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What happens to our hearts when we are encased in a field of malevolence and hatred that daily threatens our stability and peace?

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I have been thinking about fascism long before I even knew I was thinking about it. I lived for years inside the mind, the home, the terror of my tyrannical father who used violence as the methodology to sustain his power over every aspect of our existence. In order to achieve that power he separated and divided us. He isolated us, used us against each other and made us lonely.

Hannah Arendt wrote about loneliness in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951: “What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience.”

In 2023, the US surgeon general **declared** that loneliness was the most serious mental health crisis facing Americans. This **loneliness** is a form of existential dislocation. It creates persistent anxiety, depression, depersonalization and distrust. It is not unlike an ongoing, low-level collective panic attack. A constant buzzing of unrest. Enemies are lurking everywhere. The ecosystem in which we live, the culture feels poisoned and uninviting. We no longer recognize the world as our world. We become withdrawn, estranged, feeling helpless and abandoned. Mainly all our time and energy is spent protecting ourselves, proving we have a right to be here, living defensively. It occupies our attention, our creativity. It's exhausting.

I think of what Toni Morrison wrote of racism: “The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.”

I wonder what is the specific psychological impact of [Project 2025](#) – of knowing there are fascist forces who openly and proudly devised a 920-page “policy bible” meant to undo every hard-earned right, every safeguard that protects women, African Americans, workers, elderly, the infirm, LGBTQ+ folks, immigrants, Muslims – essentially everyone.

What happens to our hearts and our capacity for connection and trust when we are encased in a field of malevolence and hatred which daily threatens our stability and peace? To know people mean to harm us, that they have no shame putting that desire on paper. What does this do to our psyches? How do our bodies process such hate, violence and cruelty? Who do we have to become in order to survive?

Indigenous people and Black people have lived for hundreds of years in this landscape of precarity, capture, terror and violence. Now we are in late-stage patriarchy, where autocrats are being born and bred at the speed of light; where workers’ rights are being dismantled and child labor laws are weakened; where diversity, equity and inclusion and critical race theory programs that protected civil rights are being annihilated; [books banned](#) and history erased; where genocide is an acceptable practice to maintain domination; where rape is celebrated and bragged about as a form of control; where women are being pushed back into the dark ages (the 50s) and all the regulations that protect the Earth, the air, the water are unraveled.

Fascism is a society-wide mental affliction. It’s in the culture, on the streets with Nazi gangs and raging men wrapped in American flags, in the new draconian laws passed by a rightwing [supreme court](#) denying voting rights or giving the president extreme powers. It’s in the outright lies being told by Trump scapegoating Black and brown immigrants, accusing them of crimes they never committed. On college campuses where [students are arrested](#) for protesting against the slaughter of women and children in Gaza. It’s in the [64,000 babies](#) born of rape last year in America because their mothers were denied abortions by states demanding more and more control over their bodies.

The antidote to fascism is consciousness and education, which is why they want to terminate the Department of Education. We must learn the nature of fascism, what it is, how it operates now in 2024. Then we must name and expose it, call out the oppression, the hate, the misogyny and racism as it is

happening. This can be terrifying, which is why we cannot do it alone. For so long our movements have been siloed and divided by hunger for scant resources, a feeling of powerlessness and invisibility, a hierarchy of suffering and a lack of vision and understanding that everything is interrelated and interdependent.

Community and solidarity are our most powerful tools to fight fascism. They create a safe context for us to share so we can know that what we are witnessing and experiencing is real. They catalyze our strength to refuse the forces unraveling our freedoms. They propel us to fight for another way where people are treated with dignity, justice, respect and care.

We have a vision of what 2025 should be like, too – it will be when we finally come together, united to end these forces of loneliness and hatred that have been dividing us all along.

- V is a playwright, author and founder of V-Day, the global movement to end violence against all women and girls and the earth and One Billion Rising. Her latest book *Reckoning* is just out in paperback. She guest edited this series on fascism.