‘No one in the field of psychoanalysis is better than Nancy Caro Hollander at analyzing and explaining where the complexities of the psyche meet the power dynamics of the socio-political moment. Psychoanalyst, activist, historian, artist, and passionate, accessible writer, Hollander has secured her place among the many heroic psychoanalytic activists she introduces us to in *Uprooted Minds*. Hollander makes palpable the ways that political and economic elites in both the U.S. and in Latin America work to create hopelessness, identification with the aggressor, and an incapacity to think. And yet, she also inspires us with stories about psychoanalysts who continue to use their minds, to engage in social struggles, to resist the inequalities brought about by these many decades of neoliberal racial capitalism. In a stunning epilogue that takes the reader from the time of the book’s publication into the events of this very moment, Hollander surveys the many decolonizing movements currently fighting white supremacy and the capitalist extraction destroying our planet. She calls on us to choose, both as citizens and as psychoanalysts, how we are going to navigate fascist threats to democracy in the U.S. and elsewhere today, and the vicious backlash aimed at undermining the thinking and doing of progressive social movements.’

**Lynne Layton**, *author*, Toward a Social Psychoanalysis: Culture, Character and Normative Unconscious Processes

‘*Uprooted Minds* is as rare in psychoanalysis as it is a timely and politically organizing read in an increasingly fascist era. In this refreshingly accessible scholarly work, Hollander does us all a tremendous favor by beautifully distilling a leviathan task: detailing the nexus between contemporary and sociopolitically attuned psychoanalytic theory, radical political thought, and a piercingly clear social and class analysis. What she organizes for the reader feels central and life-sustaining for any work done by clinical practitioners, academics, and activists alike during increasingly repressive times in the United States and globally. Equal parts clinical, historical, as well as critically social and political, *Uprooted Minds* is a must read for anyone who craves a textured and containing framework to understand both the psychic and political roots of, as well as potential defense(s) against, oppressive structures such as classism, coloniality, imperialism, and capitalism.’

**Lara Sheehi**, *co-author*, Psychoanalysis Under Occupation: Practicing Resistance in Palestine (2022)
‘This subtle and penetrating inquiry weaves together the hideous record of state terror in the Americas and the terrible human cost of economic fundamentalism, and explores how social-psychological theory and direct engagement can ameliorate the traumas left in their wake and help overcome the institutional framework of repression and domination that bars the way to personal and social liberation.’


‘Nancy’s Caro Hollander’s book makes its welcome appearance just as Argentina has moved toward a much-needed social reparation by reopening the legal cases against the perpetrators of the Dirty War, who four decades ago disappeared, tortured, and assassinated tens of thousands of Argentine citizens. Intimately familiar with the history of dictatorship in the Southern Cone, Hollander alerts us to the dangerous road travelled by the United States since 9/11. Books like Hollander’s, which represent a socially engaged psychoanalysis, take their place alongside the courageous work of human rights activists that have made social justice possible. Uprooted Minds is a must-read for all who are concerned about the future of humanity.’

Julia Braun, Argentine psychoanalyst, mother of a disappeared son, and winner of the IPA’s Hayman Prize for published work pertaining to traumatized children and adults

‘In the tradition begun by Freud when he turned his psychoanalytic gaze toward the deeply conflicted human condition in Civilization and Its Discontents, Nancy Caro Hollander critically explores the discontents of our culture. She has produced a book that inserts itself in the crossroads between the individual and the social, the personal and the political, between neoliberalism and the progressive movements that challenge it, between democracy and authoritarianism, and between the September 11’s of the two Americas. With an artist’s sensibility and a depth that only personal experience can engender, she examines the impact of traumatic events that deeply affect people’s subjectivity and social experience. Uprooted Minds is a testimonial text that is not dispassionate and “objective,” but, on the contrary, a revelation of life lived, suffered, felt, and thought about: history incarnate. Hollander’s style is rigorous, transparent, solidly researched,
and colloquial, and with *Uprooted Minds* she delivers a social analysis that only a psychoanalyst could write.’

**Juan Carlos Volnovich**, Argentine psychoanalyst, psychological consultant to the Grandmothers of Plaza del Mayo, and honorary professor, University of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo

‘Drawing on personal experience and conversations with psychoanalysts who lived through and witnessed torture and murder in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay over the last four decades, Nancy Caro Hollander has written a book that will be an eye-opener and a consciousness-raiser for many of us about U.S.-sponsored oppression. For U.S. psychoanalysts in particular, there is much to be learned from the experience of Latin American analysts’ struggles to relieve individual suffering in the context of state-sponsored terror, while deploying psychoanalytic understanding in the service of creating a more humane society. Bringing lessons learned from this Latin American experience to an analysis of the social trauma represented by 9/11 and the consequent erosion of political and social democracy in this country, Hollander shows how a social psychoanalysis has emerged here as well. She has given an essential guide to those of us in North America who, using a socially situated psychoanalysis, want to help the individuals we work with in the context of post-9/11 political crises and to make a reparative contribution to the world we live in.’


‘*Uprooted Minds* inherits and develops psychoanalytical social psychology through a brilliant analysis of the historical roots of disturbances in the social matrices of several contemporary societies. Hollander weaves interviews with eminent analysts and social activists with her own personal recollections to create a book unlike any other I have read. Informative, challenging, disturbing, passionate, and good-humored, I think it will inspire a new generation of psychoanalytical investigations of social dreaming.’

**Christopher Bollas**

‘Nancy Caro Hollander has once again ventured into domains few psychoanalysts have dared to explore. As in her previous highly acclaimed *Love in a Time of Hate: Liberation Psychology in Latin America*, she
brilliantly exposes the intersection of psychology and politics. This time she examines the post-9/11 impact on political culture, covering a wide range of topics, from Argentina’s economic debacle to today’s challenges in American democracy. *Uprooted Minds* accomplishes the almost impossible task of establishing a long-overdue dialogue between social sciences and psychoanalysis. Hollander, an historian and psychoanalyst, has delivered an original work that illuminates readers from the North and the South. Her work empowers psychoanalysts, mental health practitioners, and social scientists to build bridges between practice and political activism.’

**Isaac Tylim, secretary, International Psychoanalytic Association Committee on the United Nations**

‘*Uprooted Minds* is an important and riveting critique of our times. At present, globalization is linking us in with violence as well as environmental and economic collapse. Integrating history, politics, memoir, and psychoanalysis, this book is an incisive study of this disintegration. Hollander illuminates our despair, but she also exhorts us towards hope, courage, and resistance. This is a passionate, humane, and scholarly work.’

**Sue Grand, author, The Hero in the Mirror**
In the second edition of *Uprooted Minds*, Hollander offers a unique social psychoanalytic exploration of our increasingly destabilized political environment, augmented by her research into the previously untold history of psychoanalytic engagement in the challenging social issues of our times.

Often akin to a political thriller, Hollander’s social psychoanalytic analysis of the devastating effects of group trauma is illuminated through testimonials by U.S. and South American psychoanalysts who have survived the vicissitudes of their countries’ authoritarian political regimes and destabilizing economic crises. Hollander encourages reflections about our experience as social/psychological subjects through her elaboration of the reciprocal impact of social power, hegemonic ideology, large group dynamics, and unconscious processes. Her epilogue, written a decade after the first edition of *Uprooted Minds*, extends its themes to the present period, arguing for a decolonial psychoanalysis that addresses coloniality and white supremacy as the latent forces responsible for our deepening political crises and environmental catastrophe. She shows how the progressive psychoanalytic activism she depicts in the book that was on the margins of the profession has in the last decade moved increasingly to the center of psychoanalytic theory and praxis.

This book will prove essential for those at work or interested in the fields of psychoanalysis, politics, economics, globalization and history.

**Nancy Caro Hollander** is a professor emerita of history and a research psychoanalyst in private practice in Oakland, CA. A faculty member of the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California, she is also an award-winning documentary filmmaker and former producer and host of “Just a Minute” for Pacifica Radio. Author of five books, she is published widely in national and international journals.
The Relational Perspectives Book Series (RPBS) publishes books that grow out of or contribute to the relational tradition in contemporary psychoanalysis. The term relational psychoanalysis was first used by Greenberg and Mitchell\(^1\) to bridge the traditions of interpersonal relations, as developed within interpersonal psychoanalysis and object relations, as developed within contemporary British theory. But, under the seminal work of the late Stephen A. Mitchell, the term relational psychoanalysis grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments. Various tributaries—interpersonal psychoanalysis, object relations theory, self psychology, empirical infancy research, feminism, queer theory, sociocultural studies and elements of contemporary Freudian and Kleinian thought—flow into this tradition, which understands relational configurations between self and others, both real and fantasied, as the primary subject of psychoanalytic investigation.

We refer to the relational tradition, rather than to a relational school, to highlight that we are identifying a trend, a tendency within contemporary psychoanalysis, not a more formally organized or coherent school or system of beliefs. Our use of the term relational signifies a dimension of theory and practice that has become salient across the wide spectrum of contemporary psychoanalysis. Now under the editorial supervision of
Adrienne Harris and Eyal Rozmarin, the Relational Perspectives Book Series originated in 1990 under the editorial eye of the late Stephen A. Mitchell. Mitchell was the most prolific and influential of the originators of the relational tradition. Committed to dialogue among psychoanalysts, he abhorred the authoritarianism that dictated adherence to a rigid set of beliefs or technical restrictions. He championed open discussion, comparative and integrative approaches, and promoted new voices across the generations. Mitchell was later joined by the late Lewis Aron, also a visionary and influential writer, teacher and leading thinker in relational psychoanalysis.

Included in the Relational Perspectives Book Series are authors and works that come from within the relational tradition, those that extend and develop that tradition, and works that critique relational approaches or compare and contrast them with alternative points of view. The series includes our most distinguished senior psychoanalysts, along with younger contributors who bring fresh vision. Our aim is to enable a deepening of relational thinking while reaching across disciplinary and social boundaries in order to foster an inclusive and international literature.

A full list of titles in this series is available at www.routledge.com/Relational-Perspectives-Book-Series/book-series/LEARPBS.

**Note**

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My profound gratitude goes to Mimi Langer, who will always be presente, and to my other Latin American psychoanalytic compañeros with whom I have shared and learned so much about the political psyche. I am, as well, grateful to and for Hedda Bolgar, whose insight and commitment to the importance of psychoanalytic perspectives on the social world and enduringly gracious energy have been inspirational. I am enormously appreciative of the network of progressive psychoanalytic friends and colleagues in the United States, especially members of Section 9 of the Division of Psychoanalysis (39) of the American Psychological Association and the members of the Los Angeles–based Uprooted Mind Committee, whose commitments to “psychoanalysis beyond the couch” in its various forms have been so important to me and to the writing of this book. A special note of acknowledgment to Blase and Theresa Bonpane of the Office of the Americas, with whom I have had a home for activism since the early 1980s on behalf of the Global Justice Movement’s principle that “another world is possible.” As well, I wish to recognize the significant work of my fellow members of Psychologists for Social Responsibility (http://psysr.org), psychologists, and other advocates for social change who apply psychological knowledge and expertise to promote peace, social justice, human rights, and sustainability. And as I indicate in the epilogue, I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the climate justice movement as a member of the San Francisco Bay Area’s 1000 Grandmothers for Future Generations (www.1000grandmothers.com), elder women committed to act on behalf of the key existential struggle of our time.

I am eternally appreciative to Stephen Portuges for our loving partnership, our mutual commitment to the development of a social psychoanalysis, and our active participation in struggles for redistributive justice. For
Susan Gutwill, I am deeply grateful, as always, for her steadfast intellectual and emotional sisterhood, which is always sustaining and has been so helpful during the writing of this book. And for my many friends and colleagues, especially Lynne Layton, Stephanie Solomon, Nina Thomas, Maureen Katz, Andrew Samuels, Lara Sheehi, and Marcia Black, I want to express my heartfelt thanks for many years of important discussions that helped to hone my own perspectives on the convergences of psychic and social reality.

Finally, I want to offer my warm thanks to Lew Aron, who believed in this project from the beginning and was unflaggingly supportive during its execution, and to the editorial staff at Routledge, including Kristopher Spring, Linda Leggio, Eleanor Reading, and Georgina Clutterbuck, who were most helpful every step of the way.
The second edition of Nancy Caro Hollander’s *Uprooted Minds* comes to us as a work both timeless and traveling through time. It has echoes of her seminal *Love in a Time of Hate: Liberation Psychology in Latin America (1997)*, though woven into a broader tapestry telling a story—theoretically as well as narratively—about psychoanalysis and social justice in Latin America and the United States. Its account of psychoanalysis in Latin America depicts Jewish emigres who fled fascism in Europe, like Marie “Mimi” Langer, and Latin American-born candidates and analysts, like Juan Carlos Volnovich, joining in solidarity to resist (often U.S.-backed) totalitarian regimes, military violence, and the racial, gender, and economic inequality that permeates our world. Hollander shows us—through vivid first-person accounts and exquisite documentation—how in resisting these forces, they articulated a psychoanalysis “from below,” a psychoanalysis “for the people” after an utterance of Freud (1918/1955). In essence, a psychoanalysis that theorizes the intersection of the personal and political, the psychic and the communal, and opens up space for a different narrative of what psychoanalysis *is, was, and can be*.

Hollander notes the lineage of progressive psychoanalysis going back to the first generation of psychoanalysts, predominantly Jewish men and women with left-leaning politics and activism (Danto, 2005). *Uprooted Minds* documents what I have called a tributary, a “root and route” (Gaztambide, 2019) connecting this original progressive spirit with its survival and continued elaboration in Latin America. This is a history that many of us trained in North America are usually not exposed to. As a Puerto Rican student and later clinical psychologist, I remember “meeting” Mimi and Juan Carlos in Hollander’s original text. The story of their original meeting stayed with me over the years, with Marie reassuring the younger...
Juan Carlos during their interview for psychoanalytic training that his leftist politics would not be an impediment to his professional advancement. Hollander paints a picture of two Latin American analysts connecting over politics and good humor. All that was missing to complete the scene was good café.

It was a pleasure returning to Hollander’s protagonists, heroes, and ancestors who inspired me and impressed upon me the fact that psychoanalysis belongs to us. That we, people of the Global South, have a heritage and a tradition in psychoanalysis that is ours. In this sense, Uprooted Minds functions akin to what Lillian Comas-Díaz (2020) calls a testimonio, a “witness story” or “first person’s account of an individual’s experiences with oppression, marginalization, and trauma” (p. 157). Comas-Diaz writes that testimonio “is a powerful tool to increase resilience and to promote post-traumatic growth” (p. 157), but not only for the individual testifying. Dar testimonio, to give testimony, allows the broader community to gain wisdom and strength that aids in our collective survival and growth, even amidst sociopolitical trauma.

This is the gift that Hollander gives us, to share the firsthand testimonios of her compañeras and compañeros navigating social trauma, the dynamics of “the bystander,” and how to understand the projections, counter-projections, and ideological fantasies that entrap victim and perpetrator. Uprooted Minds also doubles as an account of Freudo-Marxism, not as a theoretical proposition, but a lived clinical and political reality. Hollander’s vignettes, anecdotes, and first-person accounts of clinical work with survivors of torture, activists and revolutionaries, and even perpetrators of state terror paint a complex picture of how societal oppression dehumanizes all touched by it, grounded in an ethics that refuses neutrality as a clinical and political impossibility.

Hollander’s study begins in the U.S., and through her interlocutor, politically left psychoanalyst Hedda Bolgar, she offers a “witness story” that probes similar social psychoanalytic themes in this country. In the latter portion of the book, she brings the insights and wisdom of her Latin American protagonists “home,” embedding this story within the machinations of neoliberalism and its contradictions from the Bush and Obama years through our lurch rightward in the post-Trump era. Here the story, again, broadens. It is not simply about things that took place “over there” in Latin America. It is also about things that have and are taking place right here in the United States. From my point of view, Hollander here gives us a
narrative of our implication within what Cedric Robinson (2020) calls racial capitalism, a “colonial materiality” (Beshara, 2021), an implication that calls on us to bear an ethical responsibility to struggle for social justice and equality, at home as well as abroad. Drawing on psychoanalytic critical and decolonial theories and a deep analysis of history and political economy, Hollander documents how neoliberalism as a colonial materiality spread its tendrils throughout the Americas, mapping out a network of policies, politics, and ideologies that demarcates our fundamental relationality under the current global racial capitalist system.

Hollander draws attention to the fact that neoliberalism in the United States has been appropriated by both right-wing neoconservative ideologies and governments as well as post-Reagan liberal governments. She points to the Democratic Party’s break with New Deal politics, advancing policies that further entrenched wealth inequality while contributing to the racial inequality that undergirds the operation of U.S. capitalism. Hollander draws our attention to how we now face not only a right-wing, patriarchal, White nationalist defense of capitalism but also a liberal attempt to “rehabilitate” capitalism as such. As Slavoj Žižek (2004) once quipped, “capitalism with a human face” is a dystopian new superstructure of “cruel optimism” that demands “resilience” from all but especially marginalized people, offering to trade our suffering in exchange for a seat at the table, resulting in a performance of social justice that entraps our communities in a neoliberal nightmare.

It is against the backdrop of our rapidly shifting world that in the epilogue Hollander articulates not only a comparative psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on relational and Lacanian theories, but also a growing decolonial movement inspired by Black Martiniquan revolutionary psychiatrist Frantz Fanon—an ancestor to whom we should become disputatious heirs (cf. Said, 2003). Much as how Hollander traces the testimonios of Freudo-Marxist Latin American psychoanalysts, she reviews examples, first-person accounts, and scholarship representative of the growing decolonial psychoanalytic movement in the United States, while at the same time weaving the threads, theories, and clinical experiences she has amassed throughout the book to give us a unique synthesis and contribution to that very tradition. In a similar way to how Hollander (1997/2010) introduced us to a psychoanalytic liberation psychology in Latin America, so too she draws on testimonio across both continents to reintroduce us to decolonial psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework and a clinical-political praxis.
On a personal note, my gratitude to Hollander for introducing me to our ancestors deepens in her bringing those of us engaged in this work into a shared tapestry, bits and pieces of cloth and parchment she is collaboratively helping us sow together into a new and vibrant tradition. If we are to fight for our survival, psychoanalysis must become decolonial psychoanalysis, one that underscores our fundamental relatedness to one another in a world in dire need of repair.

Writing this foreword in my hometown of San Juan, Puerto Rico, currently struggling with multiple economic and ecological crises, colonialism, and venture capitalism, I found myself reflecting on Hollander’s report of the protest chant of the Argentinian people against those responsible for the 2001 economic crisis—“All of them should leave!”

From Buenos Aires to Chicago, Hawai’i to Puerto Rico, we are connected by a system prone to crisis invested in keeping us divided, masking how the ebb and flow of goods and capital, privilege and desire, pitting us against one another under the illusion of a zero-sum game of winners and losers (McGhee, 2022). But that same connection reminds us that we are not alone. There are more of us than there are of them. And as the Puerto Rican revolutionary leader Pedro Albizu Campos once said—“They are not bigger than us, we are just on our knees.” Whether in psyche or society, Hollander invites us to stand up, come together, and “get em out of here!”

Pa’lante Nancy, siempre.

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References


This is a book about paradoxes: How to courageously face the terrors of our era and to live with optimism and hope. It is a social psychoanalytic exploration of the tension between, on the one hand, our identifications with hegemonic values and social institutions, and on the other, our ability to develop a critical consciousness about the political and economic forces that are destabilizing our lives. In this troublesome era, the feminist assertion that “the personal is political” is incontrovertibly lived on a daily basis. By weaving together psychology, history, and memoir, this book’s narrative strives to illustrate how it is equally true that “the political is personal.”

Many of the familiar markers of predictability and continuity in our lives seem to have been uprooted. In our post–9/11 environment, we have been subject to the traumas of international terrorism, authoritarian governance, war, and economic meltdown. Our customary sense of relative security and stability associated with the privilege of living in the heart of the U.S. empire has been profoundly shaken. As we are forced to negotiate increasing anxieties about dramatic changes in our society, we live in an environment saturated with information about droughts, floods, pandemic viruses, crime, terrorism, hunger, and indebtedness, the loss of health care, jobs, retirement plans, and a sense of safety. Moreover, our daily personal struggles with work, family, friends, and community are punctuated by inescapable moments of awareness of the threats of global warming, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. We experience what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls “liquid fears” in our increasingly unsafe globalized world.

This book endeavors to make sense of the historical forces that have brought us to this critical juncture. It does so by analyzing the role played...
by the neoliberal economic paradigm and conservative political agenda that emerged in the United States and Latin America over the past five decades with devastating consequences for the majority of the hemisphere’s citizens. My historical account is informed by a psychoanalytic elaboration of how the sociosymbolic order is an important constituent of the psyche and how subjectivity is shaped by hegemonic ideology. I have woven into the theoretical material and historical narrative testimonies of U.S. and Latin American psychoanalysts who share their experiences and observations about living under authoritarian political conditions. I show how these progressive psychoanalysts engage in social activism on behalf of human rights and redistributive justice they believe to be the fundamental social matrix for collective psychological health. By illuminating themes related to the mutual effects of social power and ideology, large group dynamics and unconscious fantasies, affects and defenses, I hope to encourage reflections about our experience as social/psychological subjects.

The complex psychological and social sequelae of living in our post–9/11 culture of fear imposed by the neoconservative agenda has yet to be fully appreciated, as does the significance of the economic catastrophe that now haunts most citizens’ lives. Vexing questions remain as to the fundamental nature of the crisis of democracy in this country and its relationship to the neoliberal political/economic model that predated the Bush administration and threatens to sustain itself under the stewardship of Barack Obama and the Democratic Party. We do not yet know if the new administration represents enough of a fundamental departure from the policies of the past to effectively address the systemic sources of the growing social and psychological dislocation haunting this country. Our post–9/11 environment continues to be a traumatogenic one in which individual and group physical safety, social security, and symbolic capacities are being assaulted.

A social psychoanalysis can illuminate what it means when a person’s experience is traumatic and rendered unnamable and unspeakable. It can appreciate how the profound human need to attach to others extends to the larger society, which when it does not function to provide a holding environment leaves individuals and groups vulnerable to uncontainable anxieties that in turn affect the social world. Thus, from my perspective, taking account of the past and assessing the current direction of this country involve thinking about how psychology and politics intersect, how intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics converge with economic,
ideological, and political forces to reinforce or alter an inequitable social order. Because I was trained first as a Latin American historian and then as a psychoanalyst, I have learned to think about the intersection of psychic and social reality in the context of extreme political crisis. My analysis of the nature and impact of our post–9/11 authoritarian political culture and the challenges that we face in this country today have been informed by my experience during the last four decades of researching and writing about the more tumultuous conditions of dictatorship and revolution in Latin America.

In 1997, I published *Love in a Time of Hate: Liberation Psychology in Latin America*, in which I analyzed a number of themes related to state terror and social trauma. In part, the book was the product of my efforts to work through my own traumatic encounter with Latin American authoritarianism. I had lived in Argentina for some years prior to the Dirty War. During the transition to the 1976 military coup, the environment was already inundated with repressive state policies marked by right-wing death squads’ disappearance and murder of many Argentine citizens, including some of my close friends and colleagues. These losses only multiplied following the military seizure of state power. Thus the book was written from the perspective of both participant and witness/observer. I explored the subjective meanings of the politically repressive conditions provoked by the military dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay that endured from the 1970s through the 1980s. Although my research included interviews with individuals from many sectors of society who lived through the agonizing experience of state terror, I chose to elaborate the systemic roots of these authoritarian regimes and the psychology of perpetrators, bystanders, victims, and political activists through the real-life experiences of ten Argentine, Uruguayan, and Chilean psychoanalysts. Their desire to forge an integration of their progressive political concerns with their commitments to their psychoanalytic profession make them spokespersons for colleagues throughout the world who stand apart from a mainstream psychoanalysis that has all too often chosen to remain isolated from pressing social issues. A central figure in this drama is Austrian-born Argentine psychoanalyst Marie Langer, whose history prior to her immigration to Latin America in the late 1930s included training at Freud’s Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute and participation as a physician in an International Medical Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Langer was one of the six founders in 1942 of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association and
by the 1960s she became a prominent figure in the political struggles that linked mental health issues with the need for progressive social change.

Langer and the nine other protagonists in *Love in a Time of Hate* lived through their countries’ politically repressive conditions and found ways to engage in struggles for democracy and human rights, either from within their countries or as political refugees, often at great personal risk to themselves and their families. Their psychoanalytic and radical political perspectives shed light on the subjective meanings of collective social action. When I met her in 1983, Marie Langer was living in exile in Mexico City and cochairing a group of psychoanalysts who were helping the Sandinista Revolution construct Nicaragua’s first national free and psychoanalytically oriented mental health care system. She and other psychoanalysts also provided psychotherapy to survivors of torture and refugees from many Latin American military dictatorships. My own research with individuals who had survived horrendous abuses by the state and my experience with these psychoanalysts highlighted irrefutable convergences between psychic and social reality and demonstrated the importance of understanding the psychology of violent group conflict and the social trauma it engenders. Moreover, my collaboration with these Latin American psychoanalysts in the context of the more extreme social situation of their countries has informed my understanding of the authoritarian trends that have characterized the post–9/11 U.S. political culture designed by the neoconservatives, as well as the subjective meanings of the emergence of a progressive movement that has challenged their hegemony. The activism of my psychoanalytic colleagues in the Global South on behalf of social justice and economic equity has been an inspiration to my own participation during the past eight years with other psychoanalysts in this country engaged in projects whose principles reflect a socially responsible psychoanalysis.

In the past decade, a number of psychoanalysts in the United States have found their own journeys toward a psychoanalysis beyond the couch. *Uprooted Minds* tells this story through the myriad projects that have been developed in response to the neoliberal economic model and social strategy that has had deleterious psychological effects for millions of people. Progressive psychoanalysts in the United States have also been engaged in struggles to defend democracy from its assault by the neoconservative policies of the past eight years. This aspect of the history is framed by the testimony of Hedda Bolgar, a European-born, Los Angeles–based psychoanalyst whose personal history and commitment to a social psychoanalysis
is similar to that of our Latin American protagonists. Bolgar, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday, shares her psychoanalytic understanding of the psychological significance of the multiple social and political challenges facing us in this country. As young girls, Langer and Bolgar attended the same private girls’ school in Red Vienna, where their feminist and radical social consciousness took root. With the rise of the Nazis, both were forced to flee Europe, Langer to Argentina and Bolgar to the United States. We learn through these pages how each, Langer in the Global South and Bolgar in the heart of the U.S. empire, developed her own version of a socially committed psychoanalysis.

As we will see, the human suffering that was produced by Latin America’s military regimes has for years been represented by the signifier “September 11”—the day in 1973 of the infamous coup in Chile—which has stood for the military-imposed twin oppressions of political authoritarianism and neoliberal privatization and austerity-based economic fundamentalism. The constitutionally elected governments that succeeded state terror in Latin America from the 1980s on proved to be thoroughly corrupt: they became more benign administrators of a culture of impunity that sustained the unregulated free market economic model and protected the former perpetrators of state terror from prosecution for their crimes against humanity. Latin Americans lived through several decades of these cultures of impunity until the inherent contradictions became so intense that they produced leftist mass movements that demanded change. In the past decade, throughout the region, grassroots activism has brought to power progressive regimes that are challenging the hegemony of the U.S. and national elites, known as the Washington Consensus, in favor of progressive reforms of the institutional sources of the region’s condemnation of the majority of people to lives of poverty and powerlessness.

I believe that Latin America’s last half-century’s experience of state terror and its aftermath foreshadowed similar trends, although not so extreme and in a more condensed period of time that developed in this country during our post–9/11 political culture and economic priorities. The relationship between Latin American and U.S. experiences with authoritarianism is captured in the signifier of the date by which both are known. While Latin America’s September 11 has functioned as an icon signifying U.S.-supported-and-financed state terror throughout the hemisphere, our 9/11 was interpreted by the U.S. state as a symbol of our unprovoked victimization, and it was manipulated opportunistically by the neoconservative
movement for a domestic and foreign policy agenda that predated it. In this country, the state launched an authoritarian assault on democratic process, constitutional guarantees, checks and balances of the three branches of government, and citizens’ civil liberties. Domestic laws were undermined in the construction of a surveillance society. After 9/11 our government’s aggressive foreign policy of preemptive invasion was predicated on an unwillingness to acknowledge the long history of U.S. interventionism in the Global South as one cause of anti-American animosity. This failure produced a politics in which the “Axis of Evil” became a repository for the state’s denied and projected aggression that could then be attacked and destroyed through war and occupation in the name of keeping us safe. Under cover of 9/11, the neoconservatives also developed a corrupt form of crony capitalism through a bloated military budget and a deregulated financial structure, which has thrown this country into an unprecedented economic catastrophe that mirrors the Latin American economic debacle at the turn of the millennium. Such a profound crisis has added many voices to the progressive critique of this authoritarian era of U.S. history. Typical of a rising chorus denouncing the nature of U.S. politics during the Bush administration is international human rights lawyer Scott Horton, who has recently claimed that “We may not have realized it at the time, but in the period from late 2001 to January 19, 2009, this country was a dictatorship” (Stockwell, 2009).  

_Uprooted Minds_ is a book about psychoanalysis and the politics of terror in the Americas. In my elaboration of the themes indicated previously, I am always mindful of the complex interplay of psychological dynamics and social forces. The book begins in this country, and in Chapter 1, I elaborate a social psychoanalytic conceptualization of how the psyche is inserted in the larger social order and how intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics affect the social world. This perspective serves as the context for my analysis of how the convergence of ideology and psychological defenses framed the U.S. response to the shared traumatic significance of 9/11. The chapter then traces the psycho-political factors responsible for the drift toward authoritarianism and the evolution of a bystander population in the early years of the Bush administration. 

In Chapters 2 through 7, I retell the stories of our Latin American psychoanalytic colleagues as they traversed the terrible experience of state terror and engaged in movements that challenged the corrupt democratic regimes that replaced military dictatorships. We learn about how they
managed the demands of progressive political activism with their professional lives and how their psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives shed light on the subjective experience of living with the destructiveness of oppressive political and economic structures. I examine the Argentine economic meltdown in December 2001 brought on by the neoliberal free market paradigm and describe the revolutionary grassroots citizens’ responses, which included the collaboration of many psychoanalysts. The chapters’ additional themes, including the losses and challenges of migration experienced by political and economic refugees and the relationship between social activism and mental health, shed light on some of the most important contemporary issues facing people throughout the world.

These chapters provide a referent that serves to illuminate the nature of our own recent history with political authoritarianism and economic catastrophe in the heart of the U.S. empire. In Chapter 8 we turn our attention back to this country in order to further understand the psychosocial dynamics of our post–9/11 political culture. An elaboration of the historical roots of this culture’s high value on individualism serves as a context for my analysis of neoliberalism as an economic policy and social theory that came to be internalized as an aspect of normative subjectivity. I then elucidate the convergences between the neoliberal paradigm and the neoconservative agenda that have compromised this country’s democracy and economic stability. We see how psychoanalysts in this country have responded to social trauma by becoming engaged in projects that integrate their psychoanalytic expertise with their commitment to activism on behalf of social justice.

In Chapter 9, I interpret the growing concerns in civil society about the rightward drift of the Bush administration and explore the psychological and social significance of the oppositional movement that emerged to successfully challenge the neoconservative agenda and to mobilize support for the election of Barack Obama. We also revisit our Latin American protagonists, who share their perspectives on the significance of post–9/11 political and economic crises in the United States and their impact on their own progressive struggles to challenge the hegemony of the Washington Consensus. In Chapter 10, I assess the implications of the election of Barack Obama and show how psychoanalysis can shed light on the dynamic relationship between leaders and the groups they represent. I also explore the potential for altering the institutional and ideological sources of the U.S. and global economic meltdown in 2008. In this context, a series
of discourses are delineated that I argue contribute to a psychoanalytic conceptualization of the relationship between psychic and social reality.

In a related vein, I elaborate a social psychoanalysis that takes seriously the clinical as well as the theoretical significance of how psychic life bears the mark of the social order. I argue for the importance within the clinical experience of including rather than marginalizing the anxieties and fears stimulated by political realities, which inevitably manifest themselves in the transference/countertransference dynamic and relationship. Finally, I examine the important role that psychoanalysts can play in engaging in struggles for social justice and democracy upon which the very practice of our profession depends.

And finally, in the epilogue, written ten years after the publication of the first edition of *Uprooted Minds*, I assess the contemporary political and economic crises in this country that are extending and deepening the problematic patterns I diagnosed in the book. I examine the group psychology underlying the rise of an authoritarian mass movement whose racism, xenophobia, heteropatriarchy, and misogyny are being mobilized on behalf of an increasingly destructive neoliberal political and economic agenda. The epilogue reflects my commitment to a decolonial analysis of white supremacy as the foundation of U.S. social structures and ideologies responsible for the inequities that fuel contemporary social unrest. In this context I explore how a social psychoanalysis must embrace a decolonial perspective of the uprooting psychosocial forces that imperil the world in order to contribute to progressive struggles on behalf of social and environmental justice.

**Note**

1 Scott Horton is a New York attorney, specialist in human rights law, and contributor to *Harper’s Magazine.*
Chapter 1

Scared Stiff
Social Trauma and the Post–9/11 Political Culture

“I left Vienna on March 15, 1938, the very day Hitler himself entered the city as part of the official Anschluss. I remember that it was a beautiful, sunny, cool day, and a spontaneous popular celebration of the Führer’s arrival had erupted. The streets were packed with wildly cheering crowds waving Nazi flags. I knew I would be arrested and wouldn’t survive because I had published many anti-Nazi articles in magazines that had circulated in Paris and Amsterdam. Besides, because of what I had learned growing up in my highly politicized family and from my training at the University of Vienna, I was really clear about the horrors that lay in store for everyone under Nazi rule.” So begins Hedda Bolgar’s response to my question about how her experiences as a young woman living in Europe as it succumbed to fascism have influenced her reactions to the increasing threats to our democracy by the Bush administration’s “war on terror.”

It is a sunny day in July 2006, and Hedda, now 97 years old, is a psychoanalyst and social activist who still has a full-time practice. She is a training and supervising analyst at the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies, which she cofounded in the 1980s. Hedda’s comfortably elegant Brentwood home serves as a hospitable hub for many of the institute’s functions, and she hosts a salon on the first Wednesday of the month for colleagues to discuss a variety of topics ranging from clinical and theoretical psychoanalytic issues to the psychological implication of social problems. She and I are sitting in her earth-toned, informal living room, walls covered with original paintings and framed posters, many of which are visual representations of Hedda’s commitment to the significant political struggles of the last half century. Her gracious charm is reflected in the sumptuous gardens that surround the entranceway and the enticing fruits and pastries spread before us to energize our discussion.
She periodically utters playful side comments to her beloved cats as they wander in and out, lazily curious about what their doting owner is up to now. In this same room, along with eight other psychoanalytic colleagues, Hedda and I have met on a monthly basis over the past three years, organizing a series of conferences for mental health professionals and the community at large that feature psychoanalytic perspectives on the crucial social issues of our time. On this day, as I listen to Hedda recount the details of her life, I am reminded once again about her finely tuned memory, which is the envy of her “younger” colleagues in our fifties and sixties. Each of us has had the experience during one meeting or another of struggling to remember a specific name or date and invariably turning to Hedda, who always amazes us with her reliable instant recall of all kinds of details. We are accustomed to chuckling every once in a while when, as we settle into our evening’s agenda and heave exhausted sighs after attending to patients all day, Hedda’s alert attentiveness is blunted as she mentions that she is a bit tired, having had a full schedule of patients on the heels of a rigorous out-of-town weekend conference. When we demand to know what accounts for her boundless energy at the age of 97, her answer is always the same: “Diet,” she responds. “I’ve been a vegetarian for 85 years.” And then she adds with a twinkle in her eye but quite seriously, “Oh, yes, and being engaged in the world, always fighting for the truth.”

Now the two of us are involved in the specific project of this book. Like my Latin American psychoanalytic colleagues whose personal testimonies illuminate my analysis of their countries’ traumatogenic political and economic crises, Hedda has agreed to share aspects of her history and self-reflections that help to contextualize my interpretation of the subjective experience of the drift toward authoritarianism and economic catastrophe in the United States since 9/11. Her lifelong social concerns mirror the commitments of much of the political activism that has emerged among psychoanalysts in the post–9/11 environment. I am intrigued by Hedda’s narrative in that much of it parallels Marie Langer’s experience of growing up in the cultural ferment of the interwar years in Europe. Both were forced to flee their homeland and, as immigrants in new countries, to integrate their progressive political views with their psychoanalytic theory and practice—Marie Langer in the context of the turbulent conditions of third-world Latin America, and Hedda in the less extreme circumstances of the U.S. superpower.
“I had been studying for my PhD at the University of Vienna,” Hedda continues, now focusing on what life had been like before the Nazis extended their power into Austria. “I majored in psychology, and the department was not psychoanalytic, nor were we involved in Freud’s free clinics.1 Some faculty had connections to Freud’s Institute. It was the 1930s, during the time that Vienna was exploding with all kinds of wonderful social and cultural programs supported by the progressive Social Democratic municipal government, including much of the mental health enterprise, some of it related to the work at the university’s psychology department. Many of the faculty were Marxists, members of the Socialist Party and the youth movement, and they were very much committed to social issues. The work was very intense. We studied child development, the importance of the mother-child relationship, and even the social effects of unemployment on communities. The orientation was one of understanding the individual in the context of family and community, and this reinforced in me a sensitivity to the internal and external—or the psychic and social—continuum in human experience. The department also had connections to American universities, and because I was interested in clinical training, which was not offered there, colleagues suggested I apply for a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Chicago. My successful application turned out to be a lifesaver, because I was accepted just as Social Democracy was being vanquished by the Austro-fascist movement that later merged with the even more repressive Nazi Party. Many of the psychology faculty were arrested in the process.”

I ask Hedda what it was like living in the transition to fascism. “During the time the political situation worsened,” she says. “I noticed that as a manic defense, people often joked about the really terrible events occurring all around us. We lived in an increasingly schizophrenic Vienna, with rising unemployment, poverty, and even homelessness for the first time. People were really suffering, but the opera and symphony and galleries were still operating, as was some semblance of informative news reportage for the middle and upper-middle classes. The privileged could often easily deny the frightening signs of terrible social dislocation and the looming political threat. For me, it was the writing on the wall, and I knew we had to leave. My fiancé, Herbert Bekker, was resistant to leaving. Like many others I argued with, he thought that since he was not publicly political, he would encounter little trouble with the Nazis and would therefore have plenty of time to take care of his family before departing. So he would
emigrate later, and I would have to flee alone. I packed a small suitcase and set out to negotiate the labyrinthine Nazi-dominated border crossings and train routes that would take me to the coast of France, where I would set sail for New York.”

As Hedda describes in a matter-of-fact manner the often terrifying details of her flight, the images in my mind are like a cinematic thriller. I interrupt her to ask how she was able to tolerate what I imagine must have been intense anxiety given the personally threatening situations she frequently found herself in during her journey. How had she not been unbearably frightened? “No, I wasn’t scared,” she responds. “I wasn’t supposed to be scared of anything. I was raised not to be frightened.” She recalls how as a child just after World War I, her Marxist parents had been deeply involved in the short-lived leftist revolution that had brought socialism to Hungary for some brief months. “That was a very exciting period for me, even when as a 9-year-old my first real party was cancelled because my parents had to make the revolution. When I told my father that he had ruined my party, he said to me with a straight face, ‘I’m so sorry, I wish you’d have told me, and we would have postponed the revolution!’ But even with that major upset, I also remember it being glorious. My parents weren’t scared. They were remaking the world, and their attitude was, ‘If there’s a problem, you solve it. A need, you meet it.’” But there were also the more difficult aspects of experience during these tumultuous times, and Hedda’s early life was characterized by overstimulation, loss, and even depression. She has described the multiple losses she suffered brought on by war, her parents’ divorce, her frequent family moves from one country to another, and the loss of her first nanny. Although the political and social environment was exciting, Hedda Bolgar (2001) has written that “life during those years now feels like a manic defense against the chronic mourning everybody in the family was constantly feeling. . . . Today I know that what I knew not consciously then was that very little was experienced deeply” (p. 41).

I wonder aloud if the combination of political consciousness and manic defense learned early in life permitted her to endure with such equanimity the frightening conditions under which she fled fascist Austria. “Yes,” Hedda says, pondering the question. “The fear was probably there, but the terror and helplessness were really repressed. That was certainly the case for me as a child when the reactionary forces overturned the brief Hungarian socialist government and enacted a brutal backlash. Years later, when
I flaunted my own safety to do some of the things I needed to do as I fled the Nazis, I didn’t permit myself to feel the fear either. On my way to France from Austria, for example, I took some risks going to Switzerland and Czechoslovakia and back into Germany to collect some of my father’s important papers and money from bank accounts that I knew would be needed later. In several potentially compromising situations when I was confronted by Nazi authorities, I remembered the lessons my father taught me about the importance of assuming a cool, disdainful demeanor with those in power, and I managed to save myself. On the other hand, I had a choice: I could have joined the resistance and stayed, but it never occurred to me. I don’t know why. I did not feel guilty about leaving because I had the conviction that after I left, I would be able to help more people than if I had stayed. It was true as it turned out, because I was able to bring a lot of people out and save their lives.”

This discussion stimulates associations for both of us to our present political environment in the United States and the omnipresent sense of threat that pervades the culture. We share the conviction that the Bush administration is eroding democracy by compromising civil liberties and the right to dissent, all the while legitimizing practices, such as torture and extraordinary renditions, that violate international and national law. His preemptive war policy depends on a military budget that is compromising our welfare at home and making the United States a rogue state internationally. We are worried about how the neoconservative discourse continues to dominate the media, disenfranchising critical voices as antipatriotic threats to national security. Hedda says she is reminded of the question that plagued so many in Europe as the Nazis eviscerated democracy from one country to another: When do you pack your bags and flee? It brings back painful memories for me as well, memories of Latin American friends and colleagues who were forced to decide when the pivotal moment had arrived to make the life-altering decision to save themselves and their families by fleeing their countries’ state terrorist regimes. We ruefully agree that perhaps the scariest thing for us at this historical moment is that, in spite of so many citizens’ fantasies of moving to another country, in this globalized world, there is actually no place to escape to.

“After the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon,” Hedda is saying, “it was the first time in my life that I really allowed myself to be afraid. I’ve lived through all kinds of situations that were dangerous, and I always felt I had to—and could—do something. But after 9/11, I was
suddenly scared to death. I couldn’t understand why, because Ground Zero was more than 3,000 miles away, and there was no real indication that something similar was about to happen here in Los Angeles. But I had the grim feeling, which I couldn’t put into words, that this was the beginning of something really bad. I just felt that Bush was going to use this tragedy in a very destructive way. It was nothing I could really consciously explain. It was just a general political mistrust. I was more afraid of the reaction to the terrorists than of the terrorists themselves, and that’s where I still am. What kind of a question is, ‘Why do they hate us?’ We know that for years the aim of this country’s foreign policy has been to control others’ resources and governments. And there is this split: The United States keeps doing what it’s been doing, and meanwhile we are caught up in this horrible trauma of 9/11 that is indelibly impressed on our psyches: The people who were in the towers burning to death, the dreadful images of those who leapt to their death, those who disappeared in the ashes that covered the city . . . and then the wonderful first responders. There is this constant battle: On the one hand, this terrible thing that has happened, and on the other, the retaliatory revenge strategy that was developed almost immediately, which I could not bear. I remembered how the Social Democrats caved in to the fascists in Vienna. Now I have this intense sense of complete helplessness in the face of something similar occurring among our elected representatives, Democrats and Republicans alike, in this government. We have to scramble even to get reliable information, and there is the feeling that we have lost whatever real democracy there was in the United States. Right after 9/11, I had the sensation that with the right wing in the White House, we were going to lose all the gains, like Social Security and other benefits of progressive state policies, that still existed. I had no idea then how bad it would actually get.”

These thoughts spark recollections of our work together that began in 2003, two years after the terrorist attacks. In response to 9/11 and Hedda’s urgent concerns about the problematic political realities she thought many citizens in this country were denying, including her psychoanalytic colleagues, she proposed organizing a conference on the reciprocal impact of psychic and social reality. She wanted to demonstrate that psychoanalysts have something to contribute to our understanding of how psychological experience is affected by and affects an increasingly dangerous world. When Hedda invited me to be a member of the committee that
would organize the conference, I was delighted because it represented in Los Angeles a bridge to the work I had been doing with my psychoanalytic social activist colleagues in Latin America. All the committee members wished to do something practical that would provide people with the opportunity to use their minds to think about the growing dangers of our new political reality that were emanating as much from domestic as they were from foreign influences. We wanted the conference to focus on how current social realities affect our individual psyches and how our psychic realities impact on and reorganize the larger social world. An additional goal was to help psychoanalysts and other mental health professionals think about external reality and social events as sources of their patients’ and their own profound anxieties rather than interpret them as if they were only symbolic of unconscious anxieties provoked by unresolved childhood conflict and trauma. After one year of intense planning, the three-day conference, “The Uprooted Mind: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Living in an Unsafe World,” took place the last weekend of October 2004, on the eve of the highly contested 2004 national election. Keynote speakers included Robert Jay Lifton, who analyzed the U.S. experience of unprecedented vulnerability and its compensatory bellicose reaction to 9/11, as delineated in his book *Superpower Syndrome: America’s Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World* (Lifton, 2003); Maureen Katz, who explored the multiple and paradoxical psychological meanings to U.S. citizens of the spectacle of Abu Ghraib (see Katz, 2006); Andrew Samuels, who conveyed aspects of his pioneering ideas about political subjectivity detailed in his *Politics on the Couch* (2001); and myself, with a presentation elaborating my work on trauma, ideology, and psychic defenses, originally developed in the context of state terror in Latin America and now conceptualized in terms of the traumatogenic political culture of post–9/11 United States (see Hollander, 2006; Hollander & Gutwill, 2006).

I was in part concerned with the difficulty citizens in this country were having in recognizing the crisis of our democracy and the tendency to disavow reality because of the long-held ideological assumption that although authoritarian rule can occur anywhere else in the world, “it can’t happen here.” This attitude was an eerie reminder of what my friend and colleague Uruguayan psychoanalyst Marcelo Viñar had once poignantly told me about how it felt to be living in his country in 1971 during the
several years before its century-long democratic rule was forcibly ended by a military coup. With painful irony, Marcelo had commented,

The process of political change and the capacity to subjectively absorb and understand this change operate at distinctly different rates. . . . It’s as if I continued to believe in democracy when I was living in a country that was already totalitarian. I believe that it is characteristic of the period of transition between democracy and dictatorship that people function by denying reality.

I proposed that Marcelo’s observation of the tendency to deny a threatening reality could serve as a warning to us in this country as we too succumb to the wish to disavow the signs of our own transition toward an unprecedented centralization of political power and disenfranchisement of citizens. “The uprooted mind” was the metaphor for the painful and even traumatic impact of living in the post–9/11 environment permeated with dangers that were intensifying at a pace that felt overwhelming. The psychic residue of these social terrors, I argued, was apparent in our consultation rooms as patients experienced how the political is personal, the other side of the coin of the revolutionary idea proclaimed by feminists of the 1960s that “the personal is political.”

Since the “Uprooted Mind” conference, I have continued to extend my work on trauma, ideology, and psychic defenses as a construct to explain the subjective meanings of the political and economic crises that have become more profound and complex since 9/11. Like Hedda, I have been arguing that if we ever had any doubts, under the extreme social conditions in which we now live, it is no longer possible to speak of psychic and social reality as if they were two exclusively separate registers. Indeed, from my perspective, subjectivity is fashioned out of the intimate interplay between the imaginary dimensions of the unconscious, which is characterized by representations, drives, defenses, and affects, and a relational matrix that reaches out beyond the family to include the sociosymbolic order, composed of asymmetrical relations of power and force.

The Social Matrix of Psychic Experience

Psychoanalysts have been dealing for years from different theoretical perspectives with the concept of psychic reality and what role social reality
plays in unconscious life. In the early 1990s, the International Psychoanalytic Association held its biannual congress in San Francisco, the theme of which was psychic reality. The invited presenters concurred that Freud’s concept of psychic reality, together with the theory of infantile sexuality, the unconscious, repetition, and transference, constituted the foundations of psychoanalysis. There was agreement that external reality had to be taken into account in any conceptualization of psychic reality, but external reality for most of the presenters meant essentially the intersubjective encounter between the analyst’s and the patient’s unconscious minds. For some, the mechanism of projective identification was the essential link between the subject and the external world. But others, most notably a group of Argentine psychoanalysts, argued that the components of the unconscious are not only fantasy and object relations but internalized attributes of the sociocultural environment as well. They emphasized the importance of accounting for how the subject is constituted within specific historical moments and cultures and is likely to bear the signs of intergenerational transmissions of socially constructed trauma (Etchegoyen, 1996).

This view seems to me to take into account the insertion of the individual in the social order out of which the complex interplay between unconscious dynamics and social forces render human experience inevitably destabilizing. It is situated within an important trend stemming from Freud himself. Freud’s revolutionary discovery was the decentered subject: Enlightenment man, rational, in charge of nature and the social order, was displaced by the psychoanalytic self, dominated by unconscious forces whose presence s/he did not control, like that of a foreign body—an internalized trace of parental others—that could never be completely assimilated. The disconcerting implications of this notion were softened by Freud’s belief that psychoanalytic therapy could help human beings reassume some degree of reason over disorderly passions through making the unconscious conscious. As Stephen Frosh (1987) points out, this tradition within psychoanalysis promised mastery and a fantasy of completeness and integrated selfhood for analysts and patients alike. However, perhaps in response to the relativism, narcissism, and nihilism associated with postmodern culture and global capitalism, many psychoanalytic theorists have returned to an interest in the social and psychological meanings of the Freudian decentered subject. Considerations of how social reality forms part of the psyche lead toward a focus on how
the Other (from parent to the larger social order) governs our existence to impose an essential alienness or alterity of human subjectivity. My own understanding is that external reality is, indeed, a foundational aspect of the constitution of the self.

Most psychoanalytic research demonstrates that the social matrix either facilitates or impedes psychic development and integration. Libidinal and aggressive impulses are fated to be constructively or destructively expressed, depending on the existence and nature of container/contained relationships, not only in the intimacy of the family, but in the culture at large. How can psychoanalysis help us understand the nature of human destructiveness, which is a major theme of this book? Two trends generally characterize psychoanalytic thinking, the first that sides with Freud’s conviction of an innate destructive drive or instinct that is inevitably mobilized against the self or outward against others, and the second that conceptualizes aggression as a response to deprivations and frustrations in the environment, impingements that originate in the catastrophes of childhood trauma and are reproduced throughout the life span. My view as it is elaborated in my analysis of the violence of terror in the Americas is reminiscent of Stephen Mitchell’s perspective in which aggression, like sexuality, represents a response to others, biologically mediated and prewired, within a relational context (Mitchell, 1998, p. 25). Hegemonic institutions and ideologies either exacerbate primitive anxieties and their manifestation in envy, greed, and hate or promote the capacities that form the basis of reparative guilt and love, concern, and responsibility for others (see Ruskin, 1991; Peltz, 2005). Psychoanalytic theories have also elaborated how interpersonal experience is realized through the medium and psychological use of social symbols. D. W. Winnicott, for example, thought of symbolization as a constructive, expansive, intrapsychic capacity as well as a relational process in which one uses a transitional me/not me space to negotiate a balance between acceptance of authentic internal wishes and needs and responsiveness to external reality’s expectations and demands. When the transitional space fails, it exacerbates what Melanie Klein called paranoid/schizoid states of mind, characterized by primitive defenses such as splitting, projection, idealization, and projective identification that protect the subject from being overwhelmed by annihilation anxiety stimulated by external as well as internal forces. But Winnicott, Klein, and other object relations theorists did not take into account how external reality contains the hegemonic cultural symbols of the social
order’s asymmetrical forces of privilege and power, which are internalized to form an alienating aspect of identity. Several psychoanalytic traditions elaborate the relationship between the psyche and the larger social order, one represented by the group theorists associated with the work of S. H. Foulkes and Wilford Bion and the other by Jacques Lacan and Jean LaPlanche. Both approaches are useful in our analysis of the individual and group response in this country to 9/11.

Psychoanalysts in the group psychotherapy tradition account for a socially constructed subjectivity through the concept of the social unconscious, by which they mean the co-constructed and shared unconscious processes of members of particular social systems such as community, society, nation, or culture. The social unconscious includes shared anxieties, fantasies, defenses, myths, and memories, and its building blocks are made of chosen traumas and chosen glories (Weinberg, 2007). For some theorists in this tradition, the social unconscious represents the installation of social power relations within the core of psychic structure and functions as a bridge between the individual and the group that shapes drives, affects, and defenses. The I of the individual is constructed inevitably out of the preexisting we, which in turn exists in relation to a designated not we, always characterized by power hierarchies. Thus the psychology of individuals is constituted within the vicissitudes of the power-relational field they inhabit to shape how they feel about themselves and behave toward others (Dalal, 2001). In the British psychosocial studies tradition that examines subjectivity through a psychoanalytically informed lens, Wendy Hollway defines the concept psycho-social in this way:

We are psycho-social because we are products of a unique life history of anxiety- and desire-provoking life events and the manner in which they have been transformed in internal reality. We are psycho-social because such defensive activities affect and are affected by material conditions and discourses (systems of meaning which pre-exist any given individual), because unconscious defenses are intersubjective processes . . . and because of the real events in the external, social world which are discursively, desirously and defensively appropriated.

(Frosh & Baraitser, 2008)

In the language of Lacan and LaPlanche, the intersubjective unconscious is constituted by an alterity created by the “the Other,” by which they mean
that the subject is created by the intersubjective relationships that contextualize it, predate it, and extend beyond it. To put this in developmental terms, the infant is born without a sense of stable bodily or psychic integrity. The emergence of the self develops over time in the relationship with the primary adult(s), whose conscious and unconscious identity, saturated with constituents of the social order, is internalized by the infant as an aspect of its own psychic structure. At the same time, the child is shaped by larger external forces (unconscious expectations of others, language, patriarchy, and so on), and this otherness is also internalized to become part of the self. In this way, the individual’s original state of diffuseness or decenteredness is partially transcended through the encounter with a consolingly coherent image of him- or herself mediated through the dominant ideological discourse that assigns a place in the social order based on attributes associated with class, race, and gender. But while the specific place of each subject in what Lacan calls the symbolic order renders an apparent integrative identity, it enforces a recognition of difference and prohibitions, both of which unavoidably entail loss and rupture. Lacan’s perspective emphasizes the inevitability of divisions within the self and among subjects even as desire for unification persists (Elliot, 1939; see also Soler, 2006).

LaPlanche has stressed that the alien within the subject begins with mother and the enigmatic message the infant receives based on mother’s unconscious conflicted sexuality and aggression. The child translates what it can into representations or fantasies, leaving the remainder that cannot be translated to become the foundation of the unconscious. LaPlanche’s view that the child actively negotiates the parental enigmatic signifier through fantasy and unconscious defenses can be extended to show that these processes enjoy a recapitulation across the life span as the subject struggles with the enigmatic messages of authority figures in the social order that, even while they often refuse to yield coherent and consistent meanings, are compellingly seductive (Caruth, 2001; LaPlanche, 1999).

While the symbolic order, to use Lacan’s term, provides the decentered subject with an apparently coherent identity and thus the possibility of covering over internal discontinuities, it simultaneously functions to sustain the repressive and constraining asymmetrical relations of authority and power. Many theorists have studied how the ruling classes of any given society are able to exercise their control through the dominant ideology, which functions to justify their power and is internalized by the subjugated
classes who come to identify with a worldview that is not in their objective interests. This contradictory condition by which the oppressed identify with an ideology that oppresses has been referred to as false consciousness by many Marxist theorists (McCarney, 2005; see also Eagleton, 1994). However, political philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1971) argued that the ruling classes govern by securing consent from those they subjugate, not only in the realm of shared ideas, but through a complex habitual social practice lived out through the unconscious and inarticulate dimensions of social experience. Gramsci postulated that the dominant social symbols of the culture—the whole range of values, attitudes, beliefs, cultural norms, legal precepts, and so on that infuse civil society—are transmitted through the vast range of institutions, including the family, religious groups, the legal apparatus, civic organizations, the media, and so forth, all of which generate a belief in a particular system. Together they constitute what Gramsci called hegemony, which is so powerful because it is experienced as the common sense of an entire social order. Hegemony lends a secure and enduring quality to power not achievable through the use of coercive institutions such as the military and the police, thus giving it psychological validity. Hegemony is not static; it has to be renewed, recreated, and defended. Multiple creeds, doctrines, and modes of perception may jostle for authority, but despite their differences, together they generate and reinforce citizens’ belief in the existing system. By way of illustration, neoconservative and liberal perspectives represent different ideological trends, but they share unquestioned hegemonic assumptions about U.S. superpower strivings and the sacrosanct principles of individualism, competitiveness, and private property (Boggs, 1984).

Elaborating upon Gramsci, French Lacanian Marxist Louis Althusser analyzed what he called state ideological apparatuses—social institutions that in his words interpellate or “hail” us to our place in the social order so that we unconsciously assume our position within it in a way that maintains the hidden relations of power. Althusser (1984) explored in more detail the important unconscious function of the dominant ideology. From his Lacanian perspective, the subject engages in an imaginary search for unity and coherence to escape the fractured and decentered nature of human experience. Individuals locate themselves through ideology, which is a thought-practice—in other words, both an unquestioned set of ideas and engrained customs located in concrete behaviors of everyday life. Since hegemonic values are taken as natural, our conscious awareness
about them is preempted, and we are habituated to them. In Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Zizek’s words, “They do not know it, but they are doing it” (Myers, 2003, p. 63). Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman stresses this invisible quality and shared experience of existing power relations: “Power,” he argues,

is not an object stocked in governmental safes that can be acquired by revolutionaries storming and occupying the Winter Palace; it cannot be “taken over” by assaulting and removing its present holders “on high.” It is present in every tissue and cell of society—and it is also constantly reproduced and replenished by daily routine conduct.

(Haugaard, 2008, p. 112)

This discussion raises the important question of how we can account for the capacity of citizens to disengage from hegemony to develop a critical ideological position about their lived experience that counters the “official story” of those who rule. We will explore how this capacity has been exercised in the context of political struggles against authoritarian government in Latin America and in this country. But first I want to show how the social psychoanalytic orientation I have presented helps us understand the consensual support that the Bush administration secured for its domestic and foreign policies in the early years following 9/11. How, in other words, did the specificities of U.S. history and culture—what Gramsci calls hegemony and what I will refer to as hegemonic ideology—affect the U.S. experience and response to the traumatic trigger of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?

We might say that in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, ideology came to our rescue. Bush’s aggressive policies were justified by a discourse that split the world into a struggle between U.S. democracy and totalitarian fundamentalism. Most citizens could uncritically identify with the ideological assumptions underlying Bush’s crusade. That is, citizens were unconsciously identified with the hegemonic ideological justifications of the policies instituted by the powerful who rule this nation. Ideology rationalized a government strategy aimed at ensuring U.S. global hegemony, all the while it functioned to cover over the psychological experience of individual and group decentering, vulnerability, and discontinuity provoked by 9/11. An aggressive foreign policy justified as self-defense protected us against the narcissistic injury of impotence
and helplessness triggered by the terrorist attacks, and in so doing, ideology worked. Indeed, military expansionism as a response to the terrorist attacks was experienced by many people as a familiar solution to feelings of insecurity and impotence on the one hand and rage and aggression on the other. These conditions created a sociosymbolic order characterized by what Thomas Ogden calls the pathology of the potential space. There was little negotiation between self and Other; the symbol and the symbolized were collapsed. For example, in the initial stages of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, ideological depictions of us/America as all good and they/Iraq as all bad inhibited our capacity to see the world in the more complex terms that would encompass the idea that we as well as they are good and bad. It was assumed that if the Iraqis hated Saddam’s dictatorship, then they would want a U.S. military occupation, a perspective still maintained in this country despite much evidence to the contrary. The ideology of the “war on terror” required psychological-splitting mechanisms that inhibited citizens’ abilities to tolerate the ambiguity and ambivalence characteristic of reality, resulting in the paradox that if we are all good, then we are endlessly threatened by the all bad Other, who will attack us and thus whom we are inevitably driven to keep attacking in “self-defense.”

We all recall the initial mandate from the government: We were urged to resume life as usual and to go shopping to support the American economy. As citizens, we were encouraged to buy things, thereby associating feeling good and safe through consumption and the private relationship with commodities rather than through engagement with others in communities of shared critical thinking and informed civic participation. Surely no other message could have captured the essence of the ideological underpinnings of an individualistic consumer society. Because so many of us were frightened, the lure of acting as if life could, indeed, go on as usual was compelling. While we were shopping, our emboldened leaders promised to take care of us, literally with a vengeance. But denial of danger was perforated with the terrors of the immediate post–9/11 environment. Those who were closest to Ground Zero, whose lives were directly affected, were most apt to suffer deleterious effects, and capacities for agency, continuity, cohesiveness, and affect were often compromised by dissociative defenses. The rest of the country’s citizens were subjected to an ongoing onslaught of the terrifying scenes of the planes flying into the Twin Towers that repeatedly intruded into our lives via all the mass media. People spoke of little else, and many obsessively worried, both alone and with one another, as
they navigated an environment saturated with warnings of potential future suicide bombings and biochemical, nuclear, or anthrax attacks. Feelings of helplessness were exacerbated in the immediate aftermath by disclosures that the government was unprepared to protect us and an economic dislocation that threatened people’s jobs, investments, and savings. America was scared stiff, and patriotism, in the form of a law that bore its name—the Patriot Act—was the prescription offered by the Bush administration and Congress to keep us safe.

Robert Jay Lifton (2003) speaks of this dilemma in contemporary America in a slightly different way when he analyzes the pathology of the “superpower syndrome,” which he believes contains a basic contradiction stemming from the need to eliminate the experience of vulnerability. This need puts the superpower on what Lifton describes as a psychological treadmill. He writes,

The idea of vulnerability is intolerable, the fact of it irrefutable. One solution is to maintain an illusion of invulnerability. But the superpower then runs the danger of taking increasingly draconian actions to sustain that illusion. For to do otherwise would be to surrender the cherished status of superpower.

(p. 129)

Lifton’s view suggests a pathological transitional space in which primitive defenses prop up a leadership unable to tolerate the narcissistic blow to their omnipotent control over material and symbolic supplies of every kind throughout the world. These defenses impede those in power from being able to move beyond their grandiosity to learn from experience, for example, that people inevitably resist foreign occupations and can now do so with weapons of mass destruction; that political and economic policies focused on control over the world’s natural resources are based on short-sighted greed and unconscious denial of the immanent disappearance of oil and natural gas and the urgency with which we need to invest in research and development of alternative sustainable energy sources; that the proliferation of nuclear weapons has a chance of being contained only if the world’s superpower ceases to threaten other countries and models the way to contain proliferation through a dismantling of its arsenal. For those in this country who do not exercise power, the sense of vulnerability produces a frightened, angry, and belligerent
population that seeks relief through various defenses, including an identification with the aggressor (leadership).

In Lacanian terms, the overwhelming nature of events such as 9/11 punctures through the socially constructed world’s capacity to protect us from terror, leaving us in states of defenselessness as we encounter the Real, that which we cannot ever quite get hold of or register symbolically, that which stays beyond the mind’s grasp and cannot be communicated between us. Its ominous and mystifying grip is manifested in the human capacity for destructiveness and violence. In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Zizek (2002) writes of the significance of the attack on the World Trade Center:

> On account of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition. . . . The Real itself, in order to be sustained, has to be perceived as a nightmarish unreal spectre. (p. 19)

Thus, for a time, consensual support of arbitrary government policies was secured because under dangerous social conditions that break through the barrier of threats that can be tolerated, the arousal of fear and insecurity adversely affects peoples’ capacity for critical thought, thereby diminishing what Peter Fonagy (2002) calls mentalization and promoting the reliance on an ideologized mode of thinking. The mobilization of omnipotent defenses against feelings of vulnerability is typical of traumatized states, and in the wake of 9/11, this defensive posture characterized not only individual citizens but the large group response of a superpower nation. The government’s bellicose policies in reaction to an unprecedented vulnerability reflected the need to reaffirm the hegemonic position of the United States in the world, all the while fulfilling citizens’ fantasies of being rescued by a strong leader who would enact wishes for revenge.

An important component of the traumatic significance of 9/11 was our experience of ourselves as targets of an arbitrary and unfathomably aggressive act. Why did we become the innocent victims of such a monstrous assault? As an ostensibly puzzled President Bush put it, “But why do they hate us? We are so good.” This stance represents what Christopher Bollas (1992a) posits as “violent or radical innocence,” a psychic defense
by which the denial of one’s own aggression is projected onto the other, who is then experienced as the source of one’s innocent victimhood. This defense simplifies consciousness and inhibits the capacity for symbolization, promoting paranoid schizoid splitting and projective mechanisms that characterized the states of mind of both leaders and citizens in this country. Shortly after 9/11, Hedda had an experience that illustrates this phenomenon. She called together a group of her colleagues to discuss their responses to the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. “Of course, early on, the question of ‘why do they hate us’ came up,” she told me, with more than a little irritation, “and I thought, okay, I know a little about this, so I tried to explain something about this country’s role in the world. I got resistance to this line of thinking, so I tried suggesting that we think together about how people are looking to Bush as a father figure who in fantasy we need to rely on to keep us safe. But that kind of minimal psychoanalytic thinking was not what they were interested in. They wanted to talk about revenge, how we could get even with the terrorists. They were afraid it might happen again, and no one but me was afraid of what we might do, what Bush might carry out in a kind of self-righteous vindication that would wind up being even more destructive. I felt isolated in my concerns, which were much more about our government than about the terrorists.”

As Hedda feared, this theme of violent innocence was manifested in the Bush administration’s adoption of an attitude of righteous entitlement to aggressive retaliatory tactics that risked an ever-expanding war whose product would be the manufacture of thousands of new terrorists who also experience violent innocence in their conviction that the United States is a mortal enemy they must destroy. The recourse to violent innocence as a strategy to deal with the destabilizing effects of the terrorist attacks was framed by aspects of hegemonic ideology that have informed this country’s relationship to the rest of the world for centuries. Most U.S. citizens understand foreign policy through the government’s ideological lens as it is monotonously transmitted and reiterated through the corporate-owned media and the host of other institutions through which circulate, as Gramsci showed, hegemonic notions and practices that are felt to be the shared common sense of the social order. Citizens were thus receptive to their government’s self-representation of violent innocence based on the denial of U.S. expansionist policies that long predated 9/11. While we were in fact victims of hateful violence, the immediate conclusion of our innocent
victimization and the assumption that the terrorists were motivated by envy—of our goodness, our freedoms, our material achievements—inhibited citizens’ capacity to think about how U.S. policies in the Middle East and Asia may have been an important source of terrorist hatred, about which we might be able to do something constructive. In this regard, a poster carried by participants in antiwar marches ironically asked a significant question regarding a motive for the invasion of Iraq. It read, “How did our oil get under their sand?!?” The grandiosity in the attitude satirized in the poster has a long tradition in this country’s estimation of its superior institutions and values that is the foundation of U.S. foreign policy. Many citizens endorsed, however unknowingly, the ideological assumptions underlying the war on terror and its aggressive foreign and domestic policies. They identified with and thus gave consensual support to hegemonic depictions of this country’s invasion and occupation of Iraq as a force for democracy, liberty, and justice. War was the culturally acceptable response to the terrorist attacks because the government could rely on a historical reservoir of racism and neocolonial sentiments that has driven U.S. foreign policy for centuries.

Indeed, from the early history of the American colonies through the era of nation building, the social imaginary has been infused with themes related to American Exceptionalism, the notion that from its inception, the many immigrant peoples who comprise this country’s population share a common bond based on principles of freedom, inalienable natural and human rights, democracy, the rule of law, civil liberties, fair play, civic virtue, private property, and constitutional government. American Exceptionalism is related to Manifest Destiny, the historical belief that this country was ordained and destined by the God of Christianity to extend its superior civilization across the North American continent and beyond. The theme of American Exceptionalism, that is, the virtue of the American people and their institutions, was articulated by 19th and 20th century exponents of Manifest Destiny, who argued on behalf of the God-given mission of the United States to redeem and remake the rest of the world (Fresonke, 2003; see also Black, 1988). Manifest Destiny has rationalized the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the theft of one-third of Mexico and its citizens, the abusive exclusionary laws and customs aimed at immigrant workers, and the exploitation of labor and resources throughout the Global South. When the subjugated resist being dominated, U.S. superiority and entitlement are expressed through coercive violence.
to assure the maintenance of U.S. hegemony throughout the world. This
tradition was reaffirmed in the mid-1990s, when a group of neoconserva-
tives, many of whom later became major figures in the Bush administra-
tion, formed the Project for a New American Century. The PNAC was
conceived as a post–Cold War strategy designed to maintain this nation’s
role as the world’s only superpower in the 21st century by imposing a
Pax Americana through force of arms. Control over the earth’s strategic
energy resources was essential to PNAC’s vision, and long before 9/11,
the invasion of Iraq was thought to be a necessary step toward achieving
this objective (PNAC, 2007). Appropriation of Iraqi oil would be central
to an agenda to increase defense spending, assume control over an essen-
tial commodity sought after by competing economies, serve as a warning
of U.S. power to other Middle East governments, and award government
contracts through noncompetitive bidding to corporations close to and par-
tially owned by PNAC members, such as Halliburton, Bechtel, and Black-
water (Gutwill, 2009).

The expansionist PNAC agenda was implemented by the Bush admin-
istration’s “war on terror” and constructed around rhetorically simplis-
tic equations that were reproduced endlessly by the corporate media, by
that time so concentrated that only six corporate monoliths owned all but
10 percent of the country’s newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations,
books, records, movies, videos, wire services, and photo agencies (Media
Reform Information Center, 2004). Media discourse conflated a complex
reality by first morphing Osama bin Laden into Saddam Hussein, who then
was identified with 9/11, then with terrorism, then with Hitler, then with
Iraq, and then with the Iraqis. The belligerent actions of government were
inverted through language distortion, encouraging citizens to identify with
familiar hegemonic signifiers of American democracy: “Seeking peace”
was the symbolic language used for waging war. Bombing civilians was
referred to as “liberating” them. “Collateral damage” and “soft targets”
were reported, rather than the number of mothers, fathers, and children
being killed and maimed by U.S. bombs. “Unpatriotic” was a code used
to justify the government’s attack on anyone with a dissenting view from
official policy. “Freedom is on the march” was a euphemism for the unilat-
eral preemptive invasion and occupation of other countries.

The administration’s simplistic discourse, which bifurcated the world
into good and bad—civilization versus barbarism, the Christian world
versus Islam, democracy versus an “axis of evil”—enabled citizens to
identify with an all-powerful goodness, while all that was bad was projected onto a demonized other. This powerful emotional response exacerbated the difficulty of tolerating ambiguity and complexity typical of what Melanie Klein (1935, 1937) called the depressive position, characterized by the capacity to tolerate acknowledging one’s own aggressive impulses, feeling guilt, and making constructive reparation. As Hanna Segal has argued, groups tend to be narcissistic, self-idealizing, and paranoid in relation to other groups and to shield themselves from knowledge about the reality of their own aggression, which of necessity is projected into an enemy—real or imagined—so that it can be demeaned, held in contempt, and then attacked. Under the traumatogenic conditions provoked by the terrorist attacks and then by the aggressive U.S. response, the capacity for empathy for the suffering of others collapsed. Psychologist Sam Keen (1986) describes what happens to people who are vulnerable to unconscious splitting:

> Start with an empty canvas . . . Dip into the unconscious well of your own disowned darkness with a wide brush and stain the strangers with the sinister hue of the shadow. Trace onto the face of the enemy the greed, hatred, carelessness you dare not claim as your own. Erase all hints of the myriad loves, hopes, fears that play through the kaleidoscope of every finite heart. . . . When your icon of the enemy is complete you will be able to kill without guilt, slaughter without shame.

(p. 9)

As psychic defenses and ideology converged, shock and awe attacked U.S. citizens’ minds as well as their purported enemy.

The defensive significance of the ideological response to 9/11 has to do with another theme related to the threat of species annihilation that people have lived with since the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this regard, Hedda once told me about an experience she had when she was deeply committed to the antinuclear movement to which she gave as much time, energy, and money as she could. She found that the psychoanalytic community was loath to take up social issues and struggles, even this overridingly important one. “I gave a paper at a psychoanalytic meeting about the threat of nuclear arsenals and proliferation,” she recalled, “and before I spoke, a very prominent analyst confided that at the time of Hiroshima, he had been on his way to Tokyo,
and that if it hadn’t been for the bomb, he and his fellow soldiers would surely have been killed. At least, that’s what they were told. Therefore, he proclaimed, he found it hard to feel too worried and critical about the bomb. So I talked to him about denial. Following the presentation of my paper, he wrote me a note to tell me that after listening to me, he could recognize in himself what I meant and that it was very hard to persist with his denial. That was a minor victory! But it wasn’t often repeated.” This defensive denial has worked even more effectively and therefore dangerously among the decision makers who manufacture and trade in nuclear arms. Hannah Segal (2002) argues that the leaders of the United States, as well as other countries with nuclear capabilities, have disavowed their own aggressive motivations as they developed weapons of mass destruction. For well over half a century, the military-industrial-congressional complex has created an increasingly dangerous world, as U.S. arms manufacturers have engaged in annual sales of armaments and components of weapons of mass destruction to countries all over the world, including the Middle East and Asia. Geopolitical interests and access to strategic resources, such as oil and natural gas, have guaranteed U.S. governmental support of arms sales to nations and groups who have used them against one another and sometimes against the United States itself. Furthermore, over time, the complex process involving research, allocation of government contracts, and production and sales of armaments of all kinds has facilitated a fragmentation of responsibility and accountability, which has made it easy for those involved to hide from themselves the dangerous implications of their decisions and actions. Their denial has resulted in the gross absence of government involvement in constructing reasonable programs aimed at emergency preparedness that could protect—minimally at least—the civilian population in this country from anyone who might use a weapon of mass destruction against us. Denial has taken the form of “it won’t happen” or “it won’t be that bad.” *New York Times* investigative journalists examined the reasons why the U.S. government has not done more over the past several decades to protect civilians in this country from the dangers of a chemical, biological, or nuclear attack. They quoted one officer in the U.S. military, who told them why the military had no real plans to defend this country against a germ threat: “There’s an in-box, an out-box, and a too-hard-to-do box. . . . We saw it as a threat, but we didn’t want to deal with it, to put together a war plan. It was too difficult” (Miller et al., 2002, p. 91). In this regard, 9/11 permitted the projection of
responsibility for the menace to humanity posed by the arms race onto the immediate threat by terrorists who might very well have managed to buy or steal the components of germ warfare or radiation bombs from sources financed or supplied by the United States itself. This country has reconstructed itself from being a major player in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to that of a victim, whose current military escalation is defined exclusively as justifiable self-defense.

In the policies they developed following 9/11, our political leaders assumed a posture of self-vindication divorced from the reality of the history of U.S. imperial reach and their own declared designs to guarantee its superpower position in the world. Denial among the decision makers came in the form of projecting responsibility and guilt for their aggressive policies, insisting, for example, that their preemptive invasion of a sovereign country was the result of wrongs inflicted on them, not by them. In their arrogance, they denied the reality of their motives and actions, had little respect for truth, and thus avoided any experience of shame. Most citizens were vulnerable to the ideological representations that mystified government policies, which converged with the need to maintain a sense of sanity and safety, often through disavowal. So for example, some of us knew—and then “forgot”—that our ports, public buildings, nuclear power plants, waste sites, weaponry storage centers, and chemical and biological research facilities were not safe because of lack of oversight and protective strategies. We knew—and then “forgot”—that the budgets necessary for such protection were not supported by the government even as it warned of imminent terrorist attacks. Instead, we were told that our leaders would protect us through making war on other countries and expanding exponentially the definition of a terrorist to include anyone who opposes the policies of this country. And while U.S. citizens were still reeling from the devastation of 9/11, the government implemented a broad range of political and economic policies that expanded the influence of the executive branch at the expense of our constitutional system of checks and balances and developed an economic and military policy that favored the interests of a narrow sector of the population over those of the majority.

These developments were facilitated by the convergence of ideology and psychological defenses, so that critical reflection, restraint, and dialogue were stifled in the early years of the U.S. response to 9/11. A more long-range, thoughtful response might have included, in addition to pursuing and containing terrorist networks, an internationally collaborative