BOOK REVIEW

Pattrice Jones (2007) *Aftershock: Confronting Trauma in a Violent World: A Guide for Activists and their Allies*, New York: Lantern

Reviewed by Lisa Kemmerer

> …we are animals, and aren't able to decide not to have feelings. Just like the earth, we are going to quake if sufficiently shaken. We don't get to choose whether or not traumatic events will damage our psychic infrastructure. Like twisted bridges, injured psyches may not be stable or safe and certainly can't be trusted to get us where we need to go. Aftershocked activists who are loath to look after their own feelings for fear of selfishness may need to be helped to see self-maintenance as a necessary chore rather than an act of self-indulgence. (2007: 94)

Merriam-Webster and Cambridge Dictionaries define "aftershock" in the following ways, respectively:

> 1 **:** a minor shock following the main shock of an earthquake
> 2 **:** an aftereffect of a distressing or traumatic event (Merriam-Webster)
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> 1: sudden movement of the Earth's surface which often follows an earthquake and which is less violent than the first main movement (Cambridge)

In *Aftershock*, Pattrice Jones applies this geological term to describe "the reverberations of traumatic events endured by activists" (2007: 65). She quotes Wickipedia to explain her use of this term: "Aftershocks are dangerous because they are usually unpredictable, can be of a large magnitude, and can collapse buildings that are damaged from the mainshock" (2007: 65). Similarly, activist aftershock "can leave people feeling like they are in ruins" (2007: 65).

Pattrice Jones is a gay vegan social activist and psychotherapist, with all the right background to explore the psychological affects of animal and eco activism. She notes

how those who see violence entrenched in our way of life, and in our paradigms, are affected by this understanding. Focusing on animal and earth liberationists, Jones suggests ways that activists might protect themselves against some of these psychological traumas.

Aftershock begins with the basics: we are animals (2007: 14). Yet our language, religions, and culture in general tend to deny this basic truth. And this, Jones notes, is the root of "the most catastrophic problems facing our planet, as well as the most oppressive processes among people, are all related in some way to the denial of human animality" (2007: 20). While many animal and eco activists understand human animality, and (unlike other readers) will not be surprised by this truth, it will surprise such activists to see how they have not tended to implement this understanding. For example, activists-as-animals see the traumatic affects of gestation crates on sows and debeaking on birds, yet fail to identify similar affects of trauma in their own lives. While our traumas are not those of the "dairy" cow, the affects of trauma can be recognized across species. Dr. Hope Ferdowsian, for example, recorded symptoms of psychological disorders in chimps exploited for laboratory studies that matched those of traumatized humans ("Chimps"). We are animals, and animal activists are often traumatized while fighting for the health and lives of nonhumans.

Aftershock sometimes turns to the lives of feathered citizens to explore the affects of trauma. Jones has run and worked on a chicken sanctuary for many years. She has seen the affects of deprivation and prolonged misery on factory farmed hens stuffed in crowded in cages, unable to run after a bug, dabble in a mud puddle, or even lift their wings. These unfortunate hens stand crowded in squalor throughout their short lives. Consequently, those few hens who, one way or another, arrive at Jones' chicken sanctuary, look to be on death's door—sickly, pale, unable to walk, huddled in terror of the world around them. Over time, she watches these traumatized birds "learn to be birds" (2007: 112). Somehow, in spite of all that has been done to them, they retain enough hope for considerable recovery, and are soon flying from the coop with each new

day, eager for the chance to chase a bug or play in a fresh mud puddle, lifting their once dormant wings.

Yet in spite of the enthusiasm these now healthy hens show, Jones can see that these birds "are still compromised by the things that have been done to them" (2007: 112). Among her many feathered rescues, Jones has a flock of chickens who have gone feral, who roost in trees and roam the woods around her home. "They are truly, the happiest and healthiest birds at the sanctuary" (2007: 112), she notes. Not one "former egg factory inmate has ever chosen to join them. . . . [S]omething in their life history keeps them coming back to the coops rather than making the jump to the trees" (2007: 112). While the recovery of most battery hens is remarkable, it is seldom, if ever, complete.

We are animals (2007: 193), and so Jones' chicken observation carries across species, to humans. She notes that many people are like these "former egg factory inmates," carrying pain from a world that is angry and cruel, dishonest and shortsighted. In our violent and fragmented society, many suffer similarly—especially if we are sensitive to the plight of pigs in farrowing crates, or the outlook for walruses in a land of global warming. The magnitude of these problems, their intractable links with capitalism and consumerism, coupled with the immediate desperation of an individual hen in a battery cage, or the looming peril of global warming, can be overwhelming and seriously damaging. For animal and earth liberationists, even when our lives are going relatively well, we see suffering on every side (2007: 113). Humans and hens are both traumatized by the cruelty of our world, the greed and indifference of capitalism. What traumas are most likely for those dedicated to the earth and animal liberation?

Jones' focuses on post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and depression, which she describes as two common symptoms of aftershock. PTSD and depression can be debilitating if left untreated, Jones notes, and neither ought to be treated solely with medications. (Traumatized individuals often make things significantly worse by self-medicating with alcohol or other drugs (2007: 124).) PTSD, caused by trauma, and first diagnosed after the Vietnam War (2007: 69), is a "*normal* physical and emotional

reaction to extraordinarily frightening or disorienting experiences" (2007: 70). Jones' list of symptoms for PTSD will likely be familiar to animal and eco activists: Reliving traumatic experiences, avoiding reminders of traumatic experiences, hypersensitivity manifest in various forms (such as heightened startled responses or insomnia), emotional numbness often manifest as detachment or estrangement (2007: 75-76).

"Trauma," Jones writes, "always involves some sort of rupture or break," and often leaves people feeling helpless and disconnected (2007: 72). Trauma also tends to isolate people (2007: 129). Healing requires empowerment—doing something—and reconnection (2007: 2). A "stable recovery" requires coming "to terms with what has happened, integrating the trauma into one's life history and worldview, and restoring or forging connections with other people and the natural world" (2007: 83). In particular, Jones isolates the "healing power of nature . . . . There is no synthetic substitute" (2007: 126). Jones suggests time in the outdoors, such as walks. She encourages painting and dancing for those who are not ready to talk, or who are perhaps unable to discuss the traumas experienced. She also encourages those with PTSD and depression to continue working for change. We all need to "make sure to do some things that surely will have some impact, no matter how seemingly small" to aid against feeling helpless (2007: 133): Go vegan, rescue a hamster, or pause to move a spider from the sidewalk. Each of these acts has a direct and sure positive affect in the world, and concurrently, a direct and sure positive affect on the activist. Jones also highlights the importance of forging meaningful connections, and reminds readers that activism can be a particularly natural and meaningful way to forge such connections.

Jones work covers many details, but also backs up to talk about the bigger picture, the underlying cause, the hidden fault that causes the earthquakes and the aftershock. Jones does not sideswipe issues—she gets her teeth into the whole vegan enchelada. All forms of oppression are linked, she reminds. Therefore, activists need to network with others from a variety of causes, and we must always remember that we are not separate from nature—we are animals.

Our culture teaches us that we are separate and above other creatures and nature, but this falsity is the ultimate rupture behind the trauma that Jones indicates has led to PTSD in earth and animal liberationists, and to global warming itself. All oppressions are linked by this "fault line" running underneath all of the social and environmental disruptions that plague us and the planet" (2007: 172). Jones encourages us to root out the core falsity that is central to the thoughts and actions of the Western world: "Men have the right and the duty to transcend and subdue the earth, animals, women, children, and men of other faiths" (2007: 172). If we do not see the core problem, the dishonesty and fracture inherent in some of our most basic paradigms, we will continue to make choices rooted in falsity. If we are to heal, we must root out these ancient and deep falsities, and connect with other movements in search of a more holistic justice (2007: 199).

Jones cautions that our mental states are unlikely to ever be entirely whole and healthy in our broken world, in communities built on lies of hierarchy and violent actions of oppression and injustice—lies that are as old as hierarchy itself (2007: 190). Jones states clearly with regard to *Aftershock*: "The purpose of this book is to give you the tools and information you need" to work toward recovery from aftershock (2007: 66).

Perhaps foremost in her recovery suggestions, Jones encourages communication, and repeatedly notes that telling one's story is an important part of integrating painful experiences and healing. She refers to us as "talking animals" (2007: 129), and explains that one of our most important roles as fellow activists is to "Listen, listen, listen" (2007: 135). She even offers guidelines as to how an activist might protect her or himself from prosecution if talking to a therapist, in light of today's politically repressive society.

On reflection, always alert for the blinkers of my gender, age group, race, and economic status, I found myself wondering: Are women and men equally "talking animals"? Studies repeatedly show that women and girls are the most verbal human beings, excelling in the use of words, even turning to communication and friendship in times of stress, unlike men, who "holed up somewhere on their own (Berkowitz). Truth is, I am a bit of an anomaly as a woman, not much inclined to emotive words or sharing feelings.

Meanwhile, my sister is the quintessential communicator, and will attest to the importance of communication whenever asked—and sometimes when not asked. Consequently, I wonder about the role of communication in healing. When my sister returns home to tell me all about a wounded frog which she found on the roadway and was not able to save—purging herself of at least a portion of the incumbent pain—I am further burdened in my silence. Whereas I was previously free of the imagery and knowledge of a frog's suffering, I am afterwards weighed own by the horror of the frog's tragic end, as well as my sister's traumatic experience.

Is it ever appropriate to tell someone that, no matter how distressing their experience, we do not wish to hear of it? Do communicators have some responsibility to avoid burdening other sensitive activists? Off hand, it is difficult to envision how this concern might be integrated into Jones' focus on the importance of communication, which will resonate with most people.

Jones' thought-provoking book also led me to ponder increasing violence among liberation movements. She describes trauma as rupture, and notes that rupture tends to lead to "uncharacteristic behavior" (2007: 107). She also notes that "Everyday life can be similarly nightmarish for those who have undone the socialization that leads us to see cadavers as 'meat'" (2007: 90). Once we realize that the white, dimpled flesh under the cellophane wrap was, not long ago, a youthful chicken deprived of just about every basic instinct and desire, we flinch every time we see someone toss "bloody body parts onto the check-out conveyer belt" (2007: 90). It is not easy seeing violence for what it is when surrounded by people who do not see. "[V]egans, unlike flesh-eaters, never stop noticing the violence inherent in meat" (2007: 149). Animal and earth liberationists are likely to be in a constant state of trauma, and Jones notes that this trauma is caused "not by what has been done to them but by what they have seen" (2007: 93). As somewhat helpless witnesses to daily violence against animals in supermarkets and restaurants, we are also traumatized by veal crates, gestation crates, and battery cages, not by being *in* them, but by seeing the flesh, the eggs, the milk that surrounds us in daily life.

Furthermore, those perpetually traumatized by violence are "normal" in our incredibly violent world. Those who are oblivious to the blood on their plates, those who are in denial about global warming are in the majority—but they do not exemplify sanity (151). Connecting these various ideas from *Aftershock* looks like this:

- Animal and earth liberationists are constantly traumatized
- Trauma can lead to uncharacteristic behaviors
- Traumatized activists and their uncharacteristic behaviors are likely more healthy than those not traumatized by persistent, pervasive violence and destruction.

Even though traumatized activists are more sane than those who fail to notice the ongoing animal abuse and environmental devastation, our society does not view animal or eco activists in this light. Consequently, it might be possible to discover in Jones' book, *Aftershock*, a worthy legal defense to help activists in courts of law. If the escalating violence of liberation movements can be demonstrated to be an "uncharacteristic response" that stems from the trauma, this might help activists avoid unjust and increasingly harsh prison sentences.

While thought provoking on many levels, *Aftershock* is an imminently practical book, in which Jones provides animal and eco activists with sound and much-needed advise: take care of yourselves and each other, eat well, rest well, breathe, and get plenty of exercise and outdoor time. Of equal importance, Jones offers tips for counselors and psychotherapists who might be interested in entering this much needed treatment area. She recommends that such professionals "make themselves more available," since few activists can afford expensive healthcare. She writes: "I'd like to see relevant professional associations take responsibility for organizing and publicizing networks of therapists and counselors prepared to provide free or low-cost services to activists" (2007: 150). Jones encourages group therapy because it is cheaper, because of the importance of communication, and because this format allows one trained therapist to help a number of activists (2007: 156), keeping costs at a minimum.

Critically, Jones recommends that therapists interested in this field of work learn something of activism, and of the issues involved, noting how touched she was when one of her therapists, instead of perceiving her as most non-activists do—as a tough and strong activist—commented on the difficult exposure that Jones faced each day, and the vulnerability that goes with such exposure. Her therapist the criticisms and abuses that animal and eco activists accept as part of their advocacy (2007: 160-161).

Jones also warns that activists are likely to make therapists uncomfortable who are not leading a socially progressive and well-informed lifestyle. "It is possible," she notes, "that activist clients will directly challenge you or, without even meaning to, lead you to feel uncomfortable with your own choices. Every vegetarian who has ever attended a family dinner at which meat is served knows that all you have to do is sit there quietly not eating meat for people to feel attacked about their own food choices" (2007: 158).

Perhaps the most remarkable advice Jones offers therapists, is that they "encourage all of their clients to explore their lapses of empathy with the earth, other people, and—yes—other animals" (2007: 162). While acknowledging "sacrosanct personal beliefs," which therapists are trained not to breach, she notes that "eating an animal is something you do to somebody else's body without her consent" and that "therapists routinely intervene, speak up, or at least ask questions when they hear that their clients are violating the bodies of people" (2007: 162).

Aftershock is well-written and well-researched, offering a fresh vision into the lives and minds of activists, into the importance of the activist community, and into the importance of dealing with the inevitable emotional strain that goes along with a life of animal and earth advocacy—or any heightened sensitivity to injustice and violence. Jones has written a practical book in plain English, with plenty of worthy examples and bulleted lists to help readers key in on the most important symptoms or solutions.

Jones observes, "The world is hurt, and so are you" (113), but *Aftershock* is a book filled with possibilities. Social activism, she notes, "requires some measure of hope" (106).

We must be like the chickens at Jones sanctuary, who somehow fly from the coop to explore each bright new day filled with bugs and puddles as if they could not remember the battery cages. We must find what brings us peace, what affords us a measure of happiness, and how to hold onto joyous moments even in the face of ongoing activism:

Blue skies and bright colors, birdsong and sea breezes, all of these are parts of the real world, too. Indeed, they are more longstanding than concentration camps and highways. Remember that, and you'll have an easier time making peace with the less pleasant aspects of present reality. (113)

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