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On False Equivalencies and Surviving Domination The NW Network

For many years, the NW Network has talked with our communities about “survivor’s use of violence.” As an organization by and for survivors, we knew this was a crucial silence to break and information our communities desperately needed.

People are often confused. They want to dismiss survivors who use physical force to survive as “mutual” actors in abuse. This idea asks less of people than recognizing the dynamics of abuse. It asks less than inviting survivors to come out of the shadows and stand in our full humanity—not as objectified victims, but as full, complex humans who want to survive and whose spark of self-determination, of human will, still smolders despite even the most egregious attempts to extinguish us.

As survivors of battering, rape, bias harassment and violence, police harassment and violence, and all manner of violations by the state, the advocates of the NW Network are all too familiar with people making false equivalencies between abusive acts of intimidation and domination, and attempts to survive that abuse. We see the devastating impact of this erasure within our private lives and in the public square. We know that survival under conditions of domination is as gritty as it is grace filled.

Daily, we talk with survivors who were calculatedly pushed to the breaking point and are now being buried under such false equivalencies. Abusive partners tell survivors, “Look, you’re just the same as me, no one will help you.” The state tells survivors, “The fact that you survived means you couldn’t have been in danger,” or “If you were really afraid, why were you even there in the first place?”

Such false equivalencies are another in a long list of insults to our humanity, of the willful refusal to understand the dynamics of domination and to stand with people fighting against organized attempts to dehumanize and annihilate them.

Of course, sometimes abuse can be subtle, and it can be legitimately hard for friends and family to discern what is happening. *And then sometimes it is the Ku Klux Klan and white nationalists and skin heads and Nazis calling for your annihilation, and the lines are pretty clear cut.*

This week, while neglecting to name Heather Heyer, the social justice activist who was slain by a white nationalist, President Trump stood before our nation and rationalized and asserted tenants of KKK, white nationalist, Neo-Nazi propaganda. *You are trying to change history*, he said. *You are trying to change culture.*

President Trump praised people who took up torches and marched through the streets of Charlottesville chanting violence against Black, Jewish and queer and trans people, calling them “very fine people.” He purposefully and repeatedly insisted that explicitly racist, anti-Jewish, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic actions taken to intimidate and violate communities were the same as actions taken to defend those communities.

The NW Network will continue to stand with survivors in their full humanity. We will not turn away when survivors defend themselves with force.

We take courage from, lift up and stand with the work of [Survived and Punished](#)—a group that organizes to free “survivors of domestic and sexual violence whose survival actions have been criminalized. Some are still in prison, some are confined to their homes, some are languishing in immigration detention, and some live with the threat of incarceration or deportation at any moment. Some did not make it out of prison alive.”

Our hearts go out to Heather Heyer’s parents, family and comrades and to the Black, Jewish, queer and trans and activist communities of Charlottesville.

And for every survivor who was told “there is blame on all sides,” we see you. We see the lie for what it is, and we are here for you.

Call us if you need us.