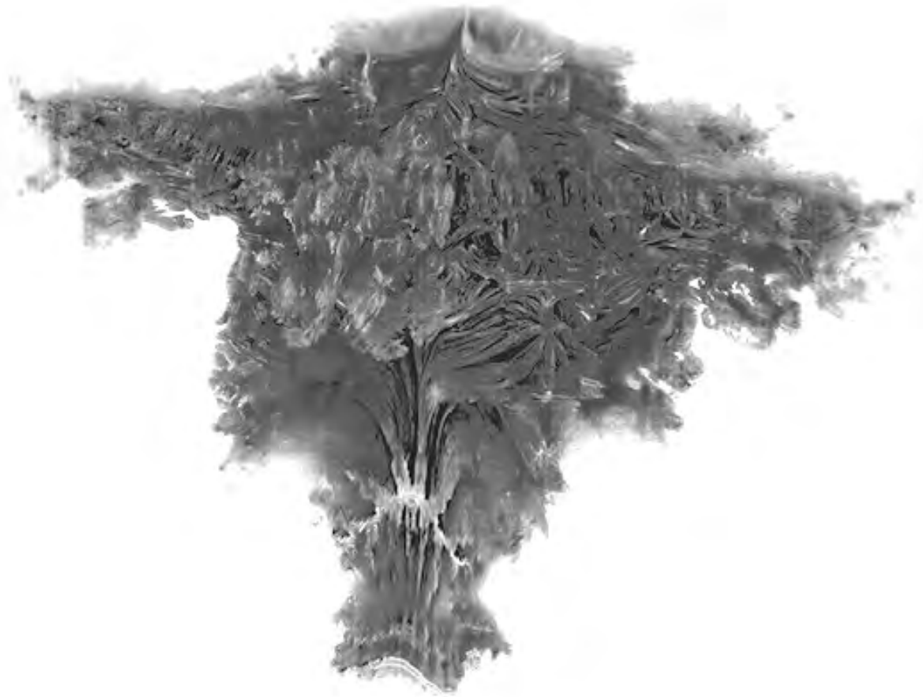


PHOTO: SCARLET PENN

Fascism's Erotic Register

GROWING UP IN MUSSOLINI'S ITALY, Umberto Eco knew only Fascism. In 1942, at the age of ten, he writes an essay for the Italian Fascists. The essay must address this question: "Should we die for the glory of Mussolini and the immortal destiny of Italy?" Eco knows the "right" answer. He wins, receiving what may have been his first award. By 1943, Mussolini is deposed. In 1945, Milan is liberated by partisans, and Il Duce is executed. Once he was all-powerful and idealized. Now his body is kicked and spat upon. Clandestine political parties celebrate their freedom in a public cacophony of difference. Eco learns that "freedom of speech is freedom from rhetoric" (*Ur-Fascism*, p. 1).

Many years pass, and Eco writes another essay; this one is an antidote to the first. In *Ur-Fascism* he revisits these memories, and asks, "Is there still another ghost stalking Europe?" (p. 2). Illuminating this ghost, Eco argues that fascism has no particular ideological essence. The *content* of its ideologies differ, but its *structure* reoccurs. He lists fourteen features that characterize Eternal Fascism. Many of these coexist in unquestioning contradiction, because fascism disdains thought and reflectivity. Thinking is considered passive, effete, and it is feminized. Fascism is a muscular "cult of action for action's sake," in which "*life is permanent warfare*" (p. 7, italics in original). To Eco, fascist violence is an erotic register of machismo. The predations of hyper-hetero-masculinity; the contempt for women; the assault on sex ed and gendered variance; the attribution of perversion to racial/ethnic minorities: all of this is bedrock to fascist structures.

Once there were Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar. Now, in 2024, we have Putin, Orbán, Modi, and Trump. Democracy is at risk. In the United States, the enticement of fascism is manifest in MAGA fever. But fascism is not new to the United States (see Maddow, 2023). Paxton identifies the Ku Klux Klan as the first fascist movement, well before Mussolini formalized Fascism (Paxton, 2004). The KKK fed into white Christian nationalism in the 1930s. These were pro-Nazi movements, infected with the virulent antisemitism that characterizes the alt-right today (Hochschild, 2022). In these regimes, Real men fight and Good women Mother. The righteous are sanctified, they are "pure," and they are ascendant. Homosexuals, the Black, and the Jew: these are considered perverse and subhuman.

These systems seem like a call to repair the collective unmanning of men. They sacralize a dominant hyper-hetero-masculinity, and promise communal protection and rescue through submission to an all-powerful Father. But the price of this rescue is the persecutory control of the body politic. These controls are often infused with erotic texts and subtexts that deify cruelty and the hatred of women (see Theweleit, 1987, 1989). Mobilized by the demagogue, lit up by the crowd, these subtexts involve contradictory enticements, prescriptions, and prohibitions. The "righteous" often have lurid projections about the degenerate and the "deviant." In these movements, fascists issue moralistic edicts; they seek and attack transgressors, *and* they engage in the unholy acts that they have forbidden.[1] At other times, they perform machismo, dread sexuality, and perpetrate violence on the women whom they sexualize (Theweleit, 1987). In both positions, fascists claim moral purity, and praise their fungible, desexualized Mother-Wife. This "holy" edifice is built upon a perverse structure: a delusional preoccupation with the *Other's* "perversion." All of this infuses racism and antisemitism.

The celebration of violence, the preoccupation with a repellant, menacing sexuality: this is operating now, in the white Christian nationalism that sees queer and trans people multiplying everywhere. Ostensibly, they are "groomers," they are "pedophiles," they will rape your daughter and turn your sons into girls. To the alt-right, Jews and Black and Brown hordes are fornicating with whiteness, polluting that whiteness, and gestating the "Great Replacement." To white Christian nationalists, liberalism permits the pregnant woman to double as murderer: she might abort *her baby the day before she gives birth*. Or commit "postbirth abortion." Only the "righteous" can purge these "deviants" and the democracy that birthed them.

These fixations gestate in cults of phallic supremacy (see Ben-Ghiat, 2020; Weiland, 2015, 2023). These cults are grounded in patriarchal narcissism and erotic splitting. Fascist movements dictate heterosexual conformity and sexual repression. But they do not merely prohibit erotic life. These regimes arouse and activate the desires that expand their powers. The Leader must become the object of desire:

> Mussolini cut an incredible figure in the 1930s. Strutting on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia in comic opera style in front of 100,000 people chanting "DUCE! DUCE!" He built up an elaborate culture of personality around himself. News photos regularly showed him in a position of command, riding on horseback, flying an airplane.... He would ... pose wrestling with a lion cub.
> (The "Death of the Duce, Benito Mussolini," April 28, 202, The National WWII Museum)

Throughout fascist narratives, women are either sluts or Mothers. The only *sanctified* form of female sexuality is the *passive* adoring female gaze cast upon the leader:

> "DUCE, I saw you yesterday during your tumultuous visit to our city," wrote Michela C. of Siena in December 1925. "Our eyes met. I told you of my admiration, devotion.... I feared I would never know love in my life. Now I know that I love you. ... I understood that I had touched your heart from the heated way you looked at me just before I fainted" (quoted in Ben-Ghiat, 2023, p. 119).

Michela C. manifests the desire that sustains phallic supremacy. But while Michela C. turns her adoring gaze on Mussolini, let's turn our gaze toward the Leader's *other* witnesses. What if a woman *laughs* at Mussolini's posturing? What if she is looking at another woman instead of admiring his prowess? What if a cis hetero man doesn't want to *be* him? What if there are cis men who *want* to relinquish their male identity? What if a cis woman can have surgery and take hormones and just *acquire* "masculinity"? Watching the rituals of fascism, these people can see what the Leader does not want to be seen. They can look at him and through him. Their eyes seem to be everywhere. In the United States, we can sense that this gaze shatters fascism's narcissistic mirror. To MAGA, this gaze must feel like a shaming panopticon. It is no wonder that these unregulated bodies evoke paranoia and rage in the dominant.

This perspective helps to explain the ferocity with which MAGA is attacking trans people. Trans bodies scramble the gender binaries and hierarchies that are foundational to fascism. Nontraditional families; racial/ethnic "mixing"; women who want sex, not babies; sex and gender outliers; Black, Brown, and Jewish "vermin": all of these query, and weaken, the patriarchy. They bust up the heroic mythology of violent hyper-hetero-masculinity. To vacate this threat, authoritarian regimes construct the category of deviance. Fascism's *real* perversion is split off into the Other body. The Other becomes a mass focus for erotic obsession, hate, and dread. To save the "pure" from the profane, "deviance" must be purged. In the fascist crowd, violence toward the "perverse Other" becomes a sanctified form of collective madness, mobilized by the dictator.

This virulence suggests that fascism knows something about the locus of its own undoing. To resist fascism, we need to learn from fascism's paranoia. A great anti-fascist force resides in the category of "deviance"; we need to liberate that force. ■

1 In Florida, Moms For Liberty condemns any form of sex other than heterosexual sex in marriage. Moms For Liberty led a movement to ban books from public school that made any mention of a sexual body part or gender. The co-founder has been exposed for engaging in a sexual threesome with her husband and another woman; the husband is accused of raping the other woman. *Business Insider*, Dec. 16, 2023. Authoritarian and fascist movements construct opposing categories of the "pure" and the "deviant"; this is used to justify dominance and subjugation.

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PHOTO: MOKHALAD MUSAVI

Sara Taber
smtaber@gmail.com

The Afghanistan Story

"The single story creates stereotypes, and the trouble with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." —Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"

"There is no story that is not true." —Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, there is a single story told about Afghanistan. That story is this: Afghanistan is a country with a history of nonstop chaos characterized by ceaseless factional, intertribal warfare and wars for domination by successive foreign powers—punctuated by periods of soul-curdling terror wrought by groups of Islamic extremists. Afghan society, we hear, is comprised of violent, tyrannical husbands and universally oppressed and terrorized abused and submissive women. We receive frequent reports that Afghanistan is a place where girls have been refused education and forced into marriages with much older men at very young ages.

I have learned while facilitating writing groups for Afghan girls and women at universities in the Middle East and South Asia, as well as within Afghanistan itself, that all of these generalizations hold truth. But I have also learned that there are coexisting, competing truths, exceptions to the generalizations, and great nuances to the Afghan story. There are important, little-heard stories about Afghan history, the composition of Afghan society, the role of women in Afghanistan, and the relationships between Afghan men and women which wrinkle and challenge the commonplace, simple story we hear of Afghanistan.

The seventeen-to-twenty-six-year-old young Afghan women I have come to know grew up in shattering times of great uncertainty and violence, and their mothers did as well. The mothers' and daughters' stories, however, are different. Each cohort was shaped by the geopolitical circumstances and societal gyrations particular to the years in which they grew up. The young women's mothers were born between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s and raised during the Soviet occupation of their country. From the 1950s through most of the 1970s, (contrary to the single story often assumed to be true in the US), the pro-Soviet, pro-communist prime minister Mohammed Daoud Khan sought to modernize the state and introduced some reforms that promoted women's rights. Women were allowed to attend university and to work outside the home. This period through which the mothers passed as children was also a time of ceaseless strife between Mujahideen rebels (armed by the US, Britain, and China) and the USSR-backed Afghan army. After Russia invaded the country in 1979, Soviet troops came to dominate the urban zones while violent rebellious guerilla groups of Mujahideen held sway in the countryside. Meanwhile, some rural Afghans were beginning to coalesce around al-Qaida, a group devoted to establishing a state governed by a strict version of Islam.

Just as the mothers of the young women in the writing groups were entering adolescence, their country underwent a huge upheaval. In 1989, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, and three years later, the Soviet-backed president was ousted. Ten years of struggle between communist-leaning and Islam-affiliated parties and factions followed the Russian withdrawal; first five years of factional infighting, then five years of Taliban rule. By 1995, this Islamic militia, promising peace and traditional Muslim values, had gained full control. The Taliban required women to be fully veiled and prohibited them from leaving the home alone. Public executions and amputations enforced their strict version of Islamic law. Girls were no longer permitted to go to school or learn to read. Many women, including mothers of the young women I have come to know, were married off at age thirteen or fourteen.

The Taliban was the dominant group in Afghanistan in 1997 when the oldest of my students were born—but various ethnic groups were fighting them to take control of the country, and Bin Laden was training al-Qaida terrorists in training camps tucked in the Afghan mountains. My younger students were born soon after 9/11. They, as well as my older students, spent most of their childhoods (under the care of their often forcibly little-educated, early-married mothers) in a country headed by democracy-aspiring Afghan leaders overseen and aided by US advisors and troops under the American banner of "Operation Enduring Freedom."

This new generation of Afghan girls grew up in an era of American influence during which women's education and employment outside the home were again promoted—with greater and lesser success in the urban and rural areas. The young women in my groups embraced and benefited from this zeitgeist in which women's education was bolstered. But, as had been the case with their mothers who grew up under Soviet occupation, the girls' childhoods were also marked by widespread violence and tumult as fighting continued between al-Qaida and Taliban forces and the US-backed Afghan government army. Suicide attacks against international troops were ongoing. The lives of Afghan families, far and wide, were disrupted by frequent, random IED explosions and targeted acts of violence (as Western forces and the US-backed Afghan army fought to subdue those opposed to democracy-oriented rule). Life in Afghanistan was dangerous. Anything could happen at any time.

On July 5, 2021, after twenty years of uphill, unending war, the US forces departed Bagram Airfield without telling Afghan officials. On August 15, 2021 the Taliban took control of the country.

In one sense, as this complicated history attests, the single story of Afghanistan as a country of chaos and a country that represses women holds profound truth. On the other hand, it does not. Yes, both the mothers and the daughters whose lives I have learned of experienced youths rent by tumult and violence. The adolescence and early adulthood of each generation was dictated by repressive Taliban rule, but each also tasted and experienced childhoods during which women's education and empowerment were promoted to a degree, the first via communist reforms, and the second by Western-oriented ones.

Here is another story about Afghan history and Afghan girls that is absolutely true: The day the Taliban seized control of their country, the lives of the young women in my groups were turned upside down. They were devastated. Those attending university at the time of the Taliban takeover did not receive the degrees they had worked hard to earn. The girls still in high school were forced to quit learning and stay home. As a consequence of the Taliban takeover, there is currently an epidemic of girl suicide in the country. Little reported is the fact that the mental health of Afghan boys, too, is under increased threat due to the repression of the women and girls in their lives. On the familial front under the Taliban, some Afghan mothers of girls and young women are forbidding their girls education out of conviction that the Islamic leaders' rulings are correct, while others forbid it out of quaking fear for their daughters' lives. At the same time, many of the illiterate or minimally schooled mothers of the young women are passionately determined that their daughters be educated and are trying to facilitate this, even under the Taliban's noses. As for the young women who I have come to know, they have impressed me no end. Somehow, they have garnered the strength to pursue their studies in the face of and despite extreme duress—either after fleeing to study in challenging university conditions far from their families or within the prisons their homes have become under the Taliban.

The story of Afghanistan, my young women informants have taught me, is yet more complicated even than a battle between communism, democracy, and Islamic forces or a battle over women's position in society. Stories upon stories, I have learned, compose the story of a country. But *just* being a woman of a certain generation is not the whole story, either. My young informants have disabused me of the notion that there is one Afghanistan story.

Here is one more story within the innumerable that complicates, broadens, and enriches the single story of Afghanistan. The young Afghans have emphasized to me that their country is not composed of a single group of people with a single heritage. The country has more than fourteen ethnic-linguistic groups, the largest being Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. The Hazara, an ethnic group of Turkic, Mongolic, and Iranic origins, who make up about 11 percent of the population, have long been marginalized, discriminated against, and persecuted because they embrace Shia Islam, while the majority of Afghans are Sunni. More than half of the Hazara population was massacred by the Emirate of Afghanistan in the late 1800s. For the last century and longer, their rural lands have been confiscated; they have been denied housing in cities and forced into urban ghettos; they have been denied jobs and a means of making a living; they have had their businesses confiscated; and they have been freely and randomly murdered due sheerly to their ethnicity. Subjected to repeated suicide bombings and attacks by other groups throughout the American presence, the Hazara are now specifically targeted by the Taliban, who are largely supported by the Pashtun and others adherents to the Sunni branch of Islam. A large portion of the young women I work with are of Hazara background. The Hazara are remarkable for the adaptation they have made in response to the repression they've received. This adaptation defies assumptions commonly made about marginalized people: Despite concerted pressures against it, the Hazaras have come to highly value education as one thing that can never be taken away from them—and, to a greater extent than some other Afghan groups, more commonly promote education of their female offspring. The college students have told me of Hazara fathers who have taken great risks to ensure that their daughters continue their educations despite Taliban edicts.

These brief stories of Afghan history and society offer a very partial backdrop and context for the many stories young Afghan women have to offer the world. Their perspectives and words, each unique as well as part and parcel of their country's story, need to be heard. ■

We are the Light: A New Space for Silenced Women

We are the Light is a forum and gathering place offering free and open expression to women from around the world whose voices are seldom heard and whose futures are threatened. The education and health of women, attention paid to the development of girls and women, and inclusion of the outlooks of women are critical to the welfare of the world. We hope making space on our website for their voices will make a contribution toward this end.

We are the Light is being launched with the poetry, prose, and art of young women currently residing in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

All contributors to We are the Light are being required by *ROOM* to choose pen names to protect their identities and those of their families.

i To read the poetry and prose as well as view more art by these young Afghan, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani women, click here or visit analytic-room.com.

Opposite page: *The Day the Taliban Took Control of Afghanistan.*
Above: *A Girl in Chains.* **Right:** *The Pen in Flight.* All drawings by Ava.

Shifa Haq
shifahaq@gmail.com

Bare Life

WHEN I OVERCOME THE FORCES THAT may have silenced the musicality of Indian history, I recount growing up in an India that had deep friendship with the historic Palestine through an intimate festooning of mutual imagination. Legends have it that Baba Farid, the beloved poet and mystic, traveled to East Jerusalem in the early-thirteenth-century Ottoman Empire. His presence touched those whom he encountered, and seven centuries later, the place where he lived is still known as Al-Hindi Serai, a shrine that has welcomed *murids* or the desirous ones who seek union with the mystic teacher. Not so long ago, the Nizam of Hyderabad, an independent monarchy in the Deccan before it joined the Indian Union post-independence, presented chandeliers to adorn Al-Aqsa Mosque. Beside the chandeliers lie the sepia-toned images of fallen Indian soldiers who fought alongside Allied forces against the Ottoman Empire. Around forty soldiers were buried in two cemeteries in Gaza far away from the motherland but closer to Baba Farid. While the market-driven, globalized world reduces cultures to forms of consumptions such as the promise of "authentic" hummus, zaatar, and künefe in supermarkets, in the deep recess of Indian imagination, Palestine flickers as a tall, burly man in keffiyeh we came to recognize as Yasser Arafat.

Perhaps it was the memory of the long night of British colonization of India, with its wounds still quite fresh in the mind of its people, that the new republic of India found connection with the political struggle of South Africa and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Soon after its independence, India was the first country to sever diplomatic, cultural, or commercial relations with the apartheid government of South Africa. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the PLO as the only legitimate representation of Palestinians. Through Arafat, India could acknowledge that Palestinians "carried an olive branch in one hand and the freedom fighter's gun in the other." These words, written and translated jointly by Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish, come back as a plea for a binocular vision or scotopic vision without which we may experience a tragic divide within ourselves or the contemporary moment. How do we reconcile the two aspects of the image as coterminous, sharing a border?

The challenge such a picture poses is not unknown. When Gandhi spoke of a nonviolent resistance, or nonviolence, in the same breath, it was an impossible proposition. The world wondered: Is it possible to be nonviolent in a political resistance? In the Indian experiment with the truth of the oppressed, we learned that nonviolence is not the same as cowardice and that violence may one day give way to nonviolence. The image of a freedom fighter could therefore carry the two sides, the olive branch and the gun, in a paradoxical relation. Along these nondichotomous lines, Indian support for Palestinian right to freedom and sovereignty exists alongside a Indian's history of not engaging in antisemitism.

India is neither without its own colonial ambitions nor innocent of its deep-rooted preference for, as Louis Dumont termed it, *homo hierarchicus*. One might ask what the past colonies know about rule by force that does not allow for political neutrality or liberal humanist approach. It is as though the past colonies fail to repress the specters of colonialism that mark their consciousness. This is sometimes visible in politics of friendship but also in the ethnic, ethno-nationalist, or caste enactments they perpetuate on their own soil. India has practiced "apartness" for centuries, segregating people based on their birth or belonging, on its land and around its peripheries.

Like the Greek monster Hydra, "segregation" or the need for "apartness," what in Afrikaans came to be known as apartheid in the South African political unconscious, has more than one head. Freud confronted the many-headed beast in his clinic as defensive operations, of repression, negation, disavowal, and foreclosure through which ego perpetuates an internal apartheid for intolerable aspects of reality. In "Fetishism" (1927), Freud observes that it is possible, and in painful situations necessary, for the ego to split itself to keep two contradictory experiences incommunicado, prevented from patriation. This way, for instance, one can host a memory of one's victimization while also being identified with the aggressor, as two separate heads. Similarly, Freud (1919) noted that the fantasy of a child being beaten while appearing masochistic could also be sadistic. Most instances of ethno-nationalisms insist on attacking and delegitimizing the existence of contradictory states in favor of pure histories of innocence. The colonizers carried the burden to civilize the colonies while killing thousands by using the "logic" of racial Darwinism or religion, while postcolonies, chaotically pluralistic in most cases, may be organized by the fear of minorities to establish their regimes of power.

The Israeli retaliation following the October 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas has killed and wounded thousands and displaced more than two million. The world is looking on to those who narrowly escaped death but may not escape hunger, starvation, dehydration, and disease. I wish to stay with the image of the starving person to imagine what will be an ethical obligation, not only for those we grieve but those who are disappearing before our eyes. For the poorer nations, hunger has always been a war. But now we are called to witness an appetite for destruction. Through the consternation of the starved, wounded, and displaced Palestinians, Giorgio Agamben's formulation of "bare life" as an analysis of sovereign violence and biopolitics returns to our minds. Palestinians' fate connects them to the millions starving in the Sahel region, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan whose dispossession like that of their Palestinian counterparts is a consequence of expanding armed conflict, coup d'état, and poverty. Freud knew that hunger is a catastrophe, where care and violence take macabre shape inside the body and the mind. Even in the concentration camps, Levi testified, it was the starved "Muselmann" that were the most abject form of life for whom fear, humiliation, and horror had taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic who the inmates wished to avoid at all costs (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1995). Agamben viewed bare life called "Muselmann" to designate "not so much a limit between life and death . . . [but] the threshold between the human and the inhuman (Agamben, 1999, p. 55).

It is interesting to imagine that an Arabic word, *Muslim*, appears as the master figure of "bare life" in the concentration camps, literally meaning "the one who unconditionally submits to the will of God" (Agamben, 1999, p. 45). Upon reading Levi's account of the abject life in the camps, Agamben writes, "In any case, it is certain that, with a kind of ferocious irony, the Jews knew that they would not die at Auschwitz as Jews" but, rather, as Muslims. In Thomas Keneally's Booker Prize–winning novel, *Schindler's Ark*, Keneally writes that the camp jargon was "based on people's memory of newsreels of famine in Muslim countries, for a prisoner who had crossed the borderline that separated the ravenous living from the good-as-dead" (1982). Some suggest that it is possible that some prisoners of Nazi camps had seen photographs or perhaps read Albert Camus's chronicles of the famine in the Kabylia region of Algeria in 1939. What is important to note is that the image of the Muselmann throws light on modern European colonial violence and its procedures that carry holographic affinity with Arabs of Algeria, "coolies" of India and "niggers" of Africa (Jarvis, J, 2014). These epithets are markers of necropolitics and hunger—a line that separates the favored and the damned.

The news of the alarming rate of hunger experienced by the dispossessed Palestinians in Gaza coincided with a change in my dream life that's now pervaded with nightmares. The image of children, women, and men queuing for food in empty plastic containers; trucks of food vanishing before a starving mass of people; or the manic relief on the rain-drenched faces of children hopeful that Allah was trying to quench their thirst has evoked a traumatic reaction in my unconscious, linking me to the experience of hunger that's stored in my tissues generationally.

In my dream, a vampirish presence is approaching fast to feed on me. It dawns on me that this is an unconscious representation of those for whom my heart bleeds. On waking up, shame replaces terror. Besides one's identification and caritas, is it possible I have perpetuated a private caste division in which I must protect myself against the ones condemned to starve? The necrophilic, cannibalistic invasion in my dream brought associations of the Bengal famines or the Great Hunger, where thousands collapsed in the private pits of fire without a grain of compassion by their absentee landlords or colonial rulers. Vampires, as we know, are dead and condemned to live forever, a state similar to hunger in which one is being destroyed silently by a sensation that doesn't yield itself to a quick death. Like the folklores, the undecaying body of the vampire unapologetically walked out of its burial ground to affect this dreamer. Perhaps vampires do not return to the living with the torment of hunger. They covet life itself and envy its effects that run in the veins of the living as their eternal right. ■

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Richard B. Grose
rgrose93@gmail.com

Do You See?

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF OPPRESSED people to their oppressors can be understood in terms of the prohibition to see or be seen.

Take the American example. Under Jim Crow in the South, Blacks understood that they were to be invisible—not seen and not seeing. No Black person could look at a white person in a way that reflected her humanity or the realities of her existence. Even the imagined gaze of a Black man at a white woman was grounds for lynching. After almost one hundred years of this invisibility, the nonviolent demonstrations of the civil rights movement forced the nation to see what was being done to Black people. It turned out that by then, the early 1960s, once it was forced to see, the nation discovered in itself the capacity to act on what it had seen. Historic civil rights legislation was passed and significant changes occurred.

Take the German example. Once Hitler had consolidated total power in Germany, the regime set about, first, placing in concentration camps all those whom it was felt people did not want to see due to their difference: homosexuals, people with disabilities, Roma people. Then the Nazis began their campaign against the Jews, which can be viewed (as Freud all but foresaw) as the elimination of those who because of their difference were able to see things differently from the majority. Stupendous crimes were committed in part to eliminate people who looked different or saw things differently.

Take the Russian example. The Soviet Union went from conditions of joint leadership in the late 1920s, in which people generally had the freedom to see what was happening in their country and say what they thought about it, to conditions of a totalitarian Stalinist state in the early 1930s, in which people were not permitted to see what was plainly in front of them. They were not permitted to see all around them the hideous suffering of millions of people caused by the first Five-Year Plan. They were only permitted to see a heroic act of self-determination by unified and optimistic people led by a farsighted and benevolent Soviet state. Later, during the Great Terror, 1937 to 1938, everyone was killed—Old Bolsheviks, independent writers, and most of the military leadership—*who might (in the future)* see things differently from the way Stalin needed things seen. Anyone who had made or might make Stalin uncomfortable by what they might be able to see was killed.

Now we have the Israeli example. We know the history: 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes in 1948, and since 1967 they have lived under a settler-colonial regime that denies them political and human rights, treats them as less than human, and, as I write, is in the process of murdering tens of thousands of them in Gaza and now also on the West Bank. Their status brings to mind Black Americans under Jim Crow, German Jews under the Nuremberg Laws, and any Soviet citizens under Stalin who Stalin considered had seen or might see something that made him uncomfortable.

Black Americans under Jim Crow, like Soviet citizens under Stalin, had to practice invisibility in order to survive: they had to appear to be what the majority demanded that they appear to be. The situation of the German Jews was different, in some ways the opposite. Many German Jews under the Nazi regime began with the thought that they and their forebears were as German as anyone, but the Nuremberg Laws, passed in 1935, made sure that Jews were seen to be different and were systematically excluded in incremental steps from society. This culminated in their having to wear yellow stars and, soon after that, in the Holocaust itself. Unlike the other two examples, Jews were kept from disappearing, and then they were killed.

These brief forays into the history of authoritarian regimes from the viewpoint of being seen or not seen point up very different national experiences. In Germany, the oppression could only cease with total military defeat, which came too late for most Jews. In the famous postwar moment, German citizens were forced to walk through concentration camps to see what their government had done to human beings, to see what they had assiduously determined not to see before. They had to be forced by the military leader of one of the conquering armies to literally open their eyes to the unspeakable crimes that their countrymen had inflicted on innocent people.

In the US, the body politic was healthy enough so that being shown the reality of the Black American experience was sufficient, in the 1960s, for it to make changes significant enough to bring national life more in line with the stated national value of justice for all, which in the process were shown to have real force. In Russia, the oppressive requirement to see only what was approved to be seen gradually lost its power after Stalin died, until under Gorbachev it lapsed completely. Then citizens were allowed to see everything, including what was contained in formerly secret files about the crimes of the Stalinist regime. The Soviet Union collapsed soon after that. In Russia, the freedom to see began before the collapse of the Soviet Union, had its apogee in the decade after that collapse, and then slowly waned under Putin until a Stalinist-like prohibition on seeing what the regime doesn't want seen was reproduced during the war in Ukraine. In this respect, Russia was healthy enough to acquire the freedom to see but not healthy enough to maintain that freedom, at least now.

The Israeli case is being played out dramatically as I write. Can Israelis see the suffering of the Palestinians that has been caused by the actions of the state of Israel from the days of its founding? Or can they only see their own suffering in our time and before? We know that the current Israeli government has been trying to destroy the independence of the Israeli judicial system. An independent judiciary does for a nation what a healthy superego does for an individual: it allows things to be seen and then responded to as justice requires. Can the Israelis maintain an independent judicial system? Can the Israelis see what they are doing, see what continuing down that path will lead to, and act so as to change course, thus affirming values of justice and humanity that their culture contains?

Can a nation allow itself to see? The Germans could not; they had to be defeated. The Russians could, briefly, in the context of the failure of the Soviet Union. The Americans could—then. In November 2024, we will see if Americans are still animated by the values that prevailed in the 1960s. One meaning of an electoral victory of Donald Trump in November would be a national decision to return to the years when Black Americans and their historic suffering in America were not seen. Indeed, Trump's victory would mean placing the resources of the federal government in the service of making what is unpleasant for people to see (for example, climate change) invisible.

Seeing and being seen are also obviously essential to individuals. They form a part of the psychopathologies addressed in psychoanalytic treatments, ranging from a need to be invisible to a need always to be seen. Pointing out the similarities between national and individual realities puts us in mind of the tragedy of large groups. An individual can find a psychoanalyst to work on a psychopathology about seeing or being seen. A nation cannot. We saw the very different fates of nations in struggling with these issues. In our historical moment, we ask: Can Israel avoid the fate of Germany? Can the US? Turning away from seeing is to turn away from the possibility of justice.[1] ■

[1] For a dramatic experience of this issue from the point of view of the Palestinians, I recommend the photo essay by Susan Greene currently on *ROOM*'s website, *I Witness Silwan: Public Art, Tourism, and International Solidarity in Occupied East Jerusalem*.

Susan Greene
susan.r.greene@gmail.com

PHOTO: APIF AMIRAH FOR I WITNESS SILWAN

I Witness Silwan: Public Art, Tourism, and International Solidarity in Palestinian East Jerusalem

I Witness Silwan, begun in 2019, is neighborhood arts collaboration that supports the struggle waged by Silwan's Palestinian residents to stay on their land.

Silwan is a neighborhood in East Jerusalem that has been occupied by Israel since 1967. Religious nonprofits have dispossessed Palestinian residents to move in settlers, build up tourist centers, and conduct archeological excavations. Renamed "The City of David," it has been turned into a Jewish heritage site that, prior to now, was visited by more than a million people a year.

I Witness Silwan is a project of the US-based Art Forces and Palestine-based Madaa Creative Center. The Madaa Creative Center's mission is to build a safe, creative, and human rights–oriented space for the community. Art Forces' mission is to create community public art and media in resistance to militarism, environmental injustice, and colonialism.

To see the full photo essay, click here or visit analytic-room.com.

Katie Burner
katieburner@kcburner.com

Degrees of Separation

"WERE YOU OFFENDED BY ANYTHING I said today?" My client's hand rested on the doorknob as they posed this casually asked question on their way out the door.

"No, of course not," I eagerly reassured her.

I made a mental and literal note to address this inquiry with her next week, but this second session would turn out to be our last. I had a decent idea about the question's origins, and the answer left me feeling familiarly uneasy. I learned early on as a therapist that we are all walking Rorschach tests, contending with the projections clients place on us. My particular inkblot, however, appears especially messy.

Of the complex anxieties that can hound therapists, apprehension about displaying diplomas on the office wall is probably an uncommon one. But with both of my degrees hailing from Brigham Young University (the flagship school of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; i.e., "LDS" or "Mormon"), this anxiety is quite tenacious. Even with contemporary psychoanalysis acknowledging the inevitability and even usefulness of the therapist's subjectivity in the room, this type of subjectivity on display feels unwieldy.

Growing up in Maryland and now living and working in the DC metro area, I am attuned to the associations people can have with the Utah-based faith. When people hear "Mormon," some think of a hit Broadway musical, Utah pioneers, proselytizing missionaries, or gosh-darn friendly, if not weird, people. The conservative practices of church members might also be familiar, including abstinence from alcohol and coffee, no premarital sex, and modest dress and language. Though sharing similarities with other conservative faiths, key doctrinal differences make this American-grown, restorationist religion distinct from many other denominations. Throw in more divisive issues—including a polygamist past, rigid patriarchy, and opposition toward gay marriage—and it's easy to imagine the variety of projections clients might have.

Born and raised as a member of the LDS faith, I'm accustomed to contending with assumptions people might have about me and navigating feelings of difference. My sense of otherness felt relatively minimal as a child, consisting mostly of feeling embarrassed about explaining to my neighborhood friends why I wasn't allowed to play outside on Sundays. (How do I explain "Sabbath day observance" to a fellow seven-year-old?) Adolescence would magnify feelings of difference. A shy temperament, few close friends, and an ache for more belonging did me no favors in feeling separate from peers. While none of these feelings are unique to my adolescent experience, the added complexity of being a religious minority (or religious at all) doubled down on these emotions. I was immersed in Mormonism's idiosyncratic culture and shibboleths, which obviously my teenage classmates couldn't relate to. Straddling the worlds of high school and church life, I found more belonging in the latter. Amongst my LDS friends, we embraced our differences and lightheartedly claimed the biblical descriptor of a "peculiar people." An oft-repeated saying in my adolescence reminded me to be "in the world but not of the world." This reinforced the notion that I would never actually fit in, and that it was wrong to even want to. Deciding to attend BYU, where 99 percent of the more than thirty thousand students are LDS, felt like an obvious choice. Going to a school where everyone was peculiar meant that no one was, including me. For my six years there, I was no longer split between two worlds, no longer consciously confronting the anxiety of my difference.

My path to becoming a therapist was paved by a desire to rub shoulders with emotional intimacy while never fully embracing it myself—"in the intimacy but not of the intimacy," so to speak. As a newer therapist in Washington, DC, my responses to clients' projections about my identity were either clumsy or dodgy. I felt apprehensive about knowing how and what to say, and had been trained in school and in life to not reveal too much of my personal self. Projections from clients were sometimes subtle—one too many clients asking if it was okay if they swore, an off-handed comment about drinking coffee in my presence, and numerous passing remarks about Mormon coworkers, extended family, dates, etc. I never knew if or how to address these comments because clients were never *directly* asking the questions I was afraid to answer, and I was happy to collude with their indirectness. Mormonism was in the air but never deliberately talked about in the context of our relationship. I wonder now whether I was accurately picking up on clients' projections (that I assumed were all negative) or if my psychic wounds were leading me to be hypervigilant to possible rejection. As with many seeming dichotomies, I'm sure there is truth in both. It's a tenacious struggle to hold all the possible projections while not allowing my countertransference to take up too much space. While anxiety was pervasive, shame rooted itself the deepest—shame for possibly being judged and rejected by clients, and shame for causing clients to doubt my ability to be with and understand them. Both possibilities felt like failure.

Some clients were more direct, and quite brave in giving voice to their projections and fears. During a now-memorable session, a queer woman whom I had been seeing for over a year cautiously asked me about my degrees and why I decided to go to BYU, expressing that all she really knew about church members came from the musical *The Book of Mormon*, and that "they don't like gay people." My heart winced thinking how long she'd carried the weight of that worry, wondering if her therapist secretly despised a fundamental part of her identity.

My response to her was one of the first times I more directly addressed a client's comments on the topic. I shared that I went to BYU because I was raised LDS, that my current relationship with the church was more complicated and nuanced, and that I disagreed with the church's stance on LGBTQ issues. We then processed her anxieties that led to asking the question and her reaction to my response. Reflecting on the moment, this wasn't simply the first time I was more honest with a client; it was the first time I was more honest with myself. These thoughts had been brewing for some time, but I had never spoken them aloud before. My dissent left me feeling uneasy and enlivened—uneasy because I feared abandoning my faith's admonition to not be "of the world," and enlivened because I was stepping into a truer version of myself.

My sensibility as a therapist and relationship to my faith continue to transform. Postgraduate education and personal therapy opened up a world of dynamic and relational approaches that somehow feel both new and comfortably familiar. These new ways of being helped me acknowledge that some projections were in fact clients correctly sensing my feelings, beliefs, and assumptions that I had not fully owned myself. Unexpectedly, deconstructing my faith has made me more grounded in addressing this part of my identity and history with clients, and more patient with myself when I occasionally fumble the response. Many influences inform my evolving spirituality—connecting with open-minded friends and therapists, endless hours consuming media by spiritual thought leaders, and deliberately spending more time with the words of wise women. A newly awakened feminism feels equally vitalizing and painful. Internalized misogyny ran so deep, I didn't even know it was there; but once I did, I thought the weight of it would crush me. In many ways, this faith journey burdens my mind with more existential aches and pains than I care for; but if anything is worth the struggle for me, it's the task of exploring where meaning and purpose reside.

Aware of my ongoing professional and spiritual journey, a colleague recently expressed curiosity about why I had previously decided to display my diplomas in the first place—if I was so burdened with anxiety, why not just tuck them away? Until that moment, it had never occurred to me that a choice existed. I wonder if a part of me, in spite of my anxiety and shame, wanted to out myself, to start the work of confronting this nuanced part of my identity. Because I now work remotely, my degrees have become nomadic—moving from my office wall to a couple of months in the trunk of my car and now leaning against a bookshelf on my bedroom floor. Their journey parallels that of my faith, where final destinations are uncertain. ■

Nancy Prendergast
nanpren@gmail.com

The Accidental Activist

"Neville, is it true you are a Democrat?" I demanded when Neville answered her phone that day in 2018. Neville hesitated and then whispered, "Yes, Nancy … but don't tell anyone."

Two years had passed since the morning of November 12, 2016, when I awoke to learn that Hillary Clinton had lost the election. I had never imagined that Donald J. Trump, he of the golden toilet in Trump Tower, would become president. My disbelief turned to despair when my husband and I went to a party in our neighborhood of Sherwood Forest that weekend and found our friends of more than thirty years jubilantly celebrating their candidate's election. Until that moment, we had no idea that our entire social group was comprised of Trump supporters.

After hearing about the first post-Trump Women's March planned for the day after his inauguration, I dusted off my 1960s Vietnam War protest credentials and organized a group of our "Florida friends" to march together at our winter home in Sarasota, Florida. In the many decades since my last college protest, I'd attended law school, married, practiced law, raised four children, and led a hectic life in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Along the way, we purchased a cottage in Sherwood Forest on the outskirts of Annapolis and summered there for more than thirty years. We never realized that our tiny enclave of 341 homes was a Republican stronghold.

I grew up in the blue state of Rhode Island, where my father was active in local Democratic politics. I voted mostly for Democrats but registered as an Independent. While I never missed voting in a presidential election, I didn't keep up with local or state politics. I simply had no time.

I hoped our Sherwood Forest friends would come to their senses when they saw how woefully unprepared Trump was to govern. When he banned Muslims from entering our country. When he separated families at the border and locked children in cages. But no matter what outrageous action Trump and the Republicans took, our friends reacted positively. When they realized we didn't share their enthusiasm, they stopped talking politics with us.

In the fall of 2018, I snapped. By then, we had sold our home in Chevy Chase, rebuilt our Sherwood cottage into our retirement dream home, and were living there full time. I felt so isolated. When my husband arrived home from work, I proposed to him that we find a place to rent in "blue" downtown Annapolis to wait out Trump's term.

The next day, I took my usual walk to our small post office, one that Trump was trying to eliminate. I ran into my friend Libby. Libby was the one and only Democrat I knew who lived in Sherwood.

"Libby, how are you standing it here? Gus and I are thinking to rent a place in Annapolis. We can't talk to anyone at parties here anymore." Libby turned to me with raised eyebrows as she fussed with the antiquated post office box lock. "Nancy, you don't have to move out! There are other Democrats here to talk to. Neville is a Democrat."

"Neville? You must be kidding! Her husband likes conspiracy theories and all her siblings voted for Trump."

"But she is a Democrat, Nancy."

After I recovered from my shock and returned home, I called Neville. "Neville, Gus and I are ready to move out. We've had it with all the Trump lovers here."

"Nancy, no! Don't do that. Listen, I have an idea. Let's have a party and invite all the women we think are Democrats or who hate Trump as much as we do."

And so we did. We made a list of twenty-five friends and invited them to join us in ranting about Trump on the night of November 6, 2018. The invitation had three options for reply: *Yes, I'll be there! No, I can't make it that night, but keep me on this list*. Or *Please take me off this list*.

Two friends wanted to be taken off the list, so I prepared to receive twenty-three Sherwood women that night. Instead, thirty-seven gals walked in. There was much joy and relief expressed around my kitchen island as neighbors discovered they were not alone. Two sisters-in-law were surprised to see each other because their husbands were diehard Republicans.

The group quickly decided they wanted to gather regularly, and we decided to meet every month or two to discuss current events. The first topic we decided to discuss was immigration, and we chose a future date. Many attending were registered Republicans or Independents, but we were unified in our views about Trump, so we christened our group Like Minded Women. Word spread and our second meeting attracted about fifty women, a few from outside of Sherwood Forest.

With time, our mission has expanded to supporting and promoting progressive female candidates for local, state, and federal office. More and more women have continued to become members and we now count many men as members as well.

The men and women who marched with me in Sarasota for the years of the Trump administration also asked to become Like Minded Women even though they come from all over the country. They want to receive the newsletter I write to highlight some of the more outrageous injustices that are underreported by the corporate media. Since Biden took office, I have highlighted his many accomplishments that have also been routinely overlooked. And now we are celebrating the nomination of Kamala Harris for the presidency.

Neville resigned when Biden won the election, but the group has continued on.

During the run-up to the 2022 midterm elections, we organized our local members to meet for postcarding nights, which proved to be a simple but effective way to get out the vote for mostly minority female candidates in critical states like Virginia and Florida. Through the newsletter, I routinely alert our members to actions they can take to help other important races around the country, like donating money, texting, and calling voters. We are currently canvassing for a local senatorial candidate and are organizing a canvassing weekend in Pennsylvania for the fall.

In the past six years, I've learned how vital grassroots organizations like ours are to protecting and upholding our democracy. Candidates appreciate our donations and especially our showing up at rallies and canvassing events. They ask to come and speak to us.

At a party celebrating our fiftieth wedding anniversary last summer, our fourteen-year-old grandson toasted me as an activist. His words surprised me and made me realize that my political work is of value within my family, too. I am offering our ten grandchildren an example of turning outrage into action. With Like Minded Women, we don't agonize, we organize.

I'm finally grateful to Trump for something: for making me the activist I've become. ■

Ali Asadollahi
asadollahi1380@gmail.com

Six Short Poems on the Iran-Iraq War

1

War is over.

To water burned trees
a fireman
hurries.

2

HAVE YOU SEEN THEM?
LAST SEEN AT THE BATTLEFRONT
ON A LITTLE LAND MINE

a poster
on the wall
with a picture of your feet
-still
no sign of them
at all-

3

Martyrs are alive, mother said.
That means
you're not dead.

If so, how
the river fishes
have mangled your flesh?

I'll be there one day
with a massive seine net:
collecting your pieces,
solving you
my jigsaw puzzles.

4

Sometimes you come, sometimes your name does.
Sometimes you stay, sometimes your name does.

Now
in this vast minefield
you, choosing:
Unidentified or
Missing?

5

No alert
No gun aiming
No broken sound barrier

Peacefully white
white
white

If the fog
would have eased the calm;
If the clouds
would have come down
to cease fire.

6

Me,
a rotten sofa
in the rain.
You,
an outlying soldier
with a bullet
in the flank.

How late *we found each other.*

ROOM100

ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action is launching a new initiative called ROOM100 in time for *ROOM* 2.25. We hope to engage 100 people as stakeholders in *ROOM*'s future by encouraging contributions over the next two years.

We are more committed than ever to ensuring *ROOM*'s sustainability, but we need your help.

ROOM opens our hearts to the universal relevance of individual voices while orienting our awareness towards the necessity of community.

If you would like to learn more about this new initiative, please email us anytime at ROOM100@analytic-room.com.

We'll be sharing more information in early 2025.

DONATE

Give Voice to Hope with *ROOM*

Magazine

Our award-winning magazine—available online, digitally, and in print—features essays, memoirs, art, and poetry from around the globe. Breaking new ground three times a year, *ROOM* applies a psychoanalytic lens to today's most complex problems while exploring the space between diverse personal, political, and cultural realities.

Accompanying roundtables bring the work published in *ROOM* to life, allowing our readers to engage with our writers in a shared community space.

Voices from *ROOM* Podcast

This year, we are excited to celebrate two years and 32 episodes of our podcast! With your support, we continue to engage in personal and provocative conversations with mental health professionals, writers, poets, artists, and activists about the complex problems of our world.

Timely Programming

This year's highlights:

• "Letter to the United Nations" by Shegofa Shahbaz, a young Afghan woman. Her powerful call against the Taliban was read at the United Nations. We supported Shahbaz as she delivered a keynote address on International Women's Day.

• A live dialogue between Eyal Rozmarin, an Israeli analyst, and Karim Dajani, a Palestinian analyst, at the Psychology & the Other Conference in July 2024. We produced a video of this conversation, titled "Speaking of Home: An Intimate Exchange on Israel-Palestine," which is now available worldwide.

CLICK HERE, SCAN THE QR CODE, OR VISIT ANALYTIC-ROOM.COM/DONATE TO GIVE NOW!

No amount is too small; everything is appreciated and needed.

room 10.24
ROUND TABLE

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2024 ■ 12 PM EST

LIVE VIA ZOOM

Join three of the writers from this issue as we take the opportunity to deepen the conversation together.

Sara Taber: *We are the Light*

Stefania Baresic: *Portrait of my Grandfather in Uniform*

Shifa Haq: *Bare Life*

To RSVP, click here, visit our website, or scan the QR code.

Roundtable Organizing Committee
Elizabeth Cutter Evert
Richard Grose

room
OPEN CALL

"Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. It transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons."
— Vaclav Havel

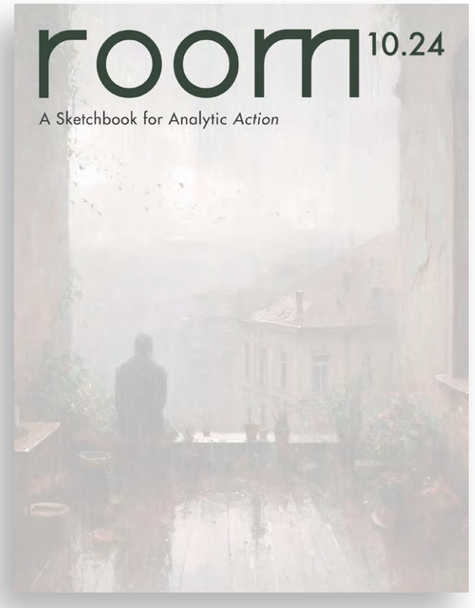
ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action* exists at the intersection of the personal, political, and cultural and brings a psychoanalytic lens onto today's world.

We welcome:
- **Essays**
- **Poems**
- **Creative Writing**
- **Community Projects**
- **Books for Review**
- **Letters to *ROOM***

Submissions for *ROOM* 2.25 are being accepted through January 5, 2025. We hope to hear from you.

For more information and to submit your work, visit analytic-room.com/submit.

Scan the QR code or visit analytic-room.com/issues to read back issues of *ROOM*.



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On this podcast, writers, poets, activists, artists, and analysts who have contributed to *ROOM* converse about their work and the complex problems our world faces.

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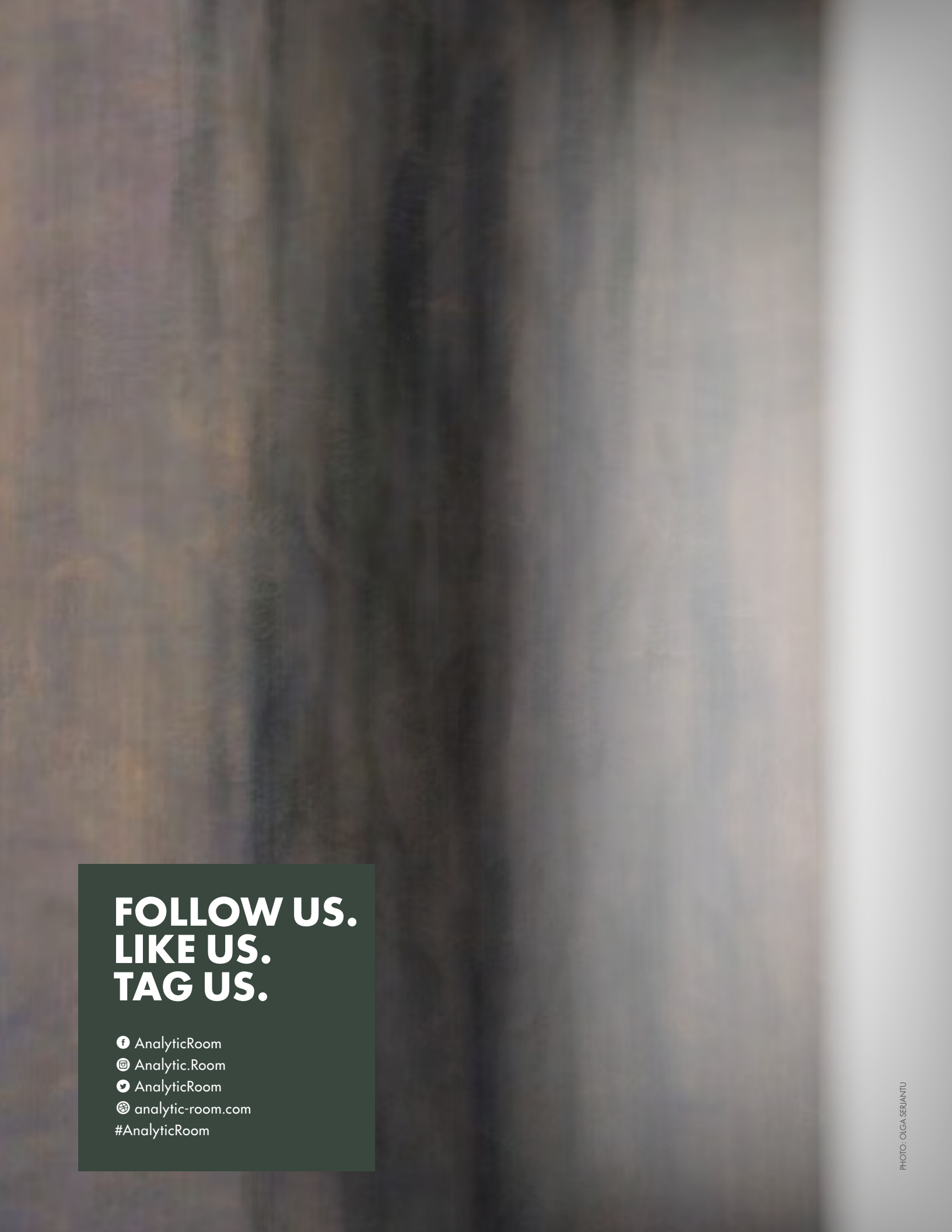

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