SITTING ON A SUITCASE

Psychoanalytic Stories

Edited by

Halina Brunning and Olya Khaleelee

KARNAC

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To Our Forebears

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Acknowledgements

We are deeply indebted to Kate Pearce and her staff at Karnac for supporting the idea behind this book, which was conceived and produced during one of the most unexpected and dangerous times in the contemporary history of the Jewish people worldwide. *Sitting on a Suitcase* was chosen as a symbolic title of that struggle to survive, which came much more to the fore during 2023/24.

Our deep thanks go to the eighteen authors, psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, and organisational consultants who shared their personal stories about the connection between being Jewish and their chosen profession, across generations of turmoil, attacks, abuse, and emigration, culminating on 7th October 2023, a date which will remain etched in history, but which took us all by surprise. Whilst working on the book, the two editors (HB and OK) did not know that the number eighteen is considered a special number in Jewish culture, because it is the numerical value of the Hebrew word "chai", meaning "life". We learned that at the same time as we were learning about the impact of 7th October.

We are especially grateful for our four book "containers", who we invited to offer a wider perspective on the suffering of those whose

families, or who themselves, suffered attacks and anti-Semitism during their lives, leading to a greater vigilance and anxiety about what might happen next and whether there is any safe place to be, or whether one should forever be ready with a suitcase.

Our thanks go to ex-Archbishop Rowan Williams for the Preface to our book, to Claudia Nagel for the opening chapter, which outlines the main issues addressed by the contributors, to Dorothee von Tippelskirch-Eissing for her closing chapter, and to Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg for the Epilogue.

For the book cover we selected an image entitled *Seated on a Suitcase* painted by Edvard Munch in 1913/15, which inspired everything related to this project.

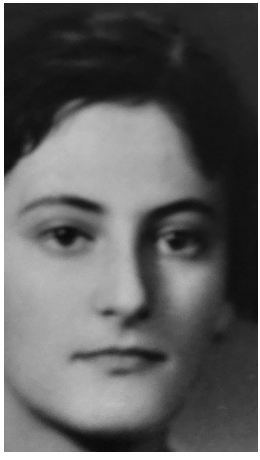
Once more, we thank Kate Pearce for ensuring that we could use that evocative image.

We also wish to thank all our future readers for wanting to know more and understand more about this sorrowful theme.

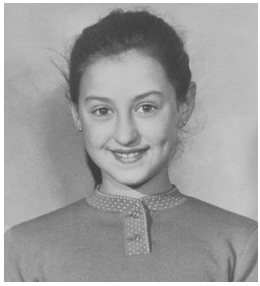
Halina Brunning and Olya Khaleelee
November 2024

About the editors and contributors

Editors



Halina Brunning is a chartered clinical psychologist, freelance organisational consultant, and executive coach. Halina has published extensively on clinical and organisational issues, and has edited several books for Karnac including *Executive Coaching: Systems-Psychodynamic Perspective* (2006). She conceived the idea of a trilogy of books which examined the contemporary world through a psychoanalytic lens: *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on a Turbulent World* (2010), *Psychoanalytic Reflections on a Changing World* (2012), and *Psychoanalytic Essays on Power and Vulnerability* (2014). This approach continued in her latest books co-written with Olya Khaleelee: *Danse Macabre and Other Stories: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Global Dynamics,* published by Phoenix Publishing House (2021), and *The Covid Trail: Psychodynamic Explorations* (2023). Halina is a member of OPUS and ISPSO.



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Contributors

Eliat Aram, PhD, CBAM, Dip. IoD is the TIHR CEO and trustee; chair of a mental health charity; chartered psychologist and psychotherapist; executive, leadership, and people developer; OD change consultant; educator, supervisor, and embodied inquirer. Her group relations career spans more than twenty years of conferences in the UK and abroad, across cultural and geographical boundaries. Eliat has shaped, influenced, and often directed the Tavistock Institute's flagship Leicester Conference since 2007. How we locate ourselves physically and psychically in our context and what informs us; why we do what we do and how we account for that, and how we author our experiences; exploring how to work in the unknown, in conditions of high turbulence, uncertainty, and ambiguity … these are lines of inquiry that matter to her. Working with the dynamic of shame as an integral part of any learning process has been her quest and the tenet of her evolving thinking over the decades of her practice.

Leslie B. Brissett has a lifelong interest in how organisations and groups function and has led non-profit, private, and public organisations in the UK and USA. He is currently the board secretary to the International Psychoanalytical Association. Previously, he worked for more than a decade at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations as a principal consultant and the company secretary. From 2017 to 2023 he was the Group Relations Programme director, consulting to conferences across the world. He has directed seven Leicester Conferences, including the first outside the UK in Bavaria during the Covid-19 pandemic. He considers group relations to be an "awakening" methodology. He has held various ministerial appointments in the judiciary, the NHS, and further and higher education boards. He chairs the board of Eggtooth, a charity in East Sussex, and sits on the management board of the journal *Socio-Analysis*, Australia. Leslie co-edited *Dynamics at Boardroom Level: A Tavistock Primer*, and has published widely.

Louisa Diana Brunner, PhD, is a leadership consultant and executive coach. She is an advanced practice lead and visiting lecturer at the Tavistock and Portman Professional Doctorate D10D. She is a member of GEN (Global Education Network) faculty and a fellow of the Family Firm Institute. She is a member of the Centre for Family Entrepreneurship and Ownership (CeFEO) Practitioners Network, at Jönköping University International Business School (Sweden). She has long-standing international experience in systemic-psychodynamic consultation and coaching and group relations. She is a founder and board member of PCCA (Partners in Confronting Collective Atrocities), an honorary member of Il Nodo Group (Italy), and a member of ISPSO, OFEK, and OPUS. She has published and presented extensively at international conferences.

Leila Djemal was born and raised in Thailand, her parents coming from Syria. She studied French with philosophy at University College London before starting her career in the advertising industry, where she worked at leading agencies in London, Bangkok, and Tel Aviv. In 2001 she moved to New York for postgraduate studies in organisational psychology at Columbia University and the William Alanson White Psychoanalytic Institute. Since then, she has worked in organisation and leadership development. Today, Leila is a Tel Aviv-based organisational consultant and executive coach. She is a founding past co-director of Touch OFEK Professional Development where she also teaches. She is a board member of PCCA, past board member of OFEK, Israel, associate of the A. K. Rice Institute, USA, and member of OPUS, London. She has directed group relations conferences and participates as a member of staff teams in Europe, UK, and USA. Leila continues to travel frequently and remains fascinated by issues of culture, language, and identity.

Shmuel Erlich is a training and supervising analyst and former president of the Israel Psychoanalytic Society. He was Sigmund Freud Professor of Psychoanalysis and director of the Sigmund Freud Center at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the recipient of the Sigourney Award for outstanding contributions to psychoanalysis. He held various positions in the IPA, among them board representative, chair of the Education Committee, and chair of the Institutional Issues Committee. He is a founding member of OFEK—the Israel Association for the Study of Group and Organizational Processes, and PCCA—Partners in Confronting Collective Atrocities. He has published on adolescence, on experiential dimensions of object relations, and on group and organisational dynamics, which is the subject of two of his books: *Fed with Tears—Poisoned with Milk: The Nazareth Group-Relations Conferences: Germans and Israelis—The Past in the Present*; and *The Couch in the Marketplace: Psychoanalysis and Social Reality*.

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Franca Fubini lives in Italy and works as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, group analyst, supervisor, and organisational consultant. She is a lecturer at Rome, Perugia, and L'Aquila universities in the field of psychology and human resources, and a senior fellow of University College London (UCL). She is an organisational consultant in the public health system as well as in the private and educational sectors, and a member, consultant, and director of international group relations conferences. She has worked with Gordon Lawrence since the 1990s. With Lawrence and Baglioni, she introduced and developed social dreaming in Italy and delivered the first training for hosting social dreaming programmes (2006 and 2008). She is chair of Social Dreaming international Network (SDiN), and has designed and directed three international editions of the SDiN one-year training and is preparing the fourth edition. Franca has contributed to the creation of "Blossoming in Europe",

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Stan Gold, MB.BS (Melbourne) 1957, DPM (London) 1961, FRANZCP 1972, MRCP. UK(Psych) 1975, graduated in medicine in 1957, and then undertook training in psychiatry at Guy's/Maudsley hospitals, London. Between 1979 and 1981 he was the overseas senior registrar in psychotherapy at the Cassell Hospital (a therapeutic community), Richmond, Surrey. He was subsequently an associate psychiatrist at the Royal Children's Hospital and senior consultant psychiatrist at Prince Henry's hospital, Melbourne. While there he developed the Post Graduate Diploma in Mental Health for members of the teaching professions. Clinically he has trained and carried out private practice in individual and group psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in Australia, until June 2014. He was appointed a training analyst in 1982. Stan was president of ISPSO and is an international consultant to the (international) *Journal of Organisational and Social Dynamics*. He is currently a member of the Mental Health Tribunal (Victoria), emphasising the protection of human rights for individuals on compulsory treatment orders under the Mental Health Act. He has published thirty-five papers covering child development, research, and behaviour; racism and related topics, and sociodynamic analysis. He has had two books published: *How to Bring Up Your Parents* (Macmillan, 1990) and *Unthinkable Evil: Understanding Racism* (2nd edition, Amazon, 2021).

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He is the founder and director of Dynamics of Consulting, a programme, sponsored by CFAR, for seasoned coaches and consultants. Larry has written five books, among them *The Workplace Within*, *Reworking Authority*, and *Beyond Mechanization*, all published by MIT Press. He won the 2008 Elliott Jaques award from the Society of Consulting Psychology for his article, "The fall of Howell Raines and the New York Times: A study in the psychodynamics of leadership". Larry is married to Marla Isaacs. They live in Philadelphia. They have one son, Daniel, and five grandchildren. lhirschhorn@cfar.com

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Mannie Sher, BA (Hons), AAPSW, TQAPsych, FBAP, PhD, considers that growing up in South Africa during the Apartheid years made him aware of the deep suffering caused by totalitarian regimes. His research consultancy and publishing career, therefore, has been a lifelong mission to improve the lives, the working conditions, and the well-being of people as individuals, in their work groups, and in their communities, and in places where they express their social, political, or faith selves. Consequently, at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, he manages a portfolio of organisational development and change assignments, focusing on the impact of thought on the dialectic relationship between social constructivism, the unconscious, and liberal democracy. He is also a practising psychoanalytical psychotherapist, hence he is interested in the causal determinants, both conscious and those that are hidden, in individuals, groups, organisations, and in global dynamics, and how these impact social systems. The Tavistock Institute and its social science and group relations methodologies have had a huge influence on his approaches to critical investigation and consultancy. He is married to a teacher trainer and consultant in primary school education and a soul-mate in group relations. They live in London, have three grown children, and a great clutch of grandchildren with whom they love spending their weekends and summers.

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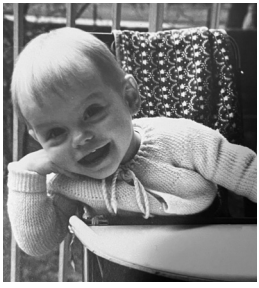
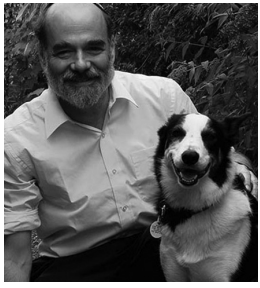


Dorothee C. von Tippelskirch-Eissing, Dr Phil, Dipl Psych, has studied Protestant theology and psychology. She works as a psychoanalyst in private practice in Berlin, Germany. She is supervisor and training analyst of the German Psychoanalytic Association (DPV) and the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA). In May 2023 she was elected as incoming president of the German Psychoanalytic Association (DPV/IPA). She is a member of the Karl-Abraham-Institute, Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute (BPI) and its former chairperson, and she is a member of the board of Partners in Confronting Collective Atrocities (PCCA) and its former chairperson. She has been nominated as a member of the Institutional Issues Committee (IIC) of the IPA.

Rowan Williams was born in Swansea and studied theology at Cambridge and Oxford, where he wrote a doctorate on modern Russian religious thought. After several years of university teaching and pastoral work, he was elected Bishop of Monmouth in 1992, later becoming Archbishop of Wales in 1999, and Archbishop of Canterbury in 2002. On retirement as head of the Anglican Church, he was master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, from 2013 to 2020, and chair of the trustees of Christian

Aid from 2013 to 2021. He is now living back in Wales, where he chairs the Wales Peace Academy, and was until recently co-chair of the independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales. He has written widely on theology, literature, spirituality, and current affairs, and has published several collections of poetry.



Jonathan Wittenberg's parents were both refugees from Nazi Germany. His mother's father, Georg Salzberger, served as a rabbi in Frankfurt-am-Main from 1910 until he was able to flee Germany in 1939. This, and the rabbinical tradition on his father's side of the family, had a profound influence on Jonathan, who trained for the rabbinate at Leo Baeck College in London, and in Israel. He has been rabbi of the New North London Masorti Synagogue for more than thirty-five years, and senior rabbi of the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues UK since 2008. He is deeply involved in supporting refugees, as well as in climate activism as a co-founder of EcoJudaism. His publications include *The Eternal Journey: Meditations on the Jewish Year* (2001); *The Silence of Dark Water: An Inner Journey* (2008); *My Dear Ones: One Family and The Final Solution* (2016); and *Listening for God in Torah and Creation* (2023). He is married to Nicola Solomon; they have three children.

Preface

Rowan Williams

A few years ago, a group of mostly Cambridge-based academics organised a conference under the title "Migrant Knowledge". It was designed not only to share conventional academic papers on the art and literature around migrant experience, but to give some space to the voices and agency of actual migrants—in live music, drama, memoir, even cookery. The book that developed from this conference (Din-Kariuki et al., 2024) includes a section with photographic images of objects that migrants had brought with them to embody the memory of homes they had left or been forced to leave. The title of the conference was meant to suggest that the displaced person knows things that others do not—but it also hinted that there is something about human knowledge itself that is mobile or unsettled. Things go dangerously wrong in human cultures when locally rooted identities become the sole criteria for truth; when being *here* and being *right* (or virtuous or innocent) are inseparably bound together.

Because it is that fusion of being here and being right that generates the persecution of the stranger; when ethnic, religious, linguistic, historical forms of belonging are weaponised against those inside and outside the frontier so as to justify exclusion and, at worst, attempted

extermination. Ultimately it is a fusion of being here and being *human* that comes into play, licensing a rhetoric that treats the stranger as less than human.

Ever since there has been a Jewish literature and a Jewish collective identity, the Jewish people have represented a deeply strange and paradoxical phenomenon: an identity constantly connected with the experience of displacement. From Abraham's journey away from Babylonia to the Asian seaboard of the Mediterranean, to the repeated narratives of exile and return in Hebrew scripture, to the millennia of life in diaspora, Jews have characteristically found the heart of their identity in a consistent sense of presence, pressure, calling, that is more than mere local belonging. The role of the land, *Eretz Yisrael*, in Jewish reflection is not that of a simple guarantor of unshakeable continuity in race and culture, but something more like the haunting promise of a home in the light of which all immediately available forms of human location and belonging are put into new and critical perspective.

Hence the millennia-long availability of Jews as scapegoats in societies obsessed with defending their identity against any such relativising perspectives; hence the poisonous mythology of Jews as enemies within, agents of sinister subversion against the unquestionable authority of being here and being right, a "cosmopolitan" presence whose loyalty to the rightness of being here can never be taken for granted. From one point of view, the goal of the Shoah was to eradicate once and for all the possibility of any kind of belonging that stepped aside from the absolute right and righteousness of being here, the self-evident goodness and blessedness of belonging to a race and a cultural history and a historic territory. The deep mystical and mythical sense of being grounded in a place beyond language and argument, negotiation and challenge, the passionate urge to root oneself in a place beyond all challenge, is the exact opposite of the way in which Jewish identity has been imagined. Those who simply credit Jewish "exceptionalism" with giving birth to modern nationalistic ideologies have not read the texts which embody that Jewish imagination. Those who (from mediaeval to modern times, from Bede's Anglo-Saxons to Putin's Russians) have borrowed the language of a chosen people with a unique vocation in the world have not registered precisely how the Jewish imagining of

"chosenness" involves a valuation of "migrant knowledge", a wisdom only available to those who have lived through displacement.

Even to express it in terms like this, though, is excruciatingly inadequate to the specific experience of violent displacement that this book sets out. It is all too tempting, especially for an outsider, to moralise and generalise a history whose extreme atrocity refuses to be contained in any tidy moral or spiritual framework. Perhaps the most that can be said is that it is just this extremity that speaks most powerfully to question our "non-migrant" forms of knowledge, the myths of self-evidently right and righteous identities—ethnic, religious, cultural—to which we still turn compulsively in our ever more tribalised world (with the ultimate irony of a section of the Israeli right adopting some of the dehumanising rhetoric of anti-Jewish nationalisms). These narratives of radical displacement arising from the most naked and lethal expression in European history of racial mythology and totalising political authority carry a very different kind of authority, encouraging us to ask the hard questions about how we understand our "belonging", and how ready we are to reimagine our systems of knowledge as linked to the crossing of boundaries and the letting-go of the passion to be right/righteous. Knowing the truth that will set us free—in the resonant phrase of Christian scripture—means the willingness to find our roots and our security in a depth of reality beyond the exclusively individual and local; to discover how the migrant experience enlarges how and what we know. At the most intense and unconsoled level, testimony to the unhealable loss narrated in the terrible story of mid-twentieth-century Europe warns us never to ignore what is known by the abused, excluded, and displaced—even where that knowledge goes on defying and resisting system, explanation, and mental peace, and can only be shown in countless acts of telling, the acts that fill these pages.

Reference

Din-Kariuki, N., Mukherji, S., & Williams, R. (Eds.) (2024). *Crossings: Migrant Knowledge, Migrant Forms*. Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books.

Prologue

Halina Brunning and Olya Khaleelee

The idea behind this book was to explore with colleagues the relationship between their choice of profession and their connection to being Jewish. The lives of minorities are a subject of discussion in a wider societal context, such as in the Black Lives Matter movement related to racism, but seldom, if ever, are the lives of Jewish people discussed within this framework.

Yet being Jewish gives rise to religious, geographic, ethnic, and generational sources of pain and even more so in the light of rising anti-Semitism in the world today. Life has never been straightforward in terms of being Jewish, emigration is always on the cards. Cultures vary in how free Jewish people feel about discussing their ethnicity, especially currently, some more so, some less so, the latter mainly due to fear of persecution by fellow citizens.

Assimilation is often erroneously seen as the way to protect one's Jewish identity. Jewish identity is therefore often hidden behind national identities, yet even this does not guarantee one's safety. This raises the question of where safety is located, if anywhere. Therefore, the suitcase was and is always in our minds.

These were the themes we wanted to explore, yet events initiated through the attack by Hamas on the kibbutzim in southern Israel on October 7, 2023 and the resulting war in Gaza, made these explorations more complicated, urgent, and even dangerous. Most of the book had already been created when the war broke out, but nevertheless it inevitably affected the content and the contributors.

To create this book, we invited sixteen colleagues, known to us personally as psychologists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, and organisational consultants, to share how they managed their Jewish identities in relation to their professional development, while living with the impact of their personal and familial stories of persecution, carrying the burden of second-generation trauma. How did being Jewish unconsciously impact on their personal and professional choices and development? We asked them to think about what their forebears escaped from, or what they themselves escaped from. How had they integrated the different aspects of themselves within the different countries and cultures in which they found themselves? And what would their legacy be? We, the editors, were and are part of this process and have contributed our own stories, making eighteen in all, thereby—as told to us later by one of our contributors—unconsciously choosing the number that in Hebrew represents life: Chai!

While planning the book we had a dilemma: should the book be called "Sitting on the suitcase", or "Sitting on a suitcase". The title we chose indicated the sorrowful realisation that one might be forced to sit on more than one suitcase during one's lifetime, therefore, sitting on *the* suitcase would have been slightly too optimistic … We felt that "sitting on *a* suitcase" was, in effect, a permanent state of mind.

This book, beautifully illustrated by the image we chose for the book cover, that of a painting entitled *Seated on a Suitcase* by Edvard Munch, links all aspects into a meaningful tapestry.

As our contributors have engaged with the work and have discussed the inherent difficulties, we are now aware that none of the processes involved in the creation of the book, such as the development of the structure, the invitation sent to contributors, the processing of their chapters, and the overall commentary from the introduction and the conclusion by the "psychic container", had been pain-free. Nothing was neutral, everything was meaningful.

For example, even our invitation letter to contributors led to a discussion about whether we should write to them individually, or collectively with the same letter. One editor wanted an individual communication "because I didn't want to herd the contributors together into a camp" while the other did not feel strongly about this.

We had not realised, when inviting contributions to this book, how much trauma would be (re)created by filling a small suitcase of approximately 3,800 words. Several of our contributors contacted us to share feeling blocked, or even traumatised, when trying to release themselves from the pain of revisiting their pasts, so that they would be able to put pen to paper again. Towards the deadline, one contributor actually withdrew, unable to cope with the disturbance of dealing with the material at the same time as being recently bereaved. We, therefore, late in the process, invited an additional contributor, perhaps because we wanted to hold on to the agreed format of our book and maintain its lifespan and life force.

For those contributors who sent in their chapters well before the deadline, it was interesting just how many then wanted to alter or amend particular aspects, something that clearly had deep psychological meaning for them. Each wanted to change, correct, and amend the smallest details in their chapter; this became a pattern, everything had to be absolutely right. What did this mean as a re-enactment, we wondered? We felt that it had to be of psychological significance since details about family members during WWII were of vital importance for survival and could save or end lives. Another association led us to consider the doing and the undoing of life, a multitude of interpretations were possible …

The book promises to be internally linked in various ways while the chapters differ a great deal in style, atmosphere, and affect. Some are crisply written with little emotion, others are powerfully emotional, and yet others are so penetrating they make for tearful and disturbing reading.

There were themes between the contributors, such as issues around having a voice, or finding a voice during formative years, or finding a family via a substitute group which would otherwise have been a friendship group; or a sense of not belonging because of the constant move between different countries, or a sense of finding a belonging through familial and non-familial relations.

Even though the majority or our authors mention the suitcase, there are many different suitcases, stuffed with different things, most of them painful. The suitcase is therefore a miniaturised "containing object" which, when opened, holds many traumatic memories, or when ripped from you becomes a double trauma.

No wonder that so many of our authors became psychologists, therapists, psychoanalysts, and organisational consultants, all devoted to providing a containing "object" which plays such an important role in the process of repair of the "Other". In this way we unconsciously tried to repair our transgenerationally traumatised selves.

Let us mention those writing the Introduction and Conclusions. Both are German, non-Jewish, female psychoanalysts providing a meta-container that represents the capacity to understand the Jewish experience. We are deeply grateful to Professor Claudia Nagel and Dr Dorothee von Tippelskirch-Eissing for undertaking this difficult emotional task of reading, reflecting, and deeply understanding each suitcase owner, as well as the eighteen contributors as a group.

We wanted additionally to mention and thank the writers of the Preface and the Epilogue: the Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Dr Rowan Williams and Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg. They came to the book later in the process as a way of providing societal containment for the contents. We are extremely grateful to both for taking up this role.

Finally, this project resulted in a particular unexpected gift from and for the mostly elderly contributors, as it gave them an opportunity, by reflecting on the meaning of their Jewish heritage for their personal and professional development and taking the risk of writing it down, to leave a legacy for the next generation, including their own children and grandchildren.

We are grateful to all the contributors for their courage and capacity to put this impossible material into a readable story.

Our very special appreciation goes to our dear publisher, Kate Pearce of Karnac, who kept us safe, secure, and supported during the twelve-month gestation.