

*Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups, Politics*  
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## Reply to Our Respondents

Daniel Burston and Cary Nelson

Before we reply to our critics we offer our sincere thanks to Kurt Jacobson and David Morgan for publishing our piece in *Free Associations* in Britain, since we could never have hoped to get it published in an American psychoanalytic journal. Given the fraught nature of the controversies that are still roiling the waters in Division 39 and the American Psychoanalytic Association, few journal editors – and none that we knew, or knew of, anyway - would have had the courage to do so for fear of “blowback” from any number of their readers and contributors.

In different circumstances, it might be possible for a detached observer to read our essay and yet not accept our claim that the psychoanalytic world is polarized by the impact that international political struggles have on current approaches to treatment. The editors of *Free Associations* solicited six responses to our essay that should eliminate any remaining doubt on that score. They seem to have prioritized responses that are critical of our essay to initiate a lively debate. They have also given us this opportunity to respond.

### *Reply to Bob Hinshelwood*

To begin with, we were a bit surprised when Bob Hinshelwood concluded his brief commentary on our paper by noting that:

the question has arisen whether *Free Associations* should have given space to the oppositional opinions of Burston and Nelson. Perhaps not? It may be that a better policy would be to remain silent over bitterly blaming feuds. Would a silence be preferable to an open dialogue which clearly will not reach a resolution without delving into unconscious dynamics?

Unfortunately, it is not clear from context when the question whether *Free Associations* should publish our “oppositional opinions” actually arose, leaving us with the impression that, in Dr. Hinshelwood’s opinion, at least, some things – notably, our opinions about the current crisis of psychoanalysis in the United States – are better left unsaid. And while it is true that there was bitterness and blame on both sides of the debates we describe, we attempted to moderate the tone and elevate the level of discussion by frankly acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of both the traditional and the Critical Social Justice Theory models, the presence and persistence of racism in American society, the need to address racial traumas in treatment, and the fact that American psychoanalysis has long had a diversity problem that needs to be addressed. This is something that neither he nor any of our other critics deem worth mentioning.

Moreover, Dr. Hinshelwood wonders whether there is any point in raising these issues “without delving into unconscious dynamics”. Obviously, we feel there is. After all, when clinicians attempt to psychoanalyze their colleagues or adversaries in debates about substantive issues, things deteriorate very rapidly into *ad hominem* attacks. The same is often true of efforts to elucidate the collective dynamics in the social unconscious of different groups, since all psychoanalysts have some group affiliations and loyalties outside the clinical setting. As a general rule, we feel it is prudent to address substantive issues – including ethical and political positions that analysts may adopt - at the level of consciousness first to see what clarity (if any) can be gained in the process *before* wading into the conflicts that bedevil the individual or the collective unconscious.

That said, we agree with Dr. Hinshelwood’s observation that our overview of the crisis applies first and foremost to the United States. And we say this with a considerable sense of relief. We sincerely hope that psychoanalytic organizations in the UK and elsewhere around the world can avoid becoming as polarized as we Americans are now. But while it is tempting to construe the fractious debates wracking many psychoanalytic organizations here as harbingers of a larger breakdown in social cohesion – one that heralds the emergence of a newly constituted Disunited Hates – something important is missing in this way of framing the issues. As we see it, the polarization that threatens what little is left of American democracy is (for the most part) a contest between conservative and liberal, Right and Left wing priorities and points of view. However, the crisis of American psychoanalysis is due to galloping polarization among and between liberal and Left leaning professionals – again, for the most part. And this, in turn, is due to excessive reliance on race and racism - which Hinshelwood calls “single issue politics” - to explain all our ills and internecine strife, to the manifest neglect of class conflict and the psychological damage that colossal deprivation, dishonesty and greed inflicts on people of all classes, but especially the poor and marginalized. Our critics here – perhaps including, but certainly not limited to Hinshelwood – conveniently overlook these facts, because it is convenient for them to depict us as agents of reaction. However, their intemperate rhetoric on this score does not – and indeed, should not - prevent us from challenging irresponsible statements to the effect that all Zionists are mentally ill or offering uncritical support to Islamist organizations, even when, in so doing, we antagonize the friends and followers of those who take these extreme positions. On the contrary, if we were to *refrain* from calling attention to these problems, passing them over in silence, we would not be doing American psychoanalysis any favours.

#### *Reply to Andrew Klafter*

Andrew Klafter’s comments have a very different tone than Hinshelwood’s, in part because they read more like a personal credo rather than a critique of our paper. Nevertheless, there are some strong convergences between his perspective and ours, because he epitomizes what we have called the traditional model at its best. Like him, we believe that efforts to change the world and redress or reverse its manifold injustices stem from religious and/or political convictions, and are not clinical “acts”; that the

boundaries between political agendas and therapeutic expertise must be acknowledged, especially if people of divergent political and religious viewpoints are to collaborate effectively and respectfully in the furtherance of the profession; that the clinician's first responsibility is to enable their patients to cope more effectively with the world as it is, not as we want it to be. This does not of course mean that analysts cannot also be activists, or that they may shirk responsibility for addressing the damage done to patients by their actual experiences of racist prejudice and persecution.

That said, we also agree with Dr. Klafter that the interests of the American Psychoanalytic Association would probably have been better served had Lara Sheehi been invited to speak at their annual meetings after all. That would have given the membership an opportunity to engage with her directly, and to weigh and assess her claims, beliefs and approach to treatment without the "noise" of listserv squabbles drowning out her words and ideas and averted a disastrous showdown. But again, like him – and Douglas Kirsner, apparently - we do not believe that the (successful) effort to oust Kerry Sulckowicz from the Presidency of APsaA was merited or that his desire to postpone Dr. Sheehi's talk until the Department of Education had cleared George Washington University of wrongdoing in her case was motivated by racism. Like Dr. Klafter, we believe his reluctance was reasonable and within his purview as President. Moreover, the fact that Sulckowicz's apology/retraction did nothing to soften the opposition or diminish the calls for his ouster is both worrisome and revealing. (The DOE's investigation of the Title VI complaint against GWU commenced on April 4th and is still ongoing.)

Furthermore, we commend Dr. Klafter for not conflating criticism of the Israeli government and anti-Zionism with antisemitism per se. We agree. We freely acknowledge that not all Zionists are Jews and that not all Jews are Zionists, and we ourselves are fiercely opposed to the policies and practices of Benjamin Netanyahu's corrupt and incompetent government. Nevertheless, demanding that APsaA formally adopt an anti-Zionist posture, whether by repudiating the IHRA definition of antisemitism, by supporting Hamas, or by any other means, is to impart or impose an activist agenda where it does not belong, and will likely result in large numbers of analysts leaving APsaA and weakening the profession as a whole.

Finally, we share his reservations about the relevance or usefulness of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the clinical arena. While fluency in the academic languages they have spawned can help aspiring academics build careers in a variety of disciplines in the university nowadays, it does nothing tangible to change or improve the world or to address the grotesque injustices that plague us all, whether we are in or out of the clinic (Burston, 2003; Burston, 2020).

### *Reply to Douglas Kirsner*

Apparently, Douglas Kirsner shares Andrew Klafter's misgivings about CSJT's resemblance to crude and deterministic forms of Marxism from days gone by. But his response to our paper complicates the picture Klafter paints for us in a number of useful ways. Klafter's heartfelt response reflects the concerns of a clinician dedicated to

helping patients address and overcome their unconscious conflicts and to dealing with their feelings, fantasies and enveloping social context more effectively. Kirsner, a philosopher, construes psychoanalysis as an open-ended process of self-discovery – one in which deepening self-knowledge is an end-in-itself, a process of *Bildung*, rather than chiefly a means to therapeutic ends, such as greater functionality, self-mastery, self-esteem or improved interpersonal relationships. Therefore, he writes that for Freud therapy was:

. . . a source of data for understanding the human condition in addition to helping patients survive their neuroses. Freud emphasized the creation of new knowledge more than the achievement of the therapy. This emphasis on the method in contrast with the therapy conveys the open-ended focus of investigation in a wide number of areas and questioning assumptions rather than making them.

Daniel Burston called attention to these somewhat discrepant visions of the goals of psychoanalysis – the therapeutic versus the philosophical - in “Psychoanalysis American Style”, his review of Kirsner’s landmark study in the history of psychoanalysis *Unfree Associations: Inside Psychoanalytic Institutes*; one inspired in no small part by R.D. Laing’s method of social phenomenology (Burston, 1996; Burston, 2002). Arguably, the tension between these two approaches – one promising or seeking therapeutic benefits, the other gains in self-knowledge, irrespective of therapeutic outcomes – was present in psychoanalysis from the very beginning, though the younger Freud was obviously more invested in achieving therapeutic results, while the older Freud leaned toward the philosophical approach, which he believed afforded him greater insight into cultural and societal trends and the formation of groups.

Though we did not address this point directly in our essay, what we called “the traditional model” actually encompasses *both* of these approaches to psychoanalysis to varying degrees, though we only dwell on this issue now because it opens onto the central theme of Kirsner’s book, namely authoritarianism and the dogmatic quest for certainty that bedeviled psychoanalytic training in many psychoanalytic institutes historically. Of course, Kirsner isn’t the only person to address this problem. Don Carveth has spoken forcefully to the authoritarian baggage that encumbers analytic training in “the traditional model” in *Psychoanalytic Thinking: A Dialectical Critique of Theory and Practice* (Carveth, 2018), and Burston addressed this issue repeatedly over the years (Burston, 1991; Burston, 1997; Burston, 2007; Burston 2020). But Kirsner seems to suggest that a correct application of psychoanalytic method would eliminate the need for dogmatic certainty, and like us, apparently, thinks that there is no point in merely replacing one dogmatic creed – no matter how fashionable – with another one. As he rightly points out: “Being able to bear uncertainty with equanimity is both a challenge and an achievement.”

For psychoanalysis to thrive then, perhaps the best way forward is to distill the best features of the traditional model and disentangle them from the authoritarian aspects of analytic education and training, opening analytic inquiry up further by deepening our awareness of the awareness of the social, economic and political realities that shape patients’ lives, as well as their idiosyncratic developmental pathways. Kirsner raises yet

another interesting and important point when he addresses the economic underpinnings of the current crisis, and more specifically, the problem of declining membership in psychoanalytic organizations.

*Reply to C. Jama Adams*

Perhaps the most striking thing about C. Jama Adams critique of our article is his acknowledgement that he is unfamiliar with the nature and scope of the crisis we're describing and the organizational cultures we are referring to. Sadly, this knowledge deficit did not deter him from weighing in on our effort with considerable confidence, nor did it prompt him to caution readers to take his ideas with the proverbial grain of salt. Neither of us would have neglected to do this if we were in a similar position. In view of circumstances, the most Adams could do here was to offer up a series of sweeping generalizations and prognostications based on his own experience in academia, which he mapped onto the conflicts and controversies in the psychoanalytic world with very mixed results. For example, Adams writes that contemporary "liberal" institutes are defending a Freud-centered curriculum. As any insider knows this statement is simply not true and hasn't been true for several decades. Nowadays, most liberal analysts lean *away* from Freud toward one of the many variants of the traditional model, and as a result, a Freud-centered curriculum is the exception, not the rule in American analytic institutes. Nevertheless, Adams writes:

Burston and Nelson demonstrate their ambivalence regarding curricula progress when they note "By now, most clinical training programs recognize the importance of social forces in patient's lives and incorporate instruction on how to recognize their effects into the curriculum." Yet they also observe the far from adequate outcomes regarding efforts at diversity. Here the challenge is not just diversity by pigment, sexuality and cultural background but also diversity of ways of thinking about Psychoanalysis.

Actually, we have no objection to viewpoint diversity, nor is there any shortage of disparate theoretical perspectives in the psychoanalytic world. On the contrary, what we referred to as "the traditional model" has been revised, augmented and in some instances fiercely disputed by a plethora of alternative schools – object relations theory, interpersonal psychoanalysis, self-psychology, Lacanian theory, relational psychoanalysis, etc. We doubt that all these approaches are of equal value theoretically, but we freely acknowledge that excellent clinicians are found among followers of *all* these different theoretical models. What do these clinicians have in common, if not their theoretical models? First, they seldom reject the "traditional model" in its entirety. More often than not, they seize selectively on certain features of the traditional model which they then augment or embellish in creative ways in the interests of greater therapeutic effectiveness. Second, and more importantly, perhaps, they regard psychoanalysis as a *clinical* endeavor first and foremost - one focused on the individual patient - rather than as a vehicle for promoting a political agenda, or for politicizing their patients. If Adams believes that these clinicians should *stop* thinking that way, we believe he is mistaken. Adams continues:

For the traditional center, this often speaks to defending a status position that is ill informed and incurious about alternate narratives. It defends the known, which is the basis of its power, and attempts to kill off the insurgents. We all know the seemingly depoliticized version of this Father-sibling cage fight, but we might well ask, are we condemned to repeat it? Here is the bittersweet irony of an enactment by psychoanalysts with seemingly little insight. Who analyzes the analysts?

In other words, Adams suggests – or appears to suggest - that the “traditional center” - and by implication, Freudians - are unconsciously playing out the role of King Laius, father of Oedipus, by refusing to acknowledge their infanticidal impulses, and their hostility toward their own offspring (the “insurgents”), whom they fear will displace them in time. This rhetorical device seems quite clever until you realize that Freudians and their immediate offspring, ego-psychologists, are (quite literally) a dying breed, and that the majority of analysts have long since repudiated Freud’s cherished belief in the primacy of the Oedipus complex as the “nuclear neurosis.” Further below, but along the same lines, Adams writes: “. . .the traditional psychoanalytic organizational model with its adoption of one perspective and the marginalization of others is doomed.” One perspective? Who are we kidding here? We are not aware of a single analytic institute in existence today where merely one theoretical perspective is adopted or endorsed.

Nevertheless, there are some areas of partial agreement between his perspective and ours. For example, he writes:

Justifiable criticism can be made of the traditional psychoanalytic model with its marginalization of the social, but ‘old models’ don’t die but live on as part of the repertoire of therapists. Therefore, it is for the insurgents to make the case as to why therapists should adopt aspects of the new model. This needs to be done respectfully, and acknowledge the well-meaning, if halting struggles, to create hybrid models. Here tactical sensitivity is the midwife of ideological change.

In our experience, cage fighters aren’t in the habit of treating their colleagues respectfully, granting their opponents the benefit of the doubt for their good intentions. But if, as Adams says, this trait and “tactical sensitivity” are “the midwife of ideological change”, we say – *Bravo, bring it on!* We’d really love to see it. We just haven’t seen it in evidence thus far. Then, gazing toward the future, Adams writes:

. . . CSJT will struggle to articulate an agreed upon position beyond the fact that social factors inform the working of the psyche. What will evolve will be psychoanalytic affinity groups that might agree on a broadly defined common position. They will hopefully respect and over time adopt some of the techniques, if not the perspectives of other psychoanalytically informed groupings. Some of these groupings will be truly hybrid and will build on preexisting work that attempts to meld psyche with social.

He continues:

In addition to resistance from the center, there will be a fight for position within the CSJT community. There will be those who simply wish to be the new center, and will attempt, a la Freud in his day, to impose purity tests that will not tolerate dissent. There will also be opportunism, as self-elected leaders will wrap

themselves in emphatic, but politically unsustainable CSJT positions. They will claim to speak for all members of a given community such as The Black or LGBT communities. Such self-appointed leaders will often not tolerate diversity of thought and will attempt to disparage those who challenge their perspective. Such resistances will derail any fruitful dialogue between insurgents and traditionalists. That in turn will weaken the organizational authority of psychoanalysis and might well severely limit CSJT's ability to be a force for change. While avoidable, there is a long tragic history of the Left's use of circular firing squads.

Too true. Evidently, Adams thinks that dogmatism and power plays – which have bedeviled the history of psychoanalysis at various points since its inception - are inevitable in and among the CSJT oriented “hybrid” groups that are likely to form as mainstream psychoanalysis continues its decline. We agree. But he also thinks that this will be a necessary transitional phase to a better more, inclusive approach to treatment. We are skeptical on that score. But of course, neither of us possesses a crystal ball. We'll just have to wait and see.

Reply to Carter J. Carter

Our essay spends some pages debating Critical Social Justice Therapy, an emerging therapeutic protocol based on Critical Social Justice Theory. Both concepts use the acronym CSJT, so some confusion between the two subjects is probably inevitable. Carter J. Carter in particular conflates the two terms. He confuses matters further by telling us that “Critical Social Justice Theory is not a thing.” He reports searching the University of Pennsylvania library *catalogue* using that search term and cognates and finding but one obscure reference. But a library catalogue lists only the books a campus has purchased. And since the 1990s, college and university libraries have purchased quite selectively. Moreover, library catalogues do not list most journal articles.

Meanwhile, Cary Nelson has worked for over fifty years in the fifth largest university library in the world, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and spent a few minutes searching the library's academic data bases that include books, journal articles, and dissertations. A “Critical Social Justice Theory” search produces 15 results, whereas “Critical Social Justice Therapy” produces 10, and the broader term “critical social justice” produces 438. Google Scholar offers 3,320 results. Those searches do not include publications in nonacademic venues. A general Google search for “critical social justice” produces 493,000 hits. Narrow it to “critical social justice theory” and you still get 11,200. Many publications argue for or against critical social justice theories without using the word “theory,” but the general point is clear: a great deal of ink has been expended on this nonexistent theory. We could add searches of legal and medical publication data bases, as we would do were we conducting a full literature review, but it is clear in any case that Carter did not do a thorough and proper search.

A few book and essay titles give a capsule portrait of academic critical social justice analysis over the last decade and more: Rita Chi-Yung Chung, *Social Justice Counseling: The Next Steps Beyond Multiculturalism* (2012); Ozlem Sensoy, *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*

((2012); Rick Lybeck, *Critical Social Justice Education and the Assault on Truth in White Public Pedagogy* (2020); Royer, “Ideological Struggle as Agonistic Conflict: (Anti)Hypocrisy, Free Speech and Critical Social Justice” (*Jus Cogens* (2021); *Yearbook on Critical Social Justice Across the Spectrum of Teaching and Learning: Theory and Practice in Communities and Classrooms* (Teachers College Record, 2021); Ginsberg, “Cultivating Social Justice Teachers” (*Feminist Teacher*, 2013); Wronowski et al, “Moving toward a Comprehensive Program of Critical Social Justice Teacher Education” (*Teacher Education*, 2023); . A University of Maryland campus runs a “Critical Social Justice” program “which aims to explore social justice both in theory and practice from academic, activist, and artistic perspectives” (<https://womenscenter.umbc.edu/critical-social-justice/>). Whether that program counts as a “cognate” from Carter’s perspective we cannot say. But it is apparently dedicated to the study of critical social justice theory. The University of Tennessee sponsors a Center for the Study of Social Justice that includes a Critical Theories of Social Justice Division (<https://cssj.utk.edu/divisions/critical-theories-of-social-justice/>).

One could supply more examples, but Nelson’s search already demonstrates how profoundly mistaken Carter J. Carter is. He tells us that “Nobody, to my knowledge, has ever written a book or article developing or advocating what Burston and Nelson describe as ‘Critical Social Justice theory’”. Nevertheless, he insists: “The paper on which I am to comment should not, in my view, be before you in this venue. It does not meet what I would regard as basic standards of academic integrity, honesty, or evidence. I see it as a breach of academic ethics on the part of Burston and Nelson, and on the part of the editors of this journal.” Why? Because: “This article is bullshit. Burston and Nelson are bullshitting.” “CSJT is bullshit. Burston and Nelson are tilting at a windmill.” Carter uses bullshit, bullshitting, or bullshitters 39 times in his paper, and leads with his full conclusion “In this particular case, the bullshit in question is a form of disinformation, one with obvious affinities with a larger right-wing disinformation machine.” Moreover, there is a “deceptive aporia at the core of Burston and Nelson’s bullshit argument—namely the failure to “substantiate their claim that CSJT is a thing, or a ‘trend’ at all.” Our response? Bullshit.

Carter gets both the large things and the small things wrong. For example, he discovered that a contributor to the Critical Theory Antidote website posted a couple of paragraphs from Nelson’s 2023 essay in the refereed journal *Fathom*, “Lara Sheehi’s Joyous Rage: Antisemitic Anti-Zionism, Advocacy Academia and Jewish Students’ Nightmares at GWU,” and provided a link to the full 20,000-word essay itself. Carter assumes (quite mistakenly) that Nelson posted the excerpt himself and that it was intended to stand on its own. Neither is true. Carter goes on to say Nelson has published repeatedly on Critical Theory Antidote. In truth, he never has.

The Sheehi essay in *Fathom* (which Carter does not cite) is one of a series of six unusually detailed and thorough analyses of publications of anti-Zionist faculty members or independent scholars that Nelson published between 2014 and 2023, all of which are between 20,000-30,000 words. Like most of the other five essays, the Sheehi essay covers *all* of her publications—essays, book(s), editorials, interviews, and social media posts. Four of the essays Nelson wrote were revised and updated in his 2019 book *Israel*



*Denial: Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism, & The Faculty Campaign Against the Jewish State*, where Nelson applies the textual analysis techniques he learned as a student of international literature.. The six writers he covers thus far are Judith Butler, Steven Salaita, Sari Makdisi, Jasbir Puar, Valentina Azarova, and Lara Sheehi. They are supplemented by detailed readings of anti-Zionist essays by Perry Anderson, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, W. J. T. Mitchell, and others. Yet Carter oddly condemns “Nelson’s . . . evidently willful refusal to actually engage with the work of other scholars” and suggests it “is part of a pattern.” There is a pattern, but one that is demonstrably of the opposite sort.

It turns out eventually that the complaint about our irresponsible invention of social justice theory—more specifically *therapy*—has a dedicated purpose: to eviscerate our analysis of its most recently celebrated avatar: Lara Sheehi. “Burston and Nelson invent a disturbing ‘trend,’ and then offer up Sheehi as an illustration of this non-existent trend. But if the trend does not exist, how can Sheehi possibly be an exemplar of it?” But castigating us for frivolity hardly warrants Carter’s lengthy critique. So, one more turn of the screw is required. So, we’re told that CSJT is actually the product of a vast conspiracy:

If no one, in psychoanalysis or otherwise, is a proponent of something called “Critical Social Justice Theory,” and if no real academic references to such a theory can be found in one of the largest libraries in the world, where does this term come from? It comes from an ecosystem of far-right and often fascist propaganda outlets that promotes antisemitic, racist, and homo- and transphobic conspiracy theories. What I will endeavor to do here is sketch a diagram of the propaganda ecosystem in which Burston and Nelson’s paper is situated, showing the route these bullshit ideas have traveled from the farthest reaches of the fascist internet to a psychoanalytic journal.

To illustrate this, Carter does a Google search and finds what he calls “a depressing archipelago of blog posts and Youtube videos from a small world of far-right activists” devoted to CSJT. In so doing, he seems to have forgotten his earlier insistence that CSJT doesn’t exist and no one talks about it, though he also has to admit that the Critical Therapy Antidote website has extensive resources analyzing the problems with CSJT. (He spends substantial time delivering insults to the website’s whole project.)

In any case, according to Carter, there are now two (conflicting) reasons why there is no need to defend Sheehi’s advocacy of CSJT principles and practices: CSJT doesn’t exist, and it’s all bullshit. Therefore, there is no need either to confront the scores and scores of anti-Zionist and antisemitic tweets she wrote and distributed. Carter complains that we just cherry pick a few tweets, though in fact we are only summarizing the case against her. Nelson’s *Fathom* essay quotes quite a few more from among the file of 9,776 of her tweets that he obtained. (*Fathom* is an open source journal that anyone can access.)

When Carter looks for something substantive to praise from Sheehi’s co-authored book, he settles on the case of a Palestinian patient named Amjad. He does not mention that Nelson discusses that case in detail after he consulted with several practicing psychoanalysts and psychologists about Sheehi’s presentation. Our shared

conclusion is that Sheehi imposes a CSJT reading on Amjad’s story and minimizes the complex individual history and psychology that are at stake. Carter also goes on to say that “Burston and Nelson seem to take as axiomatic that what Sheehi’s students said should be afforded a presumption of truthfulness,” but that is not true. We merely insisted that their complaints be taken seriously and investigated accordingly. To that end, Nelson interviewed one of her students at length and repeatedly, building a relationship of trust and finding multiple occasions to judge her veracity. He also interviewed her lawyers repeatedly. Carter on the other hand tells us that Sheehi is a personal friend who “plays wonderfully with my young children.” Well, surely that clinches the argument - doesn’t it?

Carter smears our carefully researched critique of Sheehi by imputing guilt by association, citing the loathsome, racist, homophobic far right provocateur Christopher Rufo and his allies. Nelson was president of the Association of University Professors (AAUP) from 2006-2012. So, Carter asks “What are we to make of the Association’s erstwhile president building his own arguments in this article atop the rhetorical infrastructure created by fascists to take down teachers?” Far from sharing Rufo’s anti-Black history, Nelson has been a champion of anti-racist causes, joining the 1963 March on Washington, serving as an assistant teacher in a public school in Harlem in 1965, supporting Black student initiatives in college, advocating for affirmative action as a faculty member, researching and writing about African American poets for decades and promoting their work in various anthologies he edited. He has repeatedly written confirming structural racism in the US. But that does not prevent him from opposing the anti-therapeutic CSJT practice of replacing patient’s personal and family histories with impersonal, preconceived generalizations about social forces. Patients deserve individualized treatment from psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts whatever their race. Far right disavowals of American racism have no place and no use in responsible critiques of CSJT.

The damage CSJT-oriented psychotherapists may do stems from prioritizing the theory of racial enactments in their work. That is the core of the Holmes report that we discuss in our essay. Racial enactments are involuntary expressions of unconscious structural racism. The Holmes report considers them universal in American psychology. Because they are involuntary and unconscious, they cannot be disputed. They amount to a politicized imposition of a judgement of racism that patients – and colleagues! - cannot escape. Viewing all psychic life through that lens simultaneously trivializes and exaggerates the presence of racism in American life. That is no small but regrettable accomplishment in a country for which racism is the primary, abiding, and unresolved social wound.

Carter final assault on us is that we are apparently—unwittingly or not—allied with international fascism. Added to that are echoes of Sheehi’s repeated insistence that she is being personally attacked because she is an Arab woman. The editors of *Free Associations* have “allowed” us to “get away with” a campaign “to harangue and pillory a prominent woman of color.” This despite the fact that unlike every other defense of Sheehi that we know of, all of which dismiss her tweets as trivial or of no academic interest, Carter actually insists on their importance, declaring that they “are obviously

critical statements about structural issues such as ideology, state formation, and state violence.” For us, Sheehi’s relentlessly anti-Zionist and antisemitic tweets are of considerable interest and relevance because they represent the largest corpus of such posts we know of from *any* faculty member writing in English. Carter characterizes all this as “quite ordinary scholarly activity” that we falsely see as “emotional, violent, alarming” despite the repetitive and obsessive profanity of her tweets. Over a thousand of them incorporate variations of “Fuck,” sometimes with twenty or more *in a single tweet*.

When all else fails, Carter resorts to childish insults. “Burston and Nelson are completely ignorant in this area and have no idea what they are talking about.” We have composed a “slovenly hit job on a respected colleague.” We are “moribund academics, serving as mouthpieces for fascist disinformation.” He even says that “This journal’s editors have published us because they are “clout-chasing useful idiots who are committing a kind of academic arson for their own narrow professional advantage.” In light of the errors, omissions and distortions that accompany it, his vehement accusation against the editors of *Free Associations* represents its own version of academic arson and amounts to a clear case of projection. Carter asks “How on earth did anything of this nature make it into a psychoanalytic journal that supposedly engages in peer review?” Because the editors felt honor bound to give space to as fierce a critique as anyone could muster. And because, as we suggested at the outset, over-the-top rejoinders to our essay reveal the true character of the debates roiling psychoanalysis today.

Finally, in his effort to discredit us, Carter engages in a clever smear tactic against Burston, citing some scathing remarks about his teaching from “ratemyprofessors.com”. He appears to waver on whether or not to give these appraisals credence, while insinuating that perhaps we really ought to, given the absence of any positive appraisals of his teaching on that frivolous website. That being so, we hasten to point out that students who post on ratemyprofessors.com are almost invariably the undergrads who are the most aggrieved, entitled and disappointed by their own poor performance (and the grades they receive accordingly). One such student wrote: “This is the worst professor I have ever had at Duquesne [. . .] he unprofessionally professes his political beliefs that have nothing to do with class[.]”

Before his recent retirement, Burston taught psychology at Duquesne University for 31 years and chaired the Psychology Department there for 6 years. To put this remark in context, Burston often taught sophomores about the social and political roots and ramifications of humanistic, existential and psychoanalytic psychology, elucidating their attitudes toward racism, sexism, authoritarianism, consumerism and climate change, and the ways that these social pathologies inhibit the growth of conscience and a critical faculty in the general population. He made no secret of his disapproval of candidate-then-President Trump and MAGA Republicans, his support for trade unions, his fears for the planet and the future of American democracy –what little is left of it, anyway. Naturally, his candor on these matters alienated students like this one. And there was no shortage of students like these in his classes. Does that mean that his conduct was “unprofessional” or that these issues have “nothing to do with the class”?

Only if you think that politics and psychology should be divorced from one another, or that he should have stayed silent on these matters.

Meanwhile, by contrast with students like this, students who feel they have benefited substantially from time spent with their professor usually communicate their feelings to them personally, and Burston has received many such letters of thanks and commendation from students over the years. Among them are letters from former Ph.D. students whose dissertations he supervised, including the President of one of the oldest (and largest) psychoanalytic institutes in the USA, the secretary of a regional psychoanalytic association in the American South, a Full Professor at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, a Director of an R1 university's counseling center, and numerous analysts and psychotherapists in private practice around the country. Finally, Burston has made no secret of his pedagogical philosophy, which is summed up in an essay entitled "Tradition, Authority and the Postmodern University" (Burston, 2018a). We advise readers to check this out before reaching any conclusions about Burston's teaching ability or his political views.

### *Reply to Martin Kemp*

Martin Kemp is a career anti-Zionist who uses this occasion to launch an extended complaint both about Israeli policies and the cultural and political impact of Zionism more broadly. One of us, Cary Nelson, has written or edited six books about the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and because Kemp misrepresents Nelson's work on this subject, ignoring publications that contradict the portrait he wants to paint, we will point out what work he ignores. This is not the place to debate the history of Israel, but we should also note that Carter acknowledges he had the opportunity to read Kemp's essay. It is thus not clear which of them first expressed the factual errors they share in common. In any case, those points are already addressed in our comments about Carter.

Like Carter, Kemp finds his own hyperbolic voice at several points: "Burston and Nelson invite the psychoanalytic community to feel existentially threatened by a tribe who, they suggest, have donned civilised garb the better to lure their intended victims into a lethal trap"; "the spectre of powerful alien subversives allows our authors to pose as underdogs fighting oppression"; "Burston and Nelson's piece, a combination of self-referential opinion, unreferenced assertions, quotes taken out of context, and so on, that does not warrant the expense of effort necessary to address in detail"; "In 'Under Siege', Burston and Nelson attempt to press this delusional and racist apparatus within and upon psychoanalysis, and it is this that constitutes a threat to the integrity of our professional life."; "'Under Siege' uses it [opposition to CSJT] . . . to press the normalisation of white supremacism, apartheid and settler colonialism, a project—to my mind—truly antithetical to the ethical foundations of psychoanalysis."

These statements amount to nothing more than vulgar slander. There is no reason to defend ourselves against them. But we do need to distance ourselves from what he satirizes as the movement (his caps) to "MAKE PSYCHIATRY GREAT AGAIN!" presumably "by reinstating an impermeable barrier between an (acceptable) focus on

psychic phenomena generated within the nuclear family and face-to-face relationships, and an (unacceptable) extension of interest into the psychic implications of meanings, about self and other, that originates in the milieu within which nuclear families exist. . .” In truth, however, Burston is a vigorous and outspoken critic of psychiatry, and has been ever since his second book, *The Wing of Madness: The Life and Work of R.D. Laing* was published. He has a long list of publications along these lines to his credit (e.g. Burston, 1996; Burston, 2010; Burston, 2018b).

Clearly, Kemp’s strategy is to identify an intellectual or political movement he despises, caricature it, and then declare that we are wedded to it. Thus, he proclaims that for all Zionists “the Palestinians have been rendered not only superfluous, but toxic, made into ‘terrorists’, who can be disposed of at will, without consequences.” But Zionists like Nelson and Burston have argued for Palestinian rights, consider the dual legal system on the West Bank unacceptable, and have worked to make the two-state solution practical and plausible. *Israel Denial* includes Nelson’s proposal to increase the West Bank area the Palestinian Authority controls as a step toward a Palestinian state. Nelson has published and regularly updated a fifty-step program to achieve that goal. The most recent version, “A Reconciliation Roadmap,” with sections on “Improving West Bank Palestinians’ Lives” and “What the People of Gaza Need Now,” appears in his 2021 coedited book *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. No matter. For Kemp, Nelson has a “career as an anti-Palestinian activist.” Kemp just cannot imagine someone simultaneously opposing anti-Zionism and endorsing Palestinian rights.

That failure prompts Kemp to declare that “Nelson and his colleagues take up their pens to exclude awareness of Zionism and its consequences” and “to ensure that civil society remains unconscious of social reality, unable to form meaningful moral assessments of human experience, trapping many in an unknowing collusion with social evil.” But Nelson is active in debating these issues, a process that inevitably exposes people to different points of view and thus inherently cannot “exclude awareness of Zionism.”

The tenuous connections informing Kemp’s conspiracist thinking surface soon enough. In July 2023 Israeli forces blocked access to several Palestinian wells near Hebron by capping them with concrete. It was one more unwarranted cruelty growing out of the Occupation. But Kemp depicts it as a contemporary “poisoning of the wells,” invoking the 14th century accusation against European Jews that flourished during the Bubonic plagues. Except now the poisonous Jewish conspiracy is presumed to be real, not imaginary. And this time, apparently, antisemitism is completely warranted. The Zionist “lobby operates by poisoning the wells upon which a healthy academic and intellectual life depend.” And that finally brings him around to our essay. Capping the wells near Hebron is very much like the poisonous impact of “Under Siege”: “An understanding of what lies behind such ghastly acts is essential to appreciating the true nature of ‘Under Siege.’”

Kemp continues “When it took shape in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe”—yes, even then, from the outset, at its birth—Zionism “envisaged transforming a land . . . into a

racially-exclusive State for European Jews.” This is a slander, an antisemitic declaration, not a responsible summary of the politically and ideologically diverse Zionist movement of yesteryear. It does align with some rightwing Zionist views today, but hardly addresses the views of the international Zionist peace movement or other Zionist liberals and humanists. Kemp makes this claim while examining “the question of whether it is actually outrageous to contemplate the Zionist movement through the prism of psychopathology.” He uses this lie to defend Sheehi’s assertion that Zionism is a form of mental illness.

Kemp disparages “the fantastical assertion that Sheehi’s ideas would result in discrimination against Jewish trainees.” Has he forgotten that the legal complaint filed with the Office of Civil Rights of the US Department of Education against George Washington University documents exactly a claim of discrimination against Sheehi’s students. They are trainees in GWU’s Professional Psychology Program. It was filed by StandWithUs on behalf of Sheehi’s students. It is under OCR investigation now. The case file includes Nelson’s *Fathom* essay. The students face explicit professional damage that is anything but fantastical.

Kemp characterizes both our work on Sheehi and our critique of CSJT as efforts to “silence” those whose positions we analyze or debate. But academic analysis, debate, and disagreement are a fundamental part of the search for the truth. Sadly, it is a common practice in the BDS movement to construe disagreement with their claims and policies as attempts to “silence” them. BDS student allies who adopt this fraudulent rhetoric are learning the wrong lesson about how the academy advances knowledge. Kemp reports that some Jewish faculty members share Sheehi’s views; they “are not represented by the likes of Burstson and Nelson, who would silence them too.” To be clear: we have not silenced *anyone* who is part of this debate, nor are we attempting to do so now.

Kemp contributes what amounts to a fantasy account of the silencing phenomenon:

when the Zionist lobby has chosen a target, the world re-arranges itself accordingly: invitations are withdrawn, offered awards are abruptly withheld, universities discipline their staff and alter their curricula, publishers pulp their books, political parties expel their members, bookings are cancelled, great operas go unperformed, venues become inaccessible, children’s paintings are hidden away, friends remain silent.

Oh dear! This would be a good script for a collage in a science fiction film. But it’s difficult to document all this in reality.

Claims about an all-powerful Zionist lobby are a major feature of contemporary antisemitism. The supposedly sinister “Zionist entity” is paired with the devious “Zionist lobby” in the anti-Zionist imagination. Like Carter, Kemp’s sees our analysis of Sheehi’s publications and social media posts not as a fair critique of a radical anti-Zionist faculty member whose utterances cross the line into antisemitism but as an unethical assault on a heroic figure speaking truth to power. For Carter, this is part of a broad “anti-

intellectual objective of narrowing and policing public discourse.” Readers must decide for themselves whether our work merits such a shrill and dismissive appraisal.

### *Coda*

We received the set of six responses to our essay on October 8, 2023, as we read reports of 1,300 Israelis who were brutally slaughtered in their homes, on the highways, and at a dance festival by Hamas the previous day. Thousands more were grievously injured, and more than 100 were kidnapped. The stunning depravity which the world witnessed on October 7, 2023 gives new meaning to Sheehi’s very public support for Hamas, along with that of other faculty who have honored, applauded, or endorsed this Islamist group. On May 22, 2021, she tweeted: "If you see this and STILL entertain for even a split second that Hamas is a terrorist entity, there is literally zero hope for you, your soul, or your general existence as an ethical human being in this world." In light of Hamas’ gruesome atrocities, it would have been more fitting had she written: "If you see this and STILL entertain for even a split second that Hamas is *not* a terrorist entity, there is literally zero hope for you, your soul, or your general existence as an ethical human being . . ."

The most famous US faculty member statement supporting Hamas is that by Berkeley’s Judith Butler, who argued that “understanding Hamas, Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the Left, that are part of a global Left, is extremely important” because they oppose colonialism and imperialism. Butler condemned Hamas ‘s October violence in the *London Review of Books* a few days later but specified that it had to be understood in context. She calls it “a terrifying and revolting massacre,” but does not dwell on characterizing it further. She had nothing so say about her fundamentally immoral earlier remarks, immoral because of Hamas’s genocidal charter and because it had already targeted innocent civilians for death.

Meanwhile, Sheehi has been active on Instagram, where she posts as psychoanalystactivist, in the week since the October Hamas murder spree. Often she signals that she likes posts contesting reports of Hamas violence. She complained that “there wasn’t a single image of one of the supposed beheaded babies, no images of them when they were alive, no names nor ages, and no parents family members or came forward to say their child had been beheaded.” She decries “the claims of mass rape used to siphon off support from the Palestinian resistance.” She also declared her support for George Washington U’s Students for Justice in Palestine chapter and castigated GWU’s president Cranberg: “How dare you, Ellen Cranberg. How dare you call our mourning a ‘celebration of terrorism.’ How dare you slander the names of our martyrs as terrorists.”

Readers who have come this far may appreciate how demoralizing it was for us to debate critics whose fierce eloquence and ad hominem attacks afforded them a flimsy excuse to avoid engaging constructively with many of the issues that we raised; an eloquence that, for all its outrage and relentless provocations, covers up serious scholarly errors, omissions and distortions, some of which are tinged with antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories. This kind of rhetoric impresses people who are impressionable or poorly informed; cheerleaders for CSJT who don’t care if what our critics say is true or

fair, so long as their champions make the right gestures and all the right noises. And needless to say, this state of affairs is a sad reflection on the breathtaking incompetence, frequent incoherence and sheer malice that passes for scholarship in many Left-wing circles nowadays. It erodes our admittedly faint hope that anything like a real dialogue between more traditional analysts and adherents of CSJT will ever take place. If it does, it will be despite the efforts of critics like these, and not because of them. Meanwhile, those who dare to go out on a limb and enter this arena must be prepared to endure similar treatment when they speak out. But speak out we must. There is no alternative. The stakes are high, and time is not on our side.

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