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I work in war zones, training people to respond non-violently to conflict, from the kitchen to the commons. I work with them to interrogate all aspects of their landscape – from civics and politics, history and heroes, to gender, culture, religion, media and economics. What makes for peace? What drives violence? What is it within me that capitulates to, or foments, violence in my own small corner? What obstacles within me prevent me from seeing the obvious? What are the fears that get in the way of naming reality and taking action for change? I help people connect the dots, linking local violences to a global project of profit-making violence.

We also spend a lot of time talking about, and applying, the work of Paolo Freire, a Brazilian priest whose work fundamentally altered notions of education and power. Freire noticed, in his work with poor people, their reluctance to learn, to probe, to ask questions. He recognized the deeply immobilising inertia of a preference for the status quo. He diagnosed oppression as the heart of this reluctance and began to map out the mechanisms of oppressive power in the creation of a population acquiescent in its own oppression.

Freire then looked for those means and methods of normalisation that convert the oppressive into the normal--those ways by which we become inured to instruments of our own oppression, walls we no longer see, rules we no longer challenge, violences and violations so pervasive they blend into the landscape of domination. Too much work, too much risk to ask questions and to dissent from the mantras of our captors. With each new set of “facts on the ground” and “new normals” the past is obliterated, dissent is suppressed, visions of the possible and the good are killed.

I was sitting on a beach on the island of Guímaras, in the southern Philippines, debriefing a set of trainings in non-violence in Mindanao with Filipina colleagues when someone turned on an old transistor radio. It was Thursday morning where we were, Wednesday evening in Washington, from which the voice of George W. Bush informed the world that the invasion of Iraq was underway. Declared by the U.S. President to be the “second front in the war on terror,” the Philippines had a particular interest in this news.

“What if they didn’t do it?” one person wondered out loud. Who? Saddam Hussein? “No, Muslims. Any Muslims. Bin Laden.”

On that morning in 2003, the question seemed like an aberration, a distraction from the issue at hand--the invasion of Iraq. It wasn’t until David Ray Griffin came to town for the second or third time that I returned to that question. I had just finished reading James Douglass’ *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why he died and why it matters*. Jim, a friend, had sent me early versions of the chapters and, eventually, a pre-publication manuscript. In my Ph.D. work I had become a devotee of his writings (particularly *The Non-violent Coming of God*) and I have found them very helpful in my understanding of both the non-violent gospel of Jesus and what goes into the creation of a soldier--the psychological tools needed to generate a “killing distance” sufficient to take the life of another human being. I had picked up bits and pieces of the nagging questions about the assassination over the years since 1963 but had never seen it all put together, with Jim’s exhaustively researched new information, in one place. In the pages of this book, for the first time, I came across Operation Northwoods and the language of “deep state.”

I read Jim's lonely dispatches from the 1999 Memphis courtroom that found a little known character by the name of Loyd Jowers guilty of the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. – a minor player in a conspiracy that, the jury found, included agencies of the United States Government, including the CIA and FBI, the State of Tennessee, the Memphis Police as well as Mafia intermediaries and an Army Special Forces sniper team. The silence following the King family's civil suit and its shocking revelations was deafening. A Portuguese travel writer was the only other reporter of the proceedings. The media, as had been the case for every investigation of the assassination since 1968, absented itself, put its collective hands over its ears, eyes and mouth and buried the story. During a visit to his home in 2003 I was told by Jim that he was not going to stop with JFK – he saw the book under construction as intricately linked with his earlier books, not a detour from his decades-long path of prophetic non-violence. Future books would reveal the “unspeakable” behind the assassinations of Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. “If I live that long,” he said, “9/11 will be next.”

I guess I could say that Jim softened me up for what I heard that night at the OISE auditorium. David Ray Griffin, interestingly enough another theologian of international renown, spoke compellingly, softly, often humorously, of the backdrop to and events of 11 September 2001 and what followed. I'm not a credulous person; I am a sceptic; I value evidence and reasoned weighing of points of view. I was stunned. All the “buts” I had stored up for my personal defence of the way things are were annihilated in Dr Griffin's careful presentation.

Explanations of mysteries, however diabolical, now presented themselves to me, from the vacuuming up of the crime scene, the initial deer-caught-in-headlights response by the Bush administration, the headlong rush into Afghanistan, the inexplicable horrors and chaos of Iraq where I had spent some brief weeks in 2003, to a quality of corporate rule that beggars the imagination of pre-9/11 days. Fear as profit-driver has changed our lives, giving us everything from the trillion-dollar-and-counting Homeland Security and its enabling PATRIOT ACT, and escalating levels of probing, prodding and violations of our dignity as persons and our rights as planetary citizens (from our desks, homes and streets to airport checkpoints) to vast increases in military budgets swollen by purchase orders for bombers, destroyers, tanks, bombs and drones. Oh yes, and Islamophobia. Somewhere between one and two million combined “excess deaths” in Iraq and Afghanistan. And, as a result of the diversion – one might say “theft” – of trillions of dollars out of social security, education, housing, health care, environmental protection budgets – we have received growing poverty, disintegration and environmental degradation driven by Leviathan's insatiable thirst for oil.

And we've gone along with it. Like lambs to our own slaughter.

Why? What drives people to ask so few questions, to accept such a low level of accountability of our governments? What makes people willing absurdly and loudly to insist that evidence-free nonsense is the truth? That, despite the mounting evidence to the contrary, the emperor is fully clothed? What makes the patently obvious *unspeakable*?

For the title of his book on JFK, Jim Douglass borrowed a term from American Trappist, Thomas Merton. “Unspeakable” points to a “kind of systemic evil that defies speech.” After JFK's assassination and the escalation of the Vietnam war, amidst a global arms race to oblivion, Merton wrote of “the evidence that [the world] is stricken indeed, stricken to the very core of its being by the presence of the Unspeakable.” He went on to issue a warning: “Those who are at present so eager to

be reconciled with the world at any price must take care not to be reconciled with it under this particular aspect: *as the nest of the Unspeakable*. This is what too few are willing to see.”

One of the many scientific papers presented at the *Toronto Hearings* in 2011 touched on the psychological mechanisms that, as Paolo Freire identified decades earlier, keep us silent in the face of our own oppression. Our imagined safety, our “security,” trumps everything. To imagine “what if,” to contemplate the Unspeakable, is to step on to treacherous territory, to court accusations of betrayal – of the families of the victims of 9/11, of the first responders, of our leaders. No! It can’t be so. It must not be so. Ph.D. candidate, Laurie Manwell, cited the experiments of Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram to illustrate our capacity to choose evil – or denial of the presence of evil – when the perceived cost of doing otherwise – exclusion, ostracism, humiliation, punishment – is sensed as too great a price to pay. If the cost of deviance from the “norm” (loss of my job, my reputation, my financial security, my credibility or my capacity to trust my leaders) is unbearable I choose silence, or outrage at those who choose otherwise.

Jim Douglass challenges the silence option: “The Unspeakable is not far away. It is not somewhere out there, identical with a government that became foreign to us. The emptiness of the void, the vacuum of responsibility and of compassion, is *in ourselves*... Compassion is our source of non-violent transformation.”

If a real investigation is not demanded, plans for “full spectrum dominance” will continue apace. And peace will become, for the whole world, ever more elusive.

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