Trauma and resistance: 'hang time' and other innovative responses to oppression, violence and suffering

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This article presents alternative ways to respond to events understood as 'traumatic' in most psychological contexts. It questions the medicalisation and individualisation of persons' resistance against harms, especially violence and structural oppressions, as criteria of mental illness and trauma. I present activist-informed approaches to suffering and oppression that are centred on witnessing acts of resistance. This work comes from my ethical stance for justice-doing and responding to colonisation with accountability as a white settler practitioner. Witnessing requires that we situate personal suffering in its sociopolitical context and resist the individualisation and medicalisation of suffering. Activist practices of witnessing include the duty of the witness to work to change the social contexts of oppression, addressing power both personally and structurally, and working towards co-creating a just society.

Practitioner points
- Resistance to suffering and oppression is always present as persons always act to guard their dignity and move towards safety
- Justice-doing and a decolonising stance for the work is required to resist psychology's neutrality and objectivity that obscure contexts of structural oppression
- A witnessing stance from direct action activism is useful in making space for resistance
- The practitioner's responsibility is to move beyond witnessing to create social change and address contexts of injustice and limited life choices that are the frame for suffering

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This article presents activist-informed ways of responding to suffering in persons who have been oppressed and harmed. This approach centres on witnessing their prudent and creative acts of resistance (Reynolds *et al.*, 2014; Reynolds, 2010). A witnessing approach requires that we situate personal suffering in its sociopolitical context and resist the individualisation and medicalisation of suffering. Activist practices

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of witnessing are enacted through an ethical stance for justice-doing, which includes the duty of the witness to work to change the social contexts of oppression, and engage a true reckoning with power (Reynolds and polanco, 2012).

To foreground the practice of witnessing acts of resistance (as opposed to assessing, diagnosing, and treating trauma symptomology), I share a compilation of stories from working with youth who have given me permission to share their experiences. The stories from practice shared below contain threads from various young people's stories; I have woven these threads together in order to structure safety for youth who are indeed co-creators of this work, and to make the practice clearer. This requires holding a tension between acknowledging youth wisdom and necessarily protecting identifying details.

Decolonising practice and justice-doing

As an activist and therapist, I work to bridge the worlds of social justice activism with community work (Reynolds, 2019; Reynolds and Hammoud-Beckett, 2018). My people are Irish, Newfoundland, and English folk, and I am a white settler with heterosexual and cisgender privilege. I am still immersed in the ongoing work of unsettling myself as a white settler (Regan, 2010), despite my commitment to be decolonising in all of my paid and unpaid work.

Decolonising practice is not a metaphor (Tuck and Yang, 2012); it means commitments to Indigenous governance and land return. In all my activism, community work, and organising, I aim to be directed by Indigenous people (Manuel and Derrickson, 2015). As a settler I have set intentions to stay implicated in the ongoing catastrophes (Kouri and Skott-Myers, 2016) of colonisation and genocide (Brave Heart and DeBruyn, 1998). I am informed by Metis trauma counsellor/researcher/ activist Natalie Clark (2016) who writes of trauma as the 'new colonial frontier'. As an adjunct professor and therapeutic supervisor, I resist interpreting Indigenous resistance to ongoing colonisation and state violence as a symptom of trauma, a therapeutic act of harm that response based practitioners Nick Todd and Allan Wade (1994) name with the neologism 'psycolonization'. In *The wretched of the earth* (1963) Frantz Fanon wrote specifically of the psychopathology of colonisation directly related to France's use of political terrorism and widespread torture to supress the Algerian struggle for independence. Fanon proposes that psychology as a euro-centric colonising force is used to pathologise the colonised, but that we should centre our inquiry on the mental unwellness of the

coloniser. Fanon's teachings were absent from all twenty-seven years of my education, and I am confident that erasure was connected to white supremacy, anti-black racism in the academy, and to silencing diverse voices of dissent. Here I am informed by black American therapist Makungu Akinyela (2002, 2014) and Travis Heath (2018) and their work to decolonise from a black, anti-colonial perspective addressing the soul wound (Duran, 2006) of slavery (Hardy, 2017b). As a white settler therapist, I am inextricably related to the project of psychology that systematically psycolonises Indigenous people; I cannot distance myself from these practices, but must continue to resist them in practice and theorising.

This practice also requires justice-doing. Justice-doing goes beyond the scope of anti-oppressive practice, which aims to not replicate oppression, but entails actually being just and ethical with people, which requires engaging the activist project to transform the social contexts in which suffering and oppression occur, and to do this in ways led by persons and with accountability to their communities. One reflexive question I continually puzzle with is: 'How am I attending to power in this moment, in this interaction, with this person?'

This work is an anti-perfection project in part because we have not delivered on a just society. The practice of engaging in a purposefully messy and imperfect process (Reynolds, 2014) is informed by queer theory (Butler, 1990), critical trans theory (Spade, 2011), and anti-authoritarian social justice activism (Buechler, 2005; Chomsky, 2005; Shantz, 2011), where we aim to respond immediately to all oppressive and abusive acts. It requires that we take overt positions for justice-doing, defy neutrality, and have the moral courage to face up to and repair the consequences of imperfect actions.

As scholars and cultures of resistance teach, we must continually and fluidly attend to the intersections of domains of identity connected to both power and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1995). This practice is informed by women of colour feminism (Smith, 2006), in particular black feminists such as bell hooks (1984), and Patricia Hill Collins (1998). Ideas of diversity and inclusion, although useful, are also limiting and are being problematised and transformed by communities of resistance and by activists with marginalised voices (Ahmed, 2012). The structural inequities that promote suffering demand complex collective responses.

Trauma: psychology language that obscures more than it reveals

Trauma, as conceptualised and defined by the mainstream field of psychology, is a medicalised term that obscures violence and human

suffering (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1995; Summerfield, 2001, 2004). The language of psychology centres on descriptions of individuals' brokenness which hides the structural violence that promotes suffering. Legislative poverty, ableism, developer-created homelessness, ongoing colonial violence, racism, anti-black racism (Hardy, 2017a), white supremacy, the prison industrial complex (Maynard, 2017), cis-normativity, heteronormativity, and rape culture – specifically, the structural state violence that fosters the murder and disappearance of Indigenous women that is tied to the rape of the earth through resource extraction and enacting ongoing colonisation (Hunt, 2016) – all of these forms of structural violence are excluded from and concealed by psychological conceptualisations of trauma. A complex analysis helps us resist the psychological project, which reduces political and structural violence to personal deficiency (de Finney *et al.*, 2018a): the perfect storm of victim-blaming.

Here I am accompanied by many scholar-practitioners who have offered well-considered critiques of the language of trauma (Strong and Busch, 2013; Sutherland *et al.*, 2016; Allan Wade, personal communication). Specifically, how it locates our interest as workers in symptoms and diagnoses that are personalised, individuated, and constructed as the responsibility of the person, as if their personal strengths or resiliency are the issue, and as if the material world of power and oppression can be mitigated by neutrality and objectivity.

Persons share complex stories and experiences from their lives, in which there is suffering, hardship, resistance, and responses that are insightful and intelligent. Practitioners too often side with *psychocentrism* (Defehr, 2016), reducing this complexity to simplicity, redefining people's complex responses and acts of resistance to fit narrowly defined categories of trauma criteria and symptomology. This moves the focus from a person's autonomous responses and unique acts of resistance to professional assessment and psychological templates of mental wellness. Experiences defined as trauma are often better understood as exploitation and oppression rooted in the political inequities of our unjust societies (Reynolds *et al.*, 2014; Richardson and Reynolds, 2014). Persons' responses to harm and abuses of power are often better understood as acts of resistance.

Psychology has long been curious about parenting as the site of harm, focused on abusive or neglectful families, and actively constructs those families as the source of mental unwellness. People with childhoods characterised by abuse and neglect are construed as lacking parents who are as benevolent and competent as those who do not experience these harms: but what they lack is justice. Poverty – which is legislated

and predictable in capitalist neo-liberal societies – causes harms to families by manufacturing precarious lives and limiting life choices such as employment, housing, and education. This is neglect. Colonisation, ableism, transphobia, racism, femicide, misogyny, and anti-black racism are abusive. This is not a matter of individual personal resiliency, but of structural oppression. Conceptualisations of personal dysfunction and trauma not only obscure more than they reveal, but actively contribute to blaming individuals and families for their own suffering (Coates, Bonnah and Richardson, 2019).

'The connective power of politicizing trauma'

Indigenous Two Spirit therapist Riel Dupuis-Rossi, who identifies as Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), Algonquin and Italian, writes of 'the connective power of politicizing trauma' (Dupuis-Rossi and Reynolds, 2018, p. 305). Dupuis-Rossi works alongside other Indigenous people in resisting the colonial and institutional state violence that is most often reinscribed as trauma or inter-generational trauma:

> *Trauma is understood politically … and the responsibility for it is handed back to its rightful source, the Settler government and other historical and contemporary colonial forces. […] Politicizing trauma creates an opening that allows the client to create a new relationship to her suffering (Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008). Kluane understands her experiences as historical, political, social, and specific to a colonial agenda, as opposed to being experiences that reflect her worthlessness, unloveableness, rejection, and abandonment. Kluane realizes that it is not because she is unworthy or unlovable that she has existed in a perpetual state of deprivation and pain; rather, she has been subjected to a genocidal political agenda that is dehumanizing. With the help of traditional wisdom and teachings, she is able to see herself as having been a child who was deserving of love, care, and protection. The deprivation is connected to an external context, the foster home and colonialism, as opposed to being understood as a result of personal deficits. (Dupuis-Rossi and Reynolds, p. 305)*

Politicising trauma is always useful, as all contexts exist within relationships of interpersonal and structural power. I am, however, quoting Dupuis-Rossi extensively here as these words provoke a required discomfort for me and my fellow settler and non-Indigenous practitioners who might otherwise *settle* ourselves into identities as 'the good guys' in struggles against the trauma industry, which indeed sustains our privileges as settler-practitioners, as we are inextricably connected to psychology as a colonial force.

A witnessing stance

I describe my stance as witnessing with an aim to bridge the worlds of activism and therapy. There is a rich theory of therapeutic practices oriented around witnessing, specifically in the narrative and constructivist traditions (Myerhoff, 1982; Weingarten, 2000; White, 2002), as well as testimony work by Akinyela (2002, 2014). Of particular interest and relevance is the work of Indigenous women such as Cathy Richardson (2012), who identifies as Metis and Cree, and Barbara Wingard (2001), who is Aboriginal from Ghana people; their witnessing work emerges from their cultural locations as Indigenous women. My approach is informed by decades of fellowship in social movements and activist practices of witnessing, which hold governments and other bodies to account for abuses of power. These abuses include executions, torture, and other violent strategies that silence dissent, and terrorise populations into submission. The presence of an international activist community is a profound act of faith in the power of witnessing (Amnesty International, 2000; Reynolds, 2010).

Witnessing also serves to resist the individualisation and isolation of persons who have survived violence. El Salvadoran Liberation psychologist and Jesuit priest, Martín-Baró (1990, 1994), worked to bring Liberation Theology to psychology, teaching that in order for psychology to be liberating it must first be liberated. In 1989 a Salvadoran death squad, which was American trained, executed him, alongside his Jesuit brothers, a homemaker, and her daughter. Martín-Baró teaches that political violence is best understood from a perspective that is both psychological and sociopolitical. This means that the path to liberation lies not in the individual psyche of the victim, but within social relations. The meanings given to the acts of political and state terror are social, not individual.

State oppression, such as 'residential schools', legislated poverty, and developer-designed homelessness, dismembers, disconnects, and removes people from their sites of belonging. In resistance to this dislocation, witnessing work is situated within networked communities. Witnessing engages an ethic of belonging that reconnects, paying particular attention to cultural meanings and practices that *belong* persons in community. I believe, along with many others across time, that culture is a site of healing (de Finney *et al.*, 2018b; Hardy, 2017a; Richardson and Wade, 2008), and that justice-doing can promote healing.

A commitment to witnessing in activist cultures includes the duty of the witness to move beyond hearing individual pain to collective

accountability to take actions against injustices. Witnessing exists in relationships of solidarity, meaning shared ethics across points of connection, and it requires an overt position for justice-doing, which requires the witness to respond by taking actions to change the conditions that support and promote abuses of power with action.

Acts of resistance

As an activist, it has never felt useful, accountable or respectful to question persons who have experienced torture about their humiliation and harm. It has always been useful to talk of how they managed to survive, to stay human in situations outside of human understanding – situations that are perpetrated by government agents acting with impunity to supress dissent with political terrorism. These teaching led me to seek stories of resistance to suffering, instead of psychologising and medicalising their experiences of torture and interpreting their acts of resistance as criteria for mental illness and trauma. My understandings of resistance owe much to asylum seekers and refugees who have survived torture and political violence whom I have worked alongside over the past three decades, and, particularly, Indigenous persons from Turtle Island who have survived and continue to resist the political violence of colonisation, genocide and assimilation.

Resistance refers to all of a person's or people's responses against abuses of power and oppression, and the many ways that they maintain their dignity and move towards justice. Allan Wade's article, 'Small acts of living: every day resistance to violence and other forms of oppression' (1997), provides a comprehensive analysis of working with resistance in this way. Wade took the title for his article from sociologist Erving Goffman (1961), who wrote in *Asylums* about people's resistance to being held in 'total institutions' (p. 181), such as psychiatric institutes and prisons, where power is overt and where the holders of power dictate most behaviour. Goffman witnessed people's responses to these institutions and their nuanced and small forms of resistance, such as sticking out their tongue, walking slowly, and pretending to be unintelligent. Goffman's ideas are important because they challenge what usually gets attended to as resistance, which is socially constructed as fighting back and speaking up. Instead he amplified these 'small acts of living' to describe the nuanced and multiple ways people resist violence and humiliation and work to restore their dignity.

Overt acts of resistance against oppression are the least common forms of resistance, as the adverse consequences of such resistance can be extreme (Scott, 1985). Often, people who are subjected to abuses of power cannot safely and openly protest abuse. People fight back against oppression in multiple ways, but not always in ways that are easily noticed or understood as resistance (Richardson and Wade, 2008).

The following are the understandings of resistance that scaffold my work with people suffering from and struggling against oppression:

1. Wherever there is oppression and abuses of power there is always resistance;
2. Resistance ought not to be judged by its ability to stop oppression; rather,
3. Resistance is important for its ability to maintain a person's relationship with humanity, especially in situations outside of human understanding.

We witness resistance, not because it stops the abuses of power, but because attending to resistance amplifies the person's sense of autonomy and adds grip to the fingerhold they have on their dignity (Richardson and Wade, 2010). As practitioners, we serve as witnesses to the person's resistance despite the success or failure of the struggle, as resistance helps people stay connected to humanity: their own, and the wider sense.

Acts of resistance are most often not able to stop oppression. It is important not to fetishise or romanticise resistance, as our collective purpose is to promote possible lives of justice, not to have rich practices of resistance. Not all responses are acts as resistance, and acts can only be understood as resistance if the person performing them would describe them as such (Wade, 1997).

Making resistance visible: Troy's story of 'hang time'

As part of a Living Supervision practice, I participate in sessions alongside therapists I supervise (Reynolds and Larcombe, 2016). In my role as clinical supervisor at Peak House, a live-in substance-misuse programme for youth of all genders, I met with Troy, a white youth who lives under guardianship of the state. I was invited into the therapeutic relationship between the therapist, who I will call Julie, and the youth, who I will call Troy, because Troy's intake form – which included information from diverse and historic records – was complex and disconcerting. After seeking Troy's consent to participate with him and Julie,

I asked him if he was aware of the descriptions of him in the file, to which he mumbled affirmation. So I began to ask his understandings of these descriptions, specifically being an alcoholic, an addict, and having a diagnosis of Addictive Personality Disorder. He was also ascribed, through various professionalised assessments from different domains, an identity with a possible learning disorder, trauma, and dissociative symptomology. He was reported to be a liar, and someone who had made false allegations of sexual abuse. This was quite an overwhelming picture, which was why I was invited in. He said that it was pretty much what he was told, and wondered what I made of it, and, acknowledging that we had called in the 'big guns' (me as the supervisor), if he was 'too messed up to help'. I believe as practitioners we are ethically required to be the bringers of hope, and to build trust-worthy-ness; as such, I never lie to youth. I let Troy know why I had been called in, and I also let him know that I had hope for him based on youth who had taught me how to be useful over two decades at Peak House.

After structuring safety (Reynolds *et al.*, 2014; Richardson and Reynolds, 2014), and beginning to co-construct our relationship of respect and dignity, I asked Troy if he described himself as an addict, if he knew Addictive Personality Disorder is not a credible diagnosis, and what he thought of being called an alcoholic. He thought for a while and responded that he pretty much drank until he blacked out. Here I resisted the usual addiction counselling protocol, such as: What is your drug of choice? How much do you use? Who do you use with? How do you get your drugs? Instead I asked, 'What are you blacking out?' Troy named his 'foster father's attacks'.

This changes everything. Nowhere in the assessment are the foster father's attacks against Troy named. Instead we have a litany of explanations for all that is going on with Troy due to his mental health, addiction, and moral failings. Coates and Wade (2007) describe how language can be used to hide violence, obscure the perpetrator's responsibility, blame the victim, and hide the victim's resistance to the abuse and violence. The language in Troy's file accomplished all of these things: it concealed the violence that beset him, revoked responsibility from the abusers for the suffering at hand, perpetuated an undignified story about Troy's identity that blamed him for his own suffering, whilst erasing and subverting any possible descriptions of his agency and his resistance.

My intention as a therapist is to make the person's acts of resistance visible (not to interpret it as symptoms of trauma) so I asked Troy what

he did when this man attacked him. I resisted asking questions about the nature of the violence, specific degrading acts, or his feelings about this. He said he did not do much, and that there was no way he could fight a big strong angry man as the attacks started when he was a boy. I asked what he *did* do. There was profound silence and palpable connection. Troy moved towards me, and said that I was going to find this weird. I told him I've heard lots of ways that people fight back that are *way out there*, so he asks, if I know who Michael Jordan is, and if I know what 'hang time' is. After a lot of discussion about basketball, including tales of the two games I saw Jordan play, we get out of our chairs and compare our vertical leaps, his is impressive, mine, not so much. Troy tells me he has Michael Jordan's iconic 'hang time' poster, which is a life-sized portrayal of the perhaps-greatest-basketball-player-of-all-time flying through the air, palming the ball, poised to slam dunk. Following an animated, embodied discussion on both sides in which we discuss Jordan's 'hang time' – and how I, as a white 5'3" middle-aged woman even know this stuff – Troy describes his acts of resistance.

Troy has this almost life-size poster of Jordan flying through the air taking up the whole wall of his small basement room. When he hears his foster father's steps coming down the stairs, and anticipates an attack, Troy leaves his body and joins Michael Jordan in 'hang time'. He hangs, suspended in time, and experiences himself as out-of-time. Following the assault, when the man leaves his bedroom, and Troy judges it is safe enough for him to reappear, he slam dunks the basketball ball, actively ending the suspension of time, and simultaneously comes back into his body.

Troy's words evoke a profound and meaningful silence. The conversation was quiet and slow, and we were drawn closer together physically connected by the social poetics (Katz and Shotter, 2004) of all that was spoken between us in the spirited and embodied language that exists beyond words. We were inhabiting 'spaces of justice' (Lacey, 2005), co-created relationally by our points of connection, momentary solidarity, and intentions to centre and witness Troy's acts of resistance.

Troy's use of 'hang time' is a classic example of dissociative behaviour, and yet we resist this description as it hides his act of resistance and youth wisdom. I ask him how he thought of this. If he thought it might be a useful way of trying to be safe without physically fighting back? What it might mean to Michael Jordan that he is accompanying Troy in ways that have Troy feeling safer? What qualities this act of resistance speaks to? How this has been useful to Troy? Troy spoke of thinking it

might be 'thinking quick, being smart, moving fast, and finding someone safe to not be alone'.

We go on to have a conversation about how this is connected to a possible 'learning disability' and if Troy might not be going into 'hang time' in his science class because the teacher's voice scares him. I ask if he thinks the teacher will harm him like the foster father and he says no, and we strategise how to not use 'hang time' when it is not needed.

I asked about his relationship to drinking, specifically 'drinking 'til he blacks out'. He responds that now that he's thinking of 'hang time' and his creativity, intelligence, and connection to Jordan – maybe he does not need to black out. Troy thinks he will be more able to resist 'drinking 'til he blacks out' with help from the crew of Peak House.

While Troy and I focused on his many creative, insightful, inspiring and courageous acts of resistance, acknowledging that at times he 'sacrificed himself' for his siblings, it is important to hold these celebratory revelations in a tension alongside knowing that he was not even remotely able to keep himself safe from this man's attacks, or his family safe from state apprehension. Witnessing these acts of resistance was extremely useful to Troy though, as it honoured his ability to 'stay human' in an environment of fear, degradation and suffering.

In my work with Troy, I resisted an intrusive curiosity that could probe both what is wrong in Troy's mind and the mind of the man who perpetrated sexualised violence against him. Here, I am informed by Jewish scholar Hannah Arendt's work on the 'banality of evil' (1994), which invites us to resist centering our inquiry on people who perpetrate violence, especially our societal histories of constructing despotic rulers and actors as 'evil geniuses'. I am, however, committed to an ethical curiosity that seeks to bring forward Troy's acts of resistance to abuses of power so these acts can be witnessed as expressions of his youth wisdom.

Necessary assumptions: making sense and seeking safety

Witnessing resistance requires us to create relationships of dignity and respect across differences of privilege. It is the task of therapists to build a bridge across the differences of power and to meet the person where they are at. From this dignifying relationship, we invite persons to take responsibility where they have actual choices and access to power available to them, but not for the debilitating oppression, violence, and marginalisation they have experienced nor for the social context that

promotes and sustains their suffering. We collaborate with persons and assist them in making any changes they prefer to make to alter their relationship to suffering. As therapists enacting justice-doing, we are further required to use our specific social locations and access to power to work to change the social contexts in which suffering and structural violence occurs.

There are two necessary assumptions for witnessing resistance that I am unable to work without:

1. Persons' behaviour makes sense.
2. Persons are trying to be safe.

These assumptions invite me to resist diagnosing persons' behaviour and responses as symptoms of trauma, and to resist seeing persons as being unsafe and not trustworthy with their own lives.

Un-housing as an act of resistance

I work in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver – the poorest neighbourhood in Canada, off Indigenous reserve. In Vancouver, even a family of four with two adults working full time at minimum wage is unhoused, both because they cannot afford housing and because housing is unavailable. In the context of supervising a housing outreach worker, I was asked to assist the worker and their organisation with the following situation. A mother who is sole-parenting two children lives in a car. When she is offered the prospect of housing from an outreach worker who approaches her on the street as she exits the car in the morning with her children, she quietly and laconically complies with the interview. The worker returns over the next days for follow-up, with the mandatory housing assessment forms, to find the woman and family gone, the car moved. The meaning and assessment the worker gives to this is that the mother is pre-contemplative, not ready for change or housing, and possibly self-defeating. This assessment is upheld by the dominant parlance of the helping professions, which blames this purportedly inept mother for poverty, a lack of housing and the resulting neglect that is linked to abuses of structural power.

In a supervisory conversation we engaged in a critical analysis of justice-doing where we worked to meet this woman where she is at in the world; we looked for her behaviour to make sense and we tried to see her attempts to create safety for her family. When the worker was able to actually meet this woman in the material political world

she exists in, the worker was able to see their actions as a threat to the family, putting the children at risk of apprehension by the state. Again, the mother's behaviour is not evidence of faulty logic, multigenerational trauma, attachment disorder, or an inability to trust due to Borderline Personality Disorder (all of which were considered to make sense of her behaviour), but an astute intelligence and resistance to state apprehension. This was not a refusal to be housed, but an attempt to keep her family together. What was required of the worker was that they be accountable to their individual power and their access to structural institutionalised power, which they cannot abdicate. This requires collective accountability and solidarity with other workers as opposed to blaming other workers for systemic failures when we have, as a society, failed and refused to create more just and dignifying options and responses to suffering and oppression. The task, from there, became how to actually be a safe-enough resource for this woman to trust, and that began with acknowledging our power as workers, and being accountable for the reality that being housed can make families more vulnerable to surveillance and apprehension, as their whereabouts are known, and workers can and have been used to report on the family's behaviour. This is not a quick fix or a matter of semantics. When state-sponsored fostering receives more money than families would need to keep their own children, what is required is actually working to dismantle these systems, while simultaneously responding to suffering with the flawed and limited resources we have.

Instead of judging this woman for putting her children at risk, we look for how a woman's responses make sense and how women are trying to keep their children safe, especially in ways that are not easily recognisable, especially when we structurally hold mothers responsible for men's violent behaviour.

Conclusion

The psychological language of trauma obscures persons' acts of resistance, often reinterpreting resistance to criteria of mental illness. The language of trauma obscures violence and resistance to oppression by pathologising people, which blames them for their own suffering and limited life choices. Justice-doing and a stance for decolonisation help us address suffering that is inextricably linked to structural oppression and resists pathologising and individualising people's responses

to oppression. Witnessing as enacted in social justice movements creates a space for resistance to be revealed and requires that practitioners are responsible to work toward changing social structures of oppression in which suffering occurs. When we create relationships of respect and dignity, we truly meet people where they are at and their acts of resistance become visible, inviting a witnessing of their intelligence, strength, and courage. We do not diagnose people as mentally ill, and we do not accuse them of being self-sabotaging, but enter their world where their actions towards dignity and safety (Richardson and Wade, 2010) become visible to us.

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Dedication

For Cori Kelly (who identifies as Blackfoot/Irish) who I am humbled to name as a mentor, for her big-hearted presence, brilliant analysis, and whose moral courage to offer wise critique and invite fierce accountability is a gift to so many of us, and to me specifically as a white settler. Cori shoulders up immeasurable numbers of folks with her sprinted

presence that *belongs* so many of us in the power of her love and the warmth of her circle.

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