



## Editorial

Dear Reader

Too many people are up against horrifying injustices that are being perpetuated in an attempt to diminish their lives. Within these same contexts, there are stories of resistance, of people holding on to what is precious to them, of speaking up. Reminding us, yet again, that our work is situated in history, culture and politics. This edition is a testimony to the expansive possibilities of narrative practice and the ethics of solidarity.

Jack T. C. Chiu and Sharon S. K. Leung's human–canine project in Hong Kong considers what is absent but implicit in the social withdrawal of young people and their preference for animal connections. As they point out, “narrative practice offers a powerful framework for understanding youth withdrawal not as a personal failing but as a form of resistance” and a refusal to shape their identities and lives according to socially constructed norms.

Tracing another thread of resistance, Sandra Coral draws on critical race theory to bring attention to the Eurocentric leanings in therapy spaces, which often leave Black neurodivergent people unsafe. Sandra invites us to reflect on how “the more closely a person can generally adhere to and function under the expectations of the dominant culture, the more power they can usually access in society. But this behaviour alienates the colonised person from their communities”. Narrative therapy and help us to create “pockets of freedom” – spaces free from the dominant culture's interpretations and judgements – as sites of refuge and resistance, responding to the alienation imposed by colonial legacies.

Stephanie Badman's work demonstrates this in the realm of genetic counselling, where the medicalised understandings often privilege professional knowledge over lived experience. Through letter writing, which elevates people's own local knowledges, narrative practice creates space for witnessing and re-witnessing preferred identities.

Christine Dennstedt takes us into the liminal encounters of psychedelic-assisted therapy and draws on the narrative practice metaphor of migration of identity to loosen entrenched problem stories and allow new meanings to take shape. She also examines our ethical accountability when engaging with practices linked to Indigenous knowledges, and the need for humility, integrity and a commitment to avoiding cultural appropriation.

Directing a narrative feminist lens on bulimia and abuse, Cassandra Pedersen proposes an alternative fluid language for bulimia, using the metaphor of tides. She offers a nuanced, justice-informed approach that avoids replicating neoliberal discourses on food and body management, in which the body is seen as a passive recipient of trauma. Instead, Cassandra invites us to respect the body's capacity to notice, disagree and bear witness.

In a deeply moving contribution, Tanya Newman shares the voices of dying mothers who write letters for their children. These letters are not only acts of love but also portals to future re-membling, enabling both mothers and children to resist single-storied descriptions of loss. Through “linking lives”, mothers leave behind an archive of care, preferred identities, and their unfinished yet enduring work of raising children.

Tarang Kaur turns our attention to neurodivergent children, whose skills, values and acts of resistance are too often pathologised by deficit-based discourses and disregarded in the name of treatment. Through living documents, we are invited to witness children as keen collaborators and bearers of unique insider knowledge. What is dismissed as “problematic behaviour” can be seen as a child's creative response and skilful reclaiming of agency.

The two audio recordings in this issue show us how people quietly resist erasure, remember those who came before, and shape futures rooted in dignity and care.

The first one, by Chelsea Size, weaves together wisdom on living with loneliness from residents in aged care, exploring stories of healing that can live alongside stories of loss. Their small yet profound practices, like a resident sharing, “I like the patterns in the clouds and the way they bring me calmness”, show how memory, nature and everyday rituals can become companions in times of sadness, uncertainty and grief.

The second audio recording is from the archives. Aunty Barbara Wingard’s paper shows us how grief itself can be spoken of in culturally sustaining ways. For First Nations people, conversations with grief are not only about sorrow but about refusing to be silenced, honouring ancestors and cherishing histories. As Aunty Barbara reminds us: “We are remembering those who have died, we are honouring Indigenous spiritual ways, and we are finding ways of grieving that bring us together. We are telling our stories in ways that make us stronger.”

Lorraine Grieves, in the video recording “We have always been here, We’ve been here before”, shares the we Are Allies project and asks us to reflect on how we can repair, redress and stay in relationship amidst systems built on white supremacy, colonisation and the rising tide of fascism and hatred. History reminds us that gender diversity has always existed across the world. In the face of divisiveness, disinformation and attempts to silence, we can draw on collective wisdom and discernment to support a long game of resistance that is built on hope and liberatory practices.

We are keen to revitalise the journal’s review section. Over the journal’s history, we have published review essays that stretch the field of narrative practice by making new connections, presenting innovative ideas or offering provocations. We particularly value reviews that draw connections between books (and other cultural works) and practice, and reviews that make original contributions in their own right. For this issue, David Denborough responded to a request to write three book reviews from diverse cultural contexts that urge us to consider our positioning and practice in times of profound collective suffering.

In a review of *The Friendship Bench: How fourteen grandmothers inspired a mental health revolution* by Dixon Chibanda, we get a glimpse of this inspiring project that was created against the backdrop of a national crisis in Zimbabwe. Through dialogue and reflection, they developed what they call “a philosophy of care”, grounded in three steps: *kuvhura pfungwa* (to open the mind), *kusimudzira* (to uplift), and *kusimbisa* (to strengthen). These practices privilege Indigenous knowledge holders over professional expertise, linking stories of suffering to peer support and economic action.

At its heart, *Radiance in Pain and Resilience: The global reverberation of Palestinian historical trauma* by Samah Jabr is about witnessing. But witnessing that has to be done in particular ways. Dr Jabr urges, “Palestinians need the solidarity of others who recognize us as active subjects and fighters for freedom, not as bleeding victims”. Here, the historical concept of *Sumud*, often symbolised by the deep roots of an olive tree, becomes a metaphor for steadfastness and endurance, centring solidarity, accountability and community healing. The invitation is clear: “to become witnesses who resist erasure, who join in solidarity, and who help rescue our shared humanity from the rubble of Gaza.”

White supremacist groups are on the rise across the world. In Australia, they are now serving as role models for fascists elsewhere, particularly in how they recruit young white men who are struggling. Jason Stanley’s *How Fascism Works: The politics of us and them* offers a critical frame for these times. For narrative practitioners, the implications are profound. “As narrative practitioners, when we are working with the stories of people’s lives, we are in some ways social historians and cultural workers. We make links across time and across generations. A skill of dignity in the present might be linked to a grandmother’s pride, which in turn might be linked to life during World War II or the Depression.” We are left with the question – how do we refuse to normalise what was once unthinkable?

*Kuvhura pfungwa, kusimudzira, kusimbisa* to you, dear reader.

In solidarity  
Shelja Sen

## ABOUT THE EDITOR



*Shelja Sen is narrative therapist, writer and co-founder of Children First, New Delhi. Her latest book is Reclaim Your Life and she is also a columnist with a national newspaper, Indian Express. Shelja has worked as a narrative practitioner and teacher for over 20 years in various contexts in the UK and India. She is an international faculty member at Dulwich Centre Foundation, Adelaide, and a clinical tutor at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Shelja is a curator of the unique skills, expertise and know-how of the children, young people and families she has the honour of working with, and is committed to building innovative, culturally aligned, ethical practices using a feminist intersectional lens.*

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Author pronouns: she/her