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Message from PIMA President

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I attended a webinar by Elizabeth Sawin, who asked, “Why won’t anyone listen?” As a biologist, she had for two decades been bringing facts about the state of the planet to people’s attention. It didn’t work. She asked, why don’t facts work to unlock actions? She and others have resolved that to change we need to learn through emotional connection. This relates to learning theory, which highlights, “we learn what matters to us.” We learn more easily when we are touched emotionally by the subject at hand.

Another activist-scholar, Ginie Servant-Miklos, who has recently published *Pedagogies of Collapse* (2024), addresses similar questions. She emphasises the importance of educators’ roles to enable constant dialogue between learners/students and their realities. She encourages us to ask when we go for a drive, “why is our windscreen no longer splattered with dead insects?” As with ecofeminists, she highlights the entangled connections amongst capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism and the natural environment.

This Special Bulletin addresses similar questions through sixteen articles from educators, activators, and artists, who experience the world as a web of interconnected relationships. Through activism, they seek alternative, transgressive ways of thinking, doing, being – embracing all of whom we are towards new enactments of climate justice education.

The PIMA Bulletin is an important vehicle for thinking together – for “colouring outside of the lines.” Thank you to our co-editors, Shauna Butterwick, Astrid von Kotze and Shirley Walters for leading in the publication of this bulletin. Thanks also to the authors of the defiant, creative texts which open our eyes and hearts and to Leslie Cordie and Phuoc Khau for technical assistance.

Congratulations to four PIMA members who were recently inducted into the Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame. These are: Carol Medel-Anonuevo, Elizabeth Lange, Timothy Ireland and Vaughn John.

For more information on PIMA, please consult www.pimanetwork.com or PIMA Secretary Dorothy Lucardie dorothy.lucardie@bigpond.com.au

Warm greetings for a joy and laughter-filled holiday season, which transitions into a peace-filled 2025.

Shirley Walters

Editorial

Responding to the great unravelling: and yet they dance

Shauna Butterwick, Astrid von Kotze, Shirley Walters

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This is the fourth Special Bulletin produced by PIMA's Climate Justice Education group, indicating an ongoing engagement with planetary issues. It is becoming ever more evident that the great unravelling of the world as we know it is much more than 'a climate crisis'. There are many alarming descriptions of the future, with a recent survey of 380 leading climate scientists showing that 77% of them 'feel despair' when looking to the future that threatens life on Earth because of inadequate, serious political intent. (Guardian UK 8 May 2024) A new word – polycrisis – has been coined referring to the tangles of global environmental and social dilemmas accumulating, mutually interacting and worsening. All aspects of lives and livelihoods are affected by the climate emergency, and to respond effectively, we must confront and address patriarchy, settler colonialism, neo-colonialism, neoliberal globalisation, imperialism, racism – all the ideologies that negate life and together contribute to exacerbation of the crises. But to do this we need to educate/activate differently, not through the head alone, but also through heartfelt actions which bring laughter and joy.



Moments of awakening – artist Dina Cormick

We took the title of this bulletin from Stephanie Urdang's book *And still they dance. Women, war and the struggle for change in Mozambique* (1989), where she records that:

“Mozambicans danced even as they suffered brutality under the Portuguese colonialists; they danced even as they struggled to win their war of liberation; they danced in

victory when this war was won; they danced even as they fought a second war with their racist neighbour Rhodesia....”

They danced again when celebrating Mozambican independence in 1980 – but their struggles were (and still) are not over. Clearly, dance is more than leisure and entertainment – it signals collective rituals important to survival and wellbeing. Singing, music, dance and art have been integral to human life and dignity forever – but in times of stress and brutality, where cognitive faculties are valued more than spiritual, emotional, physical ones, they are acts of defiance and collective anticipatory energy.

In 1938, playwright and poet Brecht asked: ‘What kind of times are these, when, ‘To talk about trees is almost a crime/ Because it implies silence about so many horrors?’ (1938) Fifty-three years later Adrienne Rich responded with “because in times like these / to have you listen at all, it's necessary / to talk about trees.” (1991) As suggested in threads through the Bulletin, listening with conscious humility, to confront what we don’t know, and the courage to embrace vulnerability, are crucial now, when the existence of many living entities are threatened.

In a recent book entitled “Pedagogy of Collapse” (2024), Ginie Servant-Miklos asserts that she sees hope not as an outcome, but as an ethical commitment: “Hope is looking horror ahead in the face, and stating boldly that this will not do. Never were more powerful words uttered than the menacing phrase: ‘I refuse!’ The act of defiance transcends all worlds, possible and impossible, and births a world of meaning unto itself, a world of willful resistance.” (Ginie Servant-Miklos, 2024)

The texts that were submitted to this Bulletin struck us as “existence as resistance”. Rather than succumbing to the pessimism of passive victimhood, the texts speak of defiant actions, that is, the refusal to be cowered, to reject acquiescing to fear (and fear mongering), to repudiate the scapegoating that blames ‘the other’ in whatever form; to deny those ideologies which conflict with participatory democracy; to openly resist binaries that serve those in power. Indeed, submission authors, Rebecca Freeth and carine roth see the great unravelling as a revelation and speak about confronting fear at the cliffs edge and taking a leap of life!

The Bulletin depicts survival rather than doom, the refusal to adjust, to embrace emergence, instead of certainty. In the face of often cruel reality, writers suggest being playful, jubilantly creative, with others, in gestures that celebrate life and living. Overwhelmingly, the texts express forms of activism: they are an illustration of the power of making something, drawing on heartfelt impulses, as a powerful motor. Creative practices oxygenate spaces that feel toxic, taking a deep dive to find we can hold our breath, as we find pockets of air that sustain us. This flies in the face of the powers that seek to continue destruction. The message is that a transformation of the way we live is not only necessary but also possible, if we gratefully, humbly, embrace the planet rather than exploit it.

The small-scale artistic acts of defiance are by no means sufficient to transform systems, but they can subdue our death-drive and re-ignite our life force and love. As we

breathe more deeply, we can break artificial boundaries, the separation between human and more-than-human. Our imagination is lifted beyond collapse, towards hope and positive energy.



We hold hands together - artist Dina Cormick

We are imagining contributors sitting in a circle and picking up ideas from each other.

Elizabeth Lange states that we are ancestors of the time to come, how remembering Earth's story creates new regenerative ways of being together. In a similar spirit of regenerative action, Denise Nadeau tells the story of the War of the Flea dance symbolizing how the small can disarm the powerful, how tiny acts of solidarity can have an impact. The small and local challenging the powerful is also noted in Claudia Diaz Diaz's story about work with Chilean land and water protectors who have succeeded in stopping extractive industry, even when exhausted, keep dancing and singing bringing oxygen to the hard work of resisting. Finding fuel and inspiration to keep going is something that Katie Ross explores poetically, inviting us to turn towards the trees and listen to their grand, ancient, grounded wisdom. Shauna Butterwick and Jane Munroe also speak about poetry, how its architecture provides space to imagine otherwise, reframing despair into hope.

Gabriella Maestrini, through poetry, considers how there is renewal following destruction--tiny flowers poking through the rubble. And Sharon Clancy writes a poem about rust, not as evidence of decay but about how the disintegration of a solid thing becomes the basis for new life. Decay and renewal is also a thread in Rob Evan's account of the power of learning biographies providing storyscapes about transformation. In Hsin-Pei Chen's account, she explores her dreams about death which led her to write a song which broke through barriers and led to a shared understanding. Rebecca Freeth and Carine Roth pick up this theme of connection, in their case how getting older offers a different vantage point from younger generations who inspire them to take a big step over the edge. Gertrude Fester-Wicomb also speaks of aging and the importance of care of herself and of others, of how through creative ways such as poetry, she honors her activist history. In Nic Dickson's story there is also intergenerational learning when a group of women of different ages named, reframed and

then transformed misogynistic phrases and words. The power of creating art collectively is also a theme in Bonnie Slade's article; she writes about the creation of new musical scores honouring women and how this new music was sung by feminist choir, Composeher, a life affirming response to the constant news of environmental and human destruction, forcing waves of migrants to flee. Joy and play are also themes evident in Mary Hames' account of the powerful impact of a play co-constructed and performed by university staff and students which explored violence against women. Like Mary, Gaia Del Negro and Silvia Luraschi examine the process of different art forms creating different meanings, in relation to the body. They performed in a park following which they captured the different interpretations of the story, leading to yet another horizon of understanding. Astrid von Kotze draws inspiration from existentialist writers who show how meaning is not a given but is created in acts of solidarity with other living beings. Zorba the Greek, who laughs and dances as the great structure collapses in front of him, points to new beginnings.

There is a commonality in the submissions in that they are underpinned by a commitment to ethical being, which means acknowledging our privilege, owning up to our freedom and taking full responsibility for our choices, by acting in such a way as to help others to realise their freedom. Sowing seeds of laughter, kindness and dancing in the crevices of the old is one way of preparing for the future. May the seeds germinate, and may they be nurtured and tended, with soil generated by composting the weeds and fallen leaves, the overripe fruit, processed by worms and fungi into a bed for new growth: a sit-spot to be one with nature and learn again to listen. Children dance and sing, paint and sculpt before they develop linguistic language; their creative energy has no limits and their imagination is boundless. The texts in this bulletin recognise the lightness and beauty of being with – and not just being for.

About the authors

Shauna Butterwick, Astrid von Kotze and Shirley Walters are members of PIMA's Climate Justice Education Working Group.

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Note:

Dina Cormick has kindly granted permission for use of her images in the Special Bulletin. She is an artist based in Durban, South Africa. Dina is moved to work in wood, clay and paint by her 3 great passions: art, theology and feminism. She creates vibrant images to honour the stories within each woman. Please learn more about her:

<https://www.creativewomanartist.com/>

Ancestors for a Time to Come: Living into the Wheel of Deep Time

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Abstract

We are in a moment of creation as well as dying; the unravelling frees up energy pooled in existing institutions and structures, making it available for regenerating our way of living together. During the ensuing dark age, we can remember we are ancestors of the time to come.



This mandala captures how I am remembering, honouring, and living into the wheel of deep time.

Keywords: regenerative futures, ritual remembering, Wheel of Time

Introduction

“Something is being born...[W]e are in a phase when one age is succeeding another, when everything is possible...The only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted to the earth and at the same time to the cosmos. [...] The truly reliable path to coexistence, to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation, must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts and mind...” (Havel, 1994)

In the long arc of history, we are in a moment of creation as well as in the dying times. Many civilizations have come and gone, subject to the foibles of their own weaknesses and the logical consequences of their greatest successes. The unravelling reveals both the dark forces at work as well as the strengths of the human spirit. It profiles hope — that what we do, and more importantly who we become — matters.

The unravelling frees up energy that has pooled in existing institutions and structures and makes it available for regenerating our way of living together. We will likely undergo a dark age of loss, as the empire and its death-making-form dissolves, and as perhaps as rage, hatred, and other barbarization and totalitarian impulses reign for a time. With climate pressures, there may be deprivation and loss of human and nonhuman life. Yet, these will pass.

As I think about the generations that will succeed me, I realize that I am an ancestor of the time to come, as are we all. This has led me to ponder how to hold the stress, anxiety, despair, and grief of these times and, as an educator, how to offer experiences of learning that are up to our existential crisis. Like Havel, I have come to see that what is most reliable is our relatedness to Earth and to Cosmos, whose energy and love vibrates deeply within our hearts and, when we welcome it, within our minds.

Time spirals backward and forward, just as my inner self spirals deep and high. Attuning to the movements of Earth and Cosmos is a process of learning to flow within constant change and yet, some tangible predictability. Part of our remembering is that it is a privilege to live a brief embodied life within the Great Story of the universe (Berry, 1999).

As many Indigenous peoples have done for centuries, art and dance best express these realities. The spirals in the centre of my art piece, as a mandala, are taken from the Golden Ratio. The next ring of spiral images is inspired by the neolithic Tarxien temple and underground sanctuaries and burial site of Hal Saflieni in Malta, from around 4000 BCE. This was a time when the Divine still had a Feminine face (Gimbutas, 2001), when egalitarianism and peacefulness appeared to prevail, and when the mysterious and regenerative qualities of Life were revered, my hope for our future.

I regularly practice honouring a Wheel of Time, predicated on an understanding held by many cultures. These calendars and zodiacs keep time—establishing the tasks of living within seasonal rhythms, remembering various elements and living beings at their appropriate moment, honouring the monthly and daily rotations, setting feasting and ceremonial times, recounting the principle of balance as one of the Big Principles, and re-storying the highest human qualities. Each movement of the Wheel of Time is its own spiral through the movement of the year.

The planets, elements, and living beings of Earth ground this spiralling movement. The fluidity of water and air contrast to the seeming solidity of plants, ocean and land animals, insects, and birds in each place. They flow their own movements in rhythm to the movements of the moon and sun. Each image drawn conveys the Spirit of their kind. Wheels within wheels within wheels, then, help us to perceive in a process-based way, away from the certainties, categories, and hierarchies that have shaped the modern era.

To regenerate a new way of living together, is to reclaim our highest qualities and values, offered in the first worded ring, as a foundation for a new way of process living. The ring of

verbs in the outer wheel express the actioning I am undertaking every day as part of this regenerative process. Just as birds fly in constantly emerging murmurations, this actioning finds others engaging similar actioning, flowing together into a constantly changing form. We understand ourselves as “nested-I’s” (Bollier & Silke, 2019) with a “we-consciousness” (Kidd, 1996). This form gathers energy and quickly adapts to changing conditions, shifting shape and direction.

The swirling quality of thousands of wings rustling in the air, close to and aware of each other, moving quickly in response to conditions, is the way into a new era. This quiet movement of wings will grow, overshadow, and leave behind the master controllers and the grating squeal of their machine realities and their monied and technological illusions that lay waste to so much and so many. To live into the emergent era, we can find each other, stay in close contact, monitor our reference points constantly, and rapidly change when conditions shift. Perceiving all that is being done to move with, through, and beyond this increasingly dark time, requires visionary and spiritual seeing, unique to each but available to all. In these ways, we can be good ancestors for a time to come.

About the author

Dr. Elizabeth A Lange is daughter, life partner, mother to two daughters, stepmother to two daughters, grandmother, auntie, friend, and activated citizen in her matrix of human relations in the Pacific Northwest, Canada. As a professor of adult and lifelong education serving three Canadian universities, she is currently an Honorary Fellow, Institute for Sustainable Futures in Australia and a Visiting Professor for Athabasca University. Elizabeth’s latest book Transformative Sustainability Education (Earthscan Routledge) and her publications can be found at <https://elizabethlange.ca> or <https://uts.academia.edu/ElizabethLange>. She is co-chair of the Vancouver Island Fireweed Learning Commons, dedicated to regenerative climate and sustainability education.

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And Still They Dance

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Abstract

Recalling a dance to the North American anti-war song War of the Flea, Nadeau reflects on the function of dance, patience, and joy as well as insights from Indigenous teachings to address our present context.

Keywords: dance, revolutionary joy, patience

In the summer of 1983, I attended a three-week training program in San Francisco offered by Wallflower Order, a women's contemporary dance company with a political agenda. At their public performance I saw for the first time their closing dance, War of the Flea, which Wallflower signed, sung and danced. I was deeply moved as much by the lyrics - "War of the small, war of the flea, where the strongest bomb is human who is bursting to be free" - as by the power and agility of the dancers. The context was U. S. intervention in the wars of Central America, with the U.S. backing right wing paramilitaries and governments in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. This song and dance became a beacon of hope for me, that the small could eventually disarm the powerful and mighty and that our seeming tiny acts of solidarity could have some impact. And that dance was a medium of resistance.

So began many years of dance activism for me, joining often with other politically - minded dancers in spontaneous protests against anti-labour legislation, the WTO talks in Seattle, the war in Iraq, and freedom for Palestine. "War of the flea" became a metaphor for whatever activism I did over the years, be it as part of spontaneous street dance groups, direct action or the more daily grind work of marching, educating, and writing letters.

Flash forward to now. Still the same enemy, settler colonialism and US imperialism, with Chinese and Russian rivals with similar imperial dreams. Meanwhile the planet is burning and smouldering from wars and humans ignoring the wisdom of the earth. I am no longer comfortable with war language, drawn to the Buddhist dictum of doing no harm and the fact we are all interconnected. But that darn flea keeps coming up in my imagination!

I do two things now, both seem small. Education workshops on antisemitism and anti-Palestinian racism, to open the possibilities of collective liberation in the context of one of the many polarizations underlying this war. The other is standing with Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks holding placards on the side of a highway. We have been doing this every Tuesday for more than 20 months to protest a highway expansion proposal that will cut down hundreds of trees and destroy the salmon run on the Goldstream River in WSÁNEĆ territory, violating their treaty rights and WSÁNEĆ law.

There is much in common in these two struggles. The Israel - Hamas war and the history of Israeli settler colonialism is destroying the ecosystem of the land and attempting to eradicate a people. The capitalistic desire for faster cars and highways is destroying the

ecosystem and the–more-than-human beings and ignoring the rights of peoples it has tried to eradicate. Both violate the rights to land of the Indigenous peoples who live there.

There are flea lessons to be learned everywhere. Recently we gave our workshop on antisemitism in a small rural community, Cumberland, on Vancouver Island. It was at a festival for Palestine, a fundraising event where local artists had made colourful kites of watermelons and Palestinian flags, and a “Levantine” dinner was followed with dance performances and Palestinian poetry. There was a sense of joy here that did not betray the suffering of Palestinians but held up strength and resilience.

When standing with W̱SÁNEĆ you are standing by huge old growth cedars and Douglas Firs, centuries old. Even at the edge of this destructive highway we are building community with those who show up every week. Occasionally a W̱SÁNEĆ drummer appears, and the rhythmic singing transmits our sense of purpose and connection deeper into our bodies and hearts. We learn patience and persistence and that Indigenous time and logic are different from the crisis -oriented mind.

I recall the words of some Dene Elders and youth from the Sahtu region of Denedeh in a recent article. They shared that they did not relate to the language of the climate crisis. Many spoke of “an innate trust in the process of the whole of life unfolding,” as everything is connected. The fight to save one species, the caribou, or to address climate without looking at people and wars makes no sense. Blondin- Burt, the journalist, concluded, “This is a time not of ending, but of transformation, and our job is not to halt the process or slow it down, but to understand our context in this great time of transformation, as a whole.”

This summer Canada’s northern Alberta was wracked with forest fires. On July 29th, 2024, in a moment caught on TV, more than two hundred firefighters from South Africa, dressed in their orange firefighting gear, arrived at Edmonton airport dancing and singing. I was in awe. This group, called Working with Fire, sings and dances every day before they go out to fight fires all over the world. What I saw in their faces was joy. It is revolutionary joy that sustains activism and is an initial act of transformation. Like that Wallflower dance 40 years ago, that airport moment is burned in my heart. We must never stop dancing.

About the author

Denise Nadeau (www.denisenadeau.org) is a mother, grandmother, educator, scholar, and activist who works and writes at the intersection of somatic therapy, spiritual practice, decolonization and racial justice. Her interest is in how the body holds racist and colonial patterns of behavior and how we can unlearn these through paying attention to the body and our interactions with the more - than - human world. She is of mixed European settler heritage from Quebec, and now resides in the homelands of the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples in Victoria, Canada. She is the author of Unsettling Spirit: A Journey into Decolonization (MQUP,2020).

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Between Exhaustion and Joy: Women Water Protectors and Renewal

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Abstract

In this piece, I reflect on the lived experiences of women water protectors in southern Chile, focusing on their resilience amidst the exhaustion of activism. I situate this story at a gathering in Curacautín, to ask: how do these women cultivate joy and laughter while fighting for water rights and climate and gender justice? Despite this political setback, the women continue to foster spaces of joy, solidarity, and renewal through community and shared experiences. I conclude with a reflection on how, as a researcher, I can better learn from and support their ongoing work.

Keywords: women water protectors, southern Chile, joy, exhaustion, community

As I sat in the solitude of the cabin, the day's conversations still hummed in my mind. I had traveled to Curacautín, in southern Chile, to present at a gathering of women water protectors. The fire's warmth began to soothe me, allowing the memories of the last two days to settle in my thoughts. Repeatedly, the women I had met spoke of one thing: exhaustion. Not from the day's events, but a deeper fatigue, the kind that comes from fighting battles on multiple fronts—family responsibilities, water protection, and the weight of a political defeat that still lingers.

That night, I had gone to bed earlier than most. It was the second day of a three-day gathering for women water protectors in southern Chile. I had traveled overnight to present on a topic I feared they might know better than me: women, care, and ecological interdependence. My voice had raced to keep up with the compressed schedule, and by the time the cultural night began, I found my body retreating to my cabin, craving rest.

As I lit the fire, I reflected on the collective energy I had left behind. After a long day of workshops, we were tasked with preparing for a cultural night—a time to unwind, share talents, and celebrate the joy of being together. The women, resilient despite their weariness, lingered by the fire, their conversations and laughter weaving into the cool southern air. Yet I had chosen to leave, seeking solitude and rest.

The weariness they spoke of ran deeper than the long hours of activism. It was tied to a greater loss. On September 4, 2022, the people of Chile rejected a new draft constitution, one that many of these women had worked hard for. This draft, born from the 2019 social uprising, had been a window of opportunity. It had offered a vision of Chile where water, land, and nature would no longer be commodified, where Indigenous rights would be respected, and where biodiversity would be protected. It had been lauded internationally, especially for its climate justice provisions, with publications like *Nature* praising its scientific rigor and its ambition to address the climate emergency comprehensively.

For these women, that rejection felt like a personal betrayal. They were tired, not only for the daily grind of activism—it was the weight of seeing something so precious, the possibility of reclaiming their waters and lands, slip away in the face of misinformation and political division. Even communities facing the brunt of water scarcity had voted against it. One of the women described their emotional toll. “We endure hostilities in our own communities now,” she had said. “We thought this was our moment.”

And yet, despite the heaviness, they stayed. Feminist work, as Lola Olufemi (2020) reminds us, is hard work, and these women knew it intimately. But they also knew the power of joy, of laughter, of community. As the fire warmed my body, I wondered what stories they were sharing around the other fire. What jokes had I missed? What songs were they singing? I had chosen rest, but they had chosen each other.

Their ability to hold both exhaustion and joy together seemed to teach me something about being a researcher. How do we, in the academic world, where exhaustion is so often worn as a badge of honor, make space for joy? For laughter? For celebration? How can we, too, do the hard work of resistance, and supporting others do such a work, while refusing to let go of the moments that bring us renewal?

I wish I could tell you more about what happened that night. What stories did they share? How loud did they laugh? How did it feel to dance around the fire? Community organizing is much more than struggle, though that’s a significant part of it. It’s about doing what feels right—together—through the complex relationships of joy and sadness, frustration and hope. It’s about remembering that even when we are tired, we are not alone.

About the Author

Claudia Diaz-Diaz is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada. Her research draws on intersectional, feminist, and decolonial theories to challenge pedagogical practices in both community and formal education. Currently, her work focuses on climate justice, public pedagogies, and women water protectors, with an aim to reconceptualize leadership by emphasizing our interdependence with the other-than-human world.

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Ask the Trees

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Abstract

What does the future hold? Ask the trees, they have much to tell us.

Keywords: human agency, trees, landscape regeneration, restoring the water cycle, climate cooling

Hello dear reader.

I invite you to lift your gaze towards natural light.

How many trees do you see?

Find one that captures your glance.

And linger with this tree.

And pause and see

- or feel -

if rising in your bones

is gratitude

for this rooted one?

Trees. Of all shapes, sizes, names and stories.

Can you hear them murmuring?

They are speaking.

Inviting us to know their world.

From their perspective of grand, ancient, grounded wisdom.

Perhaps get closer.

Go sit under its branches

rest against its backbone

and listen.

~ ~ ~

We the trees

have been here a long

long time.

On this Earth

for over 400 million years.

We know

our home

intimately.

We dip our deepest toes

into quiet, dark aquifers

drinking from the clear water
graced with minerals from ancient stone.
We spread and weave
our underground fingers
to water tables and within spongy soil
through which water also flows
or at least
it used to.

Like you, this water is our life blood.

We pull it up through our underworld limbs to our sky limbs.
Some of this water we use to create food from light -
food for both ourselves and
which we share
through our filamental roots
to our tiny soil kin, who
offer us flavourful gifts
of nutrients
in return.

Other water

we release to the sky.
We transform this water into vapor
which, lighter than a whisper
travels high into the atmospheric heavens.

This water we draw from below, offering to our sky is special.

So very special.
For, this is how we coax in the rain.
This vapor provides essential moisture.
Without us
Places of our sky can become parched.
We do not want parched sky.
We want to keep whispering in the rain.

Yet not all moisture is created equal.

Our special sky water also carries tiny kin.
You call them *Pseudomonas Syringae* bacteria
which ride these plumes of rising moisture too.

Our tiny kin are also special.

Very special.
In our sky dome
water vapor needs *something*
to be able to coalesce into a community
to condense, to nucleate pin drops of water together.

Sometimes this *something*
is salt from our Mother Ocean.

But often over land

it is these tiny kin
that convene and connect water vapor
into a gathering of droplets
which keep condensing, coalescing
into those white beings who ephemerally grace
our skies:
clouds.
Or at least
they used to.

When our rooted kin disappears

so does our water vapor
our bacteria
and the presence
of our clouds.

We trees and our grassland kin, used to thrive on nearly every surface of soil.

But in the blink of our eyes
half of us
50% of us
5 billion hectares of us:
gone.
Removed.
Replaced
with bare, dead ground.
We now struggle
to call in the rain.

We miss being here.

And we are missed.
By our animal and plant kin.
Including humans if even, just as an unnameable ache
in the soul.
Missing the beauty of our leaves, needles, flowers and cones
The smell of our seasonal perfumes, carried in the winds
The tastes of our fruit and bark
The healing of our saps, berries and nuts

But also, as you shelter beneath me,

What do you feel?
The tingle of coolness?
Tickling your skin?

- - -

We are also missed
because of our often unappreciated
but essential majestic and magic abilities
to cool.

When we can express our tree-ness

We are the most powerful cooling force on the Earth.
Coolness from alchemising the sun's potent energy
transforming water from liquid to vapor.
What you could call an air conditioner, we do as natural as breathing.
And, coolness from our shade.
And, coolness from our rain.
And, coolness from the rain-cleared nights
where heat can travel
back out to the stars. (Life
briefly glimpsing it's
cosmological
home).

When expressing our tree-ness,

We complete the cycles for water to flow
Continuously, from earth to sky
Through earth into sky
Down to soils, up to clouds
Down through soils, up to sing in the clouds
Down to bring life into the soil and us
which we can offer
back through us in gratitude
as water.

Dear human friend

our sacred relationship with water
does most of the cooling on our planet.
But because we are only half of what we used to be
across the whole Earth
we struggle to gift the necessary groundwater
to the sky water
to keep the water flowing
to keep us all cool
to shower our lands
with the
liquid of life.

It is paradoxical. Without us

some places do not receive
the necessary water moisture, to create rain.
Yet, paradoxically, in other places
inconceivable volumes of water vapor evaporate into the sky
from hot, tree-less surfaces
but all this water is without
the essential nucleating tiny ones.
Nature only knows relationships.

While this water vapor sits stagnant in the atmosphere,

With nothing to condense it
It gathers a lot of heat.
Heat from the sun's rays.
Radiated concrete. Roofs. Roads. Dry bare dirt.
When water can finally nucleate
it does so
into storms
of unfathomable size.

Our oceans have worked so hard

to keep atmospheres in balance
and they are bloated with carbon dioxide.
Even if your societies
stop releasing carbon entirely,
our oceans will continue to release carbon
for many
thousands
of years.

Even if your societies transition entirely to

What you call
Renewable energy
electric vehicles
carbon sequestration technologies
our lands
will continue to be mined
our lands will continue to
produce exponential heat
our lands will not cool.
And fossil fuel use
still grows.

And without us,

This heat will keep accumulating
in the water vapor stuck in the sky
water vapor that captures

way way way way way
more heat
than carbon dioxide.

Dear humans,

we long to cool and shade you
from this unrelenting heat.
We are the rain whisperers.
Abundantly producing seeds each year.
To keep whispering in the rain.

Dear humans,

Will you join us?
Learn to know us?
Gather, eat, share and plant our seeds?
Call in the rain with us?
Dance together with us?
Hand in branch in water?
Remembering how to flow?

. - - - -

About the author

Dr. Katie Ross is an independent and creative writer, researcher, and learning designer. She lives in Wisconsin, and collaborates with farmers, non-profits and universities to grow the regenerative agriculture movement. She believes that with our communities – we grow food, cool our landscapes, and continue to dance in the rain.

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Moonlight in the Darkness: The Dance of Poetry

Shauna Butterwick & Jane Munro

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Abstract

In this submission we share some experiences of how poetry created a space for holding both hope and despair. We suggest that poetry, its specifics, imagery and metaphor can be part of transformative learning, helping us to keep dancing in the midst of the great unravelling.

Keywords: poetry, architecture of imagination, hope and despair

Introduction

What language keeps us dancing in the midst of the great unravelling? Here we consider the language of poetry. Shauna begins by sharing some poems by longtime friend and published poet, Jane Munro (<https://janemunro.com>), noting how her poetry enables her to attend, be present (and dance?). Jane then speaks of poetry's architecture, a house/space in which to dwell. We believe poetry's form and imagery, its engagement with specifics, not generalizations, can be part of transformative learning, keeping us dancing in the great unravelling.

Shauna

My despair is deepened by the news, publications and documentaries about the ecological crisis. I want to feel more hopeful and seek stories about actions reconnecting us with the more than human world. Stories that nourish me include: how village women in Africa successfully stopped a mining company; how Indigenous communities use innovative approaches to protect caribou migration; how "Community Archeology" on Lasqueti island (off the east coast of Vancouver Island) is bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to explore the land; and how a local group in Vancouver is rewilding a part of the Burrard inlet shoreline. The stories and imagery of poetry also feeds me, particularly the writings of poet Jane Munro, a longtime friend. Here are a few of her poems where the metaphors and imagery invite me to linger.

Jane is a yoga practitioner of many years, travelling often to India to attend yoga retreats. In the poem below, Jane shares how her yoga teacher, Geeta Iyengar, teaches her (and me) about attention, how to use all of our senses to tap into the intelligence of the body; this helps us to be "sober", that is, quick and sure footed. This poem, a cup of fresh cool water, helps me to escape my shrinking pond of despair.

Decentralizing Mind (Glass Float, 2020, p. 42)

Your final class, Geeta's grown stronger day by day. Now, she
climbs the steps to the stage by herself.

Pay attention isn't the right message, she explains. It's not a
single focus.

Spread intelligence to all parts at once – be aware of toes and hips and navel and neck. They say this is impossible, but you must spread consciousness skin to soul and soul to skin by de-centralizing mind.

Then the soul, the self, she explains, is stable, becomes sober --and broad. The individual self or soul is not caught in its shrinking pond. It joins the river again, flows again, comes alive.

Sober is one of Geeta's favourite words. For her, it's not tinged with dull or restricted. Sober is present, flexible, observant, alert. Quick-witted. Sure-footed. Uplifted. Happy to incorporate abundant points of view.

[...]

In another poem Jane shares more of Geeta's wisdom, this time about depression. I feel inspired and my grief is softened by Geeta's account of her depression following the death of her father. Jane then wonders if Geeta's approach is a way of finding light in the darkness of depression.

Geeta's Clues Against Depression (Glass Float, 2020, p. 37)

Today Geeta tackles depression. Like a detective, she's been investigating it: her father's death less than four months ago.

Keep your eyes on the horizon, she begins. Widen the gaze to take in all your periphery.

See it on a big screen across the back of the brain, as if it were projected on the inside of the skull. Notice you can still see the ground—everything—without strain.

Immediately, you're with her. You've learned, by trial and error, to do this to keep your balance. It works better than fixating on something in front of you: spotting.

[...]

Shine like a full moon without dispelling the dark.

The poems in Jane's book *False Creek* (2022), an ocean inlet in Vancouver, where I often walk, are haunting. Not so long ago it was the location of the Squamish village *Señákw*, the waters filled with thriving flora and fauna. That history is then juxtaposed with its radically altered current state in which the more than human world is there for consumption and

entertainment. Her account of ecological devastation is stunning, yet I don't turn away. Here's part of it:

Chock-full

Not with dog walkers – photographers – buskers
cement trucks – rowing sculls.

Tubby little ferries
zigzagging shore to shore

piles of mangosteens – tuna fillets on ice
buckets of star-gazer lilies

no painted piano for the public to play
no stack of yellow wheelbarrows for marina members

Populated

with eel grass – sea asparagus – bladderwrack – bull kelp
oysters – claims – mussels – abalone – crab – octopus

surf smelts – oolichan – herring spawn
chitons – sea urchins – periwinkle – moon snails

humpback whales – sturgeon – sockeye – pink -coho
canvasback – goldeneye – bufflehead – dunlin

great blue herons – hummingbirds – bald eagles
kingfishers – ravens – waxwings – owls – sandpipers

martens – porcupines – salamanders
wolves – frogs – elk – bear – otter

dogwood – bitter cheery – elderberry – bunchberry
thimbleberry – blackberry – huckleberry – salmonberry

skunk cabbage – monkey flower – devil's club – bleeding hearts
ocean spray – nodding onion - camas

Jane

I thank Shauna for these attentive readings. A year ago I read my False Creek poems to an engaged audience on a grassy slope under leafy trees in Eden Mills, Ontario. I was reading "Ballast" (p. 82) which ends with:

this inlet fed nations
oolichans and gulls, otters and eagles

now, exhausted permafrost vents methane

heat dome slaughters
starfish, mussels, clams

despair ... deep and deeper ... the steady unbearable

False Creek

Vancouver's keel of grief

I wrote "keel of grief", I explained, because a keel keeps a vessel upright, allows a navigator to steer. The depth of our grief, painful though it is, makes it possible for us to change course or maintain a chosen course with continual small adjustments. A keel of grief can steady us and firm our resolve. Some listeners told me how that metaphor was provocative and helpful. As Geeta Iyengar's teachings, in the poem Shauna shares above, lead me to say, when contending with depression we need to "shine like a full moon without dispelling the dark." Or as I have said when visiting grade four and five classrooms, we need to dance. I tell them, "poetry is writing that can dance."

Poetry holds both moonlight and darkness. It is concrete and particular, not generalizations. We need to zoom in and engage with specifics, sense a detail, and imagine it in metaphor, in language. What does this image and language evoke in us; what larger gestalt do these specifics resonate with and represent? Poetry, however, is not a report, a summing up; it is suggestion, not representation.

Shauna's reading of my poems affirms my belief that poetry is architecture for imagination, a space for another to inhabit and furnish, an inviting emptiness. Like meditation, poetry is more about attention than intention. Our dire circumstances can prompt us to break from orthodoxies and examine what we do, why we do it, and how it affects others. Over and over again poetry and poets have challenged orthodoxies.

And so...

As adult educators, our challenge is to foster transformative learning. The arts, including poetry and story can be part of that through imagery that touches hearts and moves bodies, providing a space others can enter and furnish with their own thoughts, then dwell in reflectively. Despair, the keel of grief, can keep us on course.

About the author

Shauna Butterwick lives in Vancouver on the West Coast of Canada. She is a retired professor of adult education, a member of PIMA's working group on climate justice education. A closet poet. Jane Munro also lives in Vancouver. She is a Canadian writer, poet, and educator. <http://janemunro.com>.

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Climate and conflicts: Wrecked - the next piece is peace - maybe

Gabriella Maestrini / g_maestrini@hotmail.com

Abstract

Destruction, climate, conflicts and resulting migration go hand in hand. Destruction through earthquakes, wildfires, hurricanes and other so called “natural” disasters cause destruction and displacement of human and non-human animals without acknowledging human intervention. While many distinguish between human caused and natural disasters, the consequences of displacement and destruction may be similar.

Keywords: hope, rubble, resistance, scarring, conflicts

Destruction, climate, conflicts and resulting migration go hand in hand. Destruction through earthquakes, wildfires, hurricanes and other so called “natural” disasters cause destruction and displacement of human and non-human animals without acknowledging human intervention. While many distinguish between human caused and natural disasters, the consequences of displacement and destruction may be similar. A collapsed bridge washed out by torrential rains or earthquake ruins have consequences far beyond their immediacy. While we see, feel, and experience these immediate consequences locally, the current conflicts around the world destroy buildings, lives, livelihoods and natural environments for generations to come, scarring, displacing, jarring, resisting not knowing how this will affect the future.

Taking our earth as a whole living pulsating reacting and reactive system, any disturbance to the balance causes destruction. Destruction through climate changes and conflicts, or both in combination, is the un-building of what exists, causing literal and metaphorical rubbles, triggering human and non-human animals to flee areas they once inhabited. However, revelling in the rubbles to reconnect, rebuild and flourish, moving beyond destruction or disaster reconnects with what matters or has always mattered (Maestrini, 2022). We may just keep dancing.

Where once there were ghetto-like claustrophobic structures, the sun caresses the little yellow-brown weed that peaks its head through the rubble. It pushes with an undeniable strength through the concrete, through the broken-off stones towards the sky, towards the sun, towards a new configuration - yet aware of its roots deeply connected to what life was there before. Roots clinging to the old; yet petals moving towards the creation of new with the watery, stony, airy connected to tears, blood, death, rebuilding keeps the seeped, seeded memories alive. Rubble, debris and remains constitute the building blocks for something new and different without ever leaving the original context of the lingering and its specters. Heating up the world is heating up its people that increase conflicts while trying to find a peaceful place to exist convivially with the environment, with one another, and with earth, resisting the urge to stop dancing.

Mother trees (Simard, 2021) initiate connection when surroundings are unbalanced, adopting strategies to bring back into balance that which was disturbed. They remind us that we live within a web of stories, connections to ourselves, to others, and to the world around us

(Wohlleben, 2016). While some disturbances cannot be reversed, rubble allows for moss to form, for fissures to be discovered, for un-building to be initiated and for rubble in the ruins to reconfigure reopening anew, keeping stories and memories alive to pass them on.

The following recent piece was written not only in reflection on conflicts around the world but also how these conflicts affect us all. While the climate crisis is often shaped and understood by warming or cooling temperatures around the world, rubble, leftovers of conflict, scar the earth, its people and its nonhuman inhabitants. Though the poem does not necessarily paint a positive picture at the beginning, hope for peace ends this meandering for a space/place in all of us to give us and earth a chance. It is “imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite” (Freire in hooks, 2003, p. v).

WRECKED - THE NEXT PIECE IS PEACE - MAYBE

Walking down uneven stairs
Covered in a state of moss
Meeting the rough Salish sea
Wind caressing bare-skinned hands
Connecting with a soulless state.

Reaching, yearning, halting,
never quite there
Becoming, bewildered,
never quite there.

The wind connecting
pages of unknown
pages of unseen
pages of in-between.
Trying to hold in
Trying to hold on
Trying to let go
Trying to BE.

Reaching, yearning, halting,
never quite there
Becoming, bewildered,
never quite there.

As one, as Other, as another in an ocean of deceit,
unstable
uncanny
unwelcoming
unwelcome at wreck
never grounded
never at peace
never in tempo

always out of step.

Moving between spaces, places at different paces. Can we ever be at peace?

Reaching, yearning, halting,
never quite there
Becoming, bewildered,
never quite there.

The body not in the body
Living in the half of the half of the centerfold
Re/de/constructing east and west
Standing at the precipice
Cradling,
straddling global lines of
unhomed
rehomed
unfold
manifold
unfold
the wreck between two covers
Never home.

Reaching, yearning, halting,
never quite there
Becoming, bewildered,
never quite there.

Peace HOPE between confusion between disturbance.
As possible future of reconciliation.
Unstable,
away from oneself

In the splicing of memories.

Reaching, yearning, halting,
never quite there
Becoming, bewildered,
never quite there.

Improvise, they say,
Step outside
Step aside
The norms
Make them shake

Halt their path
Hold their breath
Circle around
To a point of

RE/TURN/ED

THE NEXT PIECE IS PEACE IN PLACE.

About the author

My work focuses on humor in disasters, how people make meaning of “natural” events through humor, and how they resist, rebuild and flourish after such moments. Writing poetry or creating poetic voices is one of the devices I use to convey my theoretical meanderings. As a visual artist, through a pedagogy of hope and discomfort, I render my poems visually on the page so that they may take the reader metaphorical places they have not been before.

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Surface and Rust

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Abstract

Below I offer two poems about linking with nature and material transformation.

Keywords: poetry, decay, becoming

Surface

The waters push backwards,
the undertow draws me down
beyond light, air and earth.
I fear the wreckage beneath me,
the carnage of broken clocks that spool,
the soft white bodies of the bloodless,
that snag with their waving arms.
Anchors set adrift and furred in
weeds that entangle and snare.
But better than the surface.

Still down,
the silence is shattering,
only the rush of water and the beat
of my waterlogged heart, thrumming in my ears.
Such cold solitude is beyond bliss,
it erases and anaesthetises as my eyes
adjust to the dark like a bottom feeder.
And all above the dance continues
on and on in joyless frenzy,
as the days wear out and the seasons scream,
and surface is all.

Rust

The horseshoe, suspended from a bent nail,
is upside down,
all the luck draining away.
It is scabrous with age, psoriatic -
its mute flakes of metal slack
powdering in a pile below.

I notice only its rust,
the slow, painless erosion

of cold, hard brightness -
oxidising with light,
the earth beneath it breathing better.

It is becoming, not decaying;
it is root and blood,
staining the earth with tears and sweat.

The flowers around it
throb in ultraviolet brilliance,
suckling on its iron and growing fat

About the author

Sharon Clancy is Associate Professor in education at the University of Nottingham, specialising in post-16 education. Her writing focuses on adult education, class, culture and social justice. She convenes with Iain Jones, the Research Circle on Fostering Democracy, Debate and Dialogue which emerged from the Centenary Commission on Adult Education. Sharon is currently Chair of the Raymond Williams Foundation, co-Chair of SCUTREA and co-editor of the Studies in the Education of Adults journal. Sharon is also a poet and a painter. Her recent poetry book, 'A Tear in the Fabric of Time', published in September 2024, is available on Amazon. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Tear-Fabric-Sharon-Louise-Clancy/dp/B0DFHDXRRN/ref=sr_1_1?dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.LRZ1BeL7KxmYRSwjzr1lhdMzldTVnZ6T2q0YlPmpK28P2ZbZGB8hjhcMkZ5I_VivymGwJfEotx58oTmvGWJHEzLU-IY4ehK6oNisvpXmIS

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Penelope in Minsk, 2020

Rob Evans / rob.evans@t-online.de

Abstract

Learning biographies serve as a reserve of crucial social and emotional competence coping with dislocation. Explored here is Aleksandra, a learning biography about the protests and conflict following the robbed Belarus presidential election of August 2020. Like a Belarusian Penelope, it weaves tapestry, previous narratives are unravelled. Hope arises as the telling starts over and over.

Keywords: learning biographies, dislocation, hope

Learning Biographies

Learning biographies are situated in and create storied spaces which replace other spaces of learning and change that were formerly inhabited or passed through by the tellers. In times when demands on people come as drastic changes, this biographical knowledge serves as crucial social and emotional competence (Alheit, 2018). The biographical narratives are often spun across times in an arc from the immediate learning situation of a person to complex and potentially threatening spaces of political, social, and emotional dislocation. The narratives are all communicating some reality. Yet embedded in every narrative is silence, too, and in the silence the story continues, the meanings are unravelled and started anew.

How many of us in the COVID year 2020 were in Zoom interview conversations with people who were squeezed into a corner of a kitchen, with half-perceived other bodies passing by on the way to bedrooms, bathrooms, to work? Bodies without heads or torsos, trying to remain unseen? Interviews interrupted as a move was made into a more intimate, quieter space when the partner needed the corner being used for the Zoom to do their work out? Private spaces in changing places. Too private sometimes, in echoingly empty flats, hushed claustrophobic cellars or deathly antiseptic empty home office - deserted corporate areas, and quarantine flats? The distant immediacy rendered voyeuristic by the sheer magnified blurriness of the faces, hands, fingers of people I hardly knew at all.

The most insistent and most irresistible of all the blurred overlapping stories sent in sound and video, was Aleksandra, whose dramatically woven stories led me off into a parallel storyscape in which I am still.

Belarus/Aleksandra

A storyscape of interviews after the robbed presidential election of August 2020 in Belarus, the autumn of protest and repression (Cimafiejeva, 2021), and through 2021 and 2022 and the war in Ukraine, weaves a thread through Aleksandra's experience of awakening to social activism, re-reading her society and crossing the deeply embodied physical,

emotional, and linguistic borders learnt in our bodies (Williams, 1965, p. 137). New physical landscapes, dramatically unstable timescapes, and a lifescape of dark and light emerge.

I hear the pressures on someone to find themselves in difficult times. The physical and emotional spaces of her life are changing (re-discovering her city as a wholly different symbolic space), exhilarating (the slogans, new vocabularies, the shouting, the solidarity), but also frightening (men in balaclavas, stun grenades, explosions, running, hiding). An everyday world of family and work, kitchen-table conversations (Aleksievich, 2013), bus stops and supermarkets are invaded by realities whose names alone generate new continents of experience: the Okhrestina, the SIZU, Volodarka, names that stand for the threatening urban gulag archipelago of detention centres, ice-cold KGB prisons and dilapidated jails which become the routine subject of cappuccino-bar discussions everywhere for everyone, it seems, garnished with brutal-hilarious anecdotes and shared in social media (Cimafiejeva, 2021). In her narratives, Aleksandra has crossed over into different emotional and intellectual territory and in this radically new learning space she rehearses the voice to tell her story.

“It’s like falling in love”, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said (Carlin, 1994) in 1994 when the “Rainbow Nation” South Africa was born, and similarly Aleksandra expresses love of her city, Minsk, and of the “sea of people” she swims in during the mass protests:

So, you could just look on the left or look on the right and there were people everywhere. It just looked like an endless red and white river. And you also see everything kind of different because of the energy around you. People are positive, they are smiling, they are laughing, and it just feels like some kind of huge, huge party, and ...YOU JUST LIKE IT!

Her words flow in a great flood of stories and accounts that are told by an endless number of other individuals also swept up in this frightening conflict. Her stories mesh as life stories "within a community of life stories" (Bruner, 2004, p. 699). Given the vortex of events which is the context of this biographical learning process, she does not and cannot know where she is in the narrative that is unfolding around her. She does not and cannot know what the end of her narrative is. And, as in all narratives, current endings are resources for the telling, but after every successive ending there is a great empty gulf before her. The next telling starts at this empty space. As well, the thread of her biography has been broken.

Unravelling the skein of things

I think of Aleksandra as a Belarusian Penelope (Homer, 2018). She bears a heavy responsibility. When asked to talk about her life and where it is going, she feels the weight of saying the last word, ending her narrative. As she starts each narrative, she takes it where it must go: her childhood, language, arrests and beatings, discussions and joyous neighbourhood tea parties, just-discovered decorated synagogues, stun grenades, and so on, as it must be. And when she starts again, the narrative departs from somewhere completely different or goes over familiar ground but in a wholly new way. And so on. Like Penelope in the story, she weaves her tapestry patiently, skilfully, intently. And she then unravels the previous narrative and alters the pattern, tightens the skein, settles for a simpler form or starts

off on an image incomparably more intricate. The story is done, undone and done again. And there is hope in there, dancing in the light, and waiting for her with patience.

About the author

Rob Evans, EdD, born in London, studied Russian and History at Leeds and Tübingen. After working in adult, further and higher education at universities in Italy, Germany and Egypt and as a freelance adult and management trainer for many years, he taught Academic English Writing at the University of Magdeburg, Germany until 2019. His main research interests include biography research methods, the language of narrative, conversation analysis and discourses of learning. Publications include chapters, journal articles, and edited books.

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From other people's light to the soles of my feet- creating music that resonates with encountering others

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Abstract

This is a journey that begins with the image of death in my dreams. Driven by curiosity about death, I embarked on a quest for life, observing how death manifests in this world and learning to stand firm in the face of extreme situations. The world is a vast totality, where forms of death and life coexist. The closer we come to destruction, to the edge of death, the more deeply we uncover the essence of life—to reclaim our strength and commit ourselves to renewal.

Keywords: cultural roots, soulmate, dialogue, music across divides

I was once a very rebellious person, but I fell in love with the feeling of listening to music and being understood by music. It was like: "Ah, people around me can't understand me, but this singer who doesn't know me, touched my heart". Last year, I dreamt that I was dying. It was an overwhelming, extremely gray dream that smelled of disinfectant. Also, I found myself in a bottleneck on creation, as if in the process of writing, my pen and my words also died.

Driven by escaping this horrified death image, I tried to cross the psychological boundary, using music and words as a way for me to build relationships with others, in the field work in the world. I met Ms. Wu Suping during the second visit on a field trip in a rural village, the last daughter of a camphor producer (camphor is a treasure in early Taiwan). Growing up listening to her predecessors' stories about the camphor industry, she has deep emotional ties with the camphor gatherers. This motivates her to preserve memories of camphor when it is currently no longer valued.



Me and my partner and at musical field workshop

Listening to her sharing ignited a strong impulse in me to write it down. Thus, I turned the story into a piece of report literature and attempted to write lyrics. "April Fresh Flowers" refers to fringe flowers, symbolizes respect and admiration for independent women. The song describes Wu's continuous efforts to preserve camphor culture. Ms. Wu's connection with the land has made me rethink my own identity—What is the mission in my life that I hold onto as tightly as she does?

April Fresh Flowers

Lyrics & Music: Author

Scattering April's white fresh flowers
The wind of the wilderness carries them away
One by one, the passing souls
Stored in dim dreams

I walked too slowly
Unable to keep up with the aging memories
Just chasing, chasing
Until dusk obscures my vision

Awakened by the tranquility of dawn
The light hasn't gone out, yet it's unusually dim
The sighs of old age turn into July's snow

Can you see it, your dreams?
Can you hear it, all the stories?

Last Christmas Eve, I went to see her and sang to her. When I reached the chorus, I heard sounds of sobbing. I turned around and saw tears streaming down her face. She told me she felt like she heard her own voice. The song listened to her heart and transformed into musical form, creating a space to show that I understand her. This broke down our psychological barriers, allowing for genuine communication to take place.

I am engaged in a total of four fields, these fields shared a similar state: on the margins of certain social circumstances, yet they have not given up and even reached out to assist others. I witnessed their persistence, resilience, and selflessness in adversity.

This August, I started full-time volunteer work at a nonprofit organization in Japan dedicated to advancing human development. Early on, I was part of the planning phase for a study tour in Bali. Immersed in a local community there, I participated in a rite of passage where children transition to adolescence. I witnessed a young girl praying reverently amidst frangipani flowers, seemingly transformed as she released her childhood along with the flowers. I saw all vehicles stop to let two funeral processions pass, each treated with solemnity, as everyone carried out their roles with care. I observed local dancers using subtle expressions, head angles, and finger movements to embody the essence of Balinese men and women, and I felt the island's sacredness through the fusion of dance and music. These were aspects I would have missed had I visited as a tourist.

While experiencing the local culture, a question kept coming to mind: amid the constant influx of tourists, how do residents carve out spaces to preserve their culture? Perhaps my presence in this community is one expression of their cultural preservation. Despite the uncertainty brought by forces of rapid development, exploitative tourism, and other aspects of globalization, they continue their rituals, wear traditional attire, and express their cultural identity through music and dance. Their confidence in their heritage, conveyed through an open invitation, drew me in and naturally inspired me to join.

As I travel across different parts of the world, witnessing how various groups approach life, I realize that behind humanity lies a strength. When people sense that the world is changing and the environment is becoming extreme, no one bows their head in sorrow. It is as if this awareness of looming challenges, the physical feeling of an increasingly chaotic world drives people to come together, share wisdom, and act. Those on the margins, once aware of their position, do not stop moving forward.

Just as Paulo Coelho said, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it. Perhaps this internal strength, intertwined with the world's unique vibration, will guide people toward new paths.

From Knowing to Being
Perception
Spreading from fingertips—
Body and mind
Becoming the focal point of the gaze

The intermittently bright and dim North Star
Guiding a fleeting journey alone
Sometimes speeding, pausing
Imagining the forms to encounter

Should it be shattered, smeared, questioned
Or reassembled, interpreted, responded to
Choosing the forms to encounter

Thoughts and senses
Extending from the vantage point to the other shore—
I am
Understanding the flickering North Star, I am
And at this moment, the dawn is breaking

(Poem of The stars are me...)
At the cracks,
covered in rusted iron. No
stars. No
listeners.

So, just quietly
Perhaps what's restricted is
words, and where to stand.

The sun won't set, like
a cold crescent moon perpetually shining upside down.

It turns out the stars are me, as well as
the sun and the moon.

About the author.

Vina is a Hai-Siann Waldorf High School Student and currently on a gap year at the Institute of Cultural Affairs Japan (2024). She comes from southern Taiwan, she enjoys reading a variety of books, playing music and writing. She cherishes moments of co-creation with others but also appreciates spending her time alone. Rather than just listening to others, she prefers to experience and interpret things independently.

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When at the cliff edge, take a big step forward

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Abstract

We reflect on the “great unravelling” from the vantage point of being in our 50s, noting how different this is to the vantage point of younger generations. Characterizing this moment as being at the proverbial cliff edge, we explore what to do there. What to do with our fear, and – inspired by the young ones - seizing the possibility to change everything by taking a big step over the edge.

Keywords: destructive energies, revelation, rite of passage

The young ones spent a night under the stars, fasting, each silently finding their today-truth. When they came back, they wove their individual insights into a collective message:

We are the song people who have heard the rumbling of the sky, invited the darkness, and nested in its embrace.

Through the lessons of the land, we encountered grief, joy, and life.

We weave laughter, music, and stories into medicine.

We bend lines into circles.

What about our privileges? Our certainties? We stay with the discomfort.

Owning our colours, greatest fears and dreams, on the edge of the cliff we are the ones who reach out our hand, hold each other as we jump. We are life moving, and life is moving us.

[Rise and Regenerate & Rite de Passage / Rage, Essertfallon Switzerland, 5 September 2024].

And what about us? Two post-menopausal humans in love. While perhaps only beginning to truly blossom into our fullness, we are certainly not young ones in the prime of life yet burdened with failing SDGs and eco-anxiety, racing beyond a 1.5-degree temperature rise. How do we, in our 50s, respond to the great unravelling?

We watch the quickening of destructive energies. How a man with a bad haircut but enormous influence – and who is known to lie, rape, cheat, and corrupt - is joining forces with another man of even more enormous influence and disturbing principles who owns Space-X. How the financial markets are busy turning fossil fuel into an increasingly attractive investment. How Israel continues to flatten hospitals, orphanages, and family

homes in ever-widening circles of destruction, and how the world continues to turn a blind eye to the devastation in Sudan. One of us is grieving the killing of dozens of birch trees – felled for the most myopic of reasons – with whom they have been in conversation their whole life. The other is mutely observing while a pristine wetland, full of chorusing frogs, is gouged open by yellow machines so that a too-large private home can be built there.

This quickening of destructive energies will take us to the cliff edge faster than we had previously feared. And yet, maybe that is the only way. Once there, we hope that instead of clinging to the cliff, instead of pushing others over to save ourselves, that we will have the presence of mind to take a big step forward. Holding hands. Maybe singing. Because that big step over the edge is the only way to escape these destructive energies, the only way to shed the linear ways of thinking and being that got us to this cliff.

The great unravelling is not a process. It is a revelation. Once you see it, you are changed. You are in or you are out. This means changing our relationship with fear, with the notion of risk, with each other. We are life moving, and life is moving us.

We don't know what happens when we leap. It might be a long free-fall. It might be the end. Or it might be a threshold. An initiation. A leap of life. Regardless, it requires some falling. There's reason to be afraid. What happens when we stay with the fear? Even befriend fear? Knowing that something in us needs to die to cross this edge into the forever-becoming-into-who-we-are.

About the author

Rebecca is a dialogue facilitator. She researches, teaches, facilitates, and writes about bringing people from vastly different life experiences into dialogue and collaboration. As a senior consultant with Reos Partners (Africa office), she works on issues such as dismantling structural racism, preventing gender-based violence, decolonising global civil society, and navigating organisational culture change. She leads Reos Africa's work in fragile and conflict affected contexts.

Carine is a Rite of Passage guide and a shamanic counsellor. She/they trained with the School of Lost Borders in California and guides programs in Europe, South Africa and USA. They also offer one on one counselling to courageous individuals who are willing to show up for the necessary conversations of our times. They are the founder of Ceux d'ici, an organisation based in Switzerland, where they have their basecamp.

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Creativity, Caring ... and onto the stage

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Abstract

Reflecting on my feminist, anti-apartheid activist life in South Africa, until today, i describe moments which illustrate how laughter, being in awe of the natural beauty around me, playfulness, creativity and caring help me to dance through the darkest times. In ‘the great unravelling’, embodied movement, growing awareness of the magic of my body, poetry, being on stage, eating healthily and balancing this with creativity, singing and dancing, allow hope to persist.

Keywords: activism, singing, survival

The current wars are devastating for humanity and the environment. Globally floods and fires confront us. We are reaping the consequences of our disrespect - not to revere the earth. Poverty and unemployment abound. And yet, there are innovative environmental programmes by youth - and this gives me hope.

On a personal level my body, surpassing the promised three score and ten years, i am confronted with frailty, pains, increasing immobility. Yet still I dance with delight. I look around me and see the majestic mountain and undulating waves and i am filled with awe at the splendour. I take a deep breath of beauty. I take time to listen to my body and ensure regular exercises and have learned how these movements are the best antidotes for my pains. These movements mobilise my muscles, initially with much pain. Executing tasks in an earth friendly manner, i learn daily – celebrating, living with joie de vivre. I can overcome pains with mobility. This conquering of pain by dancing; gives me joy and hope.

Doing writing workshops with those whose past has traumatised them is invigorating. For us all, writing is therapeutic. I am invited to do poetry and in turn invite Girl Child Movement members. Instead of reading from our anthology as proposed, they compose their own impressive poems. I appreciate listening to and learning their concerns. Collectively we share this inter-generational platform; all wiser and inspired with hope for the future. I discover how much pleasure it is to do fun poetry on stage, caricaturing my idiosyncrasies. Annual visits to McGregor Poetry festivals feed my soul. We are healing ourselves through our creativity; delightfully dancing with our pens, giving us hope.

I venture with confidence into new creative arts. I take my past prison paraphernalia and put them into an art installation... I went to a scrap yard, bought an iron barred door and adorned it with my prison paintings and poems. This time i control the barred door, making it the centre of creativity and manoeuvre and control it as opposed to the past. Overcoming past trauma and transforming it with creativity, i dance in defiance of past pains, hope contributes to the healing.

I documented our past political struggles but not as victims. I found fun and merry moments, our outwitting police, state agents and emerging triumphantly. I recall our arrest in Gugulethu. We just could not take this “arrest” seriously, giggling nonstop. The police wanted our names and professions, we asked whether they could spell our names but just spelt them all out, loudly and clearly, with gusto. They did not have enough cells to put us into separate “races” which we rejected. The police were flabbergasted. They did not know how to deal with these “giggling girls” and released us without further ado. This produced a loud guffaw. There was our guerilla theatre at the Grand Bazaars boycott during the Retail and Allied Workers’ strike, women chaining themselves to the Robben Island ferry, Nomatyalla nailing a copy of the Freedom Charter onto a door at Parliament, police attempting to arrest Zurayah for swearing at an “officer of the law.” I jumped onto the policeman preventing her arrest. I was charged with assaulting an officer of the law. Our group and gathering spectators cheered. The two policemen walked away to the safety of their van. Subsequently, we laughed, sang and danced with defiance.

A new insightful awareness of the magic of my body: On return from a rural retreat, I was confronted by strange insect bites on my leg. It was itching. To my dismay the tiny bites erupted into huge red blotches with great pain. People were quite alarmed, coercing me to immediately consult a doctor. The red inflammation looked frightening. I delayed consulting a doctor. Meanwhile, I just massaged the eruptions regularly with castor oil. This somehow eased it, and I continued the massaging. A few days later there were no signs of any pain, eruptions or scars. I really marvelled at this. It reminded me of primary school Environment Studies when I first learnt about the lizard’s tail and its regeneration. Somehow, no link was made of the lizard’s regenerative properties to our bodies.

I am daily in awe of the beauty around me, sunrise and sunsets, the diverse colours of nature, the mountain in all its majesty. I am always mesmerised by the unceasing rolling of the waves; unceasingly moving to and fro, each wave patterned uniquely in shape, size and sound. The flamingos and other birds visit us in the surrounding wetlands. Then occasionally i see a cold front menacingly rolling across Table Bay towards the land. I stare; am transfixed by the calmness exuding inside me.

Performing my one-woman plays is such fun. I no longer believe I must try to solve the problems of the world. I no longer work non-stop for hours, forgetting to exercise and eat... now it is caring for my body with regular exercises in the pool. Usually, the music for the aqua exercise is diverse and energising; i add my own dance steps to the basics. I embroider them into elaborate dance moves, adapting dance steps; accordingly, not sure how successfully but I “Bollywood” my body as well as I can. Then similarly with Latin American, Zumba and African music from DRC, not forgetting Makeba’s Pata Pata. And when Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake is played, moi, the 1950s baby elephant at the Eoan Group emerges!

When working on the computer the foot dance movements are twofold: under the table I manoeuvre my legs and feet within limited space and range to avoid pain and to be

able to walk effectively once I stand. Of course, also at 3am I need the toilet; there I am firstly exercising vigorously before attempting to walk.

I now eat healthily... try to make positive changes where I am, balancing this with creativity, singing and dancing. And that comic play must still be written one of these days.

About the author

gertrude fester-wicomb is a long-time feminist, anti-apartheid activist, academic, educator. She is part of the Curatorial Research Team, Sarah Baartman Centre for Remembrance, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

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Reclaiming Labels: Creative Defiance Through Printmaking

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Abstract

This paper explores the feminist resistance of young women—childhood sexual abuse and homelessness survivors—through printmaking and creation of a zine, transforming derogatory labels into symbols of defiance, challenging stigma and asserting resilience. The resulting zine is a creative and political statement, questioning societal expectations and celebrating the strength of marginalised voices.

Keywords: feminist resistance, empowerment, printmaking

Introduction

In response to the PIMA Special Bulletin's call to engage with “the great unravelling”, I would like to share the outputs from a recent community-based project that I co-facilitated in Glasgow, Scotland. Working with a charity which supports young women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse and homelessness, we created visual art to explore the themes of stigma and resistance. Together, we chose to confront harmful labels imposed on women through printmaking and zines. Our aim was to transform negative words into symbols of empowerment, resisting the unravelling around us.

In a time of inequality and despair, our project pushes back with creativity. We act in the face of the “great unravelling” by reclaiming our identities through art. Hope emerges, not just in the art, but in the connections formed through collective courage.

What's in a name?

Our project began with a group exercise to share the names and labels women have been called over the years. We passed a balloon around the room and when someone caught it, they had to share a label or name that had been directed at them. This playful start soon led to deeper conversations about how language is used to stigmatise, control and limit women.

The younger women (aged 18-24) in the group were sometimes shocked by the derogatory terms the older women (in their late 30s and 40s) had encountered when growing up in the 1980s. Words like “bimbo”, “spinster”, and “bunny boiler” felt outdated and absurd to them, yet they realised that such words had real power over women's lives in previous decades. Conversely, the older women were equally stunned by the contemporary language the younger women now face; terms like “tight”, which has evolved into a label tied to desirability based on sexual inexperience. These intergenerational discussions opened up important dialogue about how language continues to evolve, yet still serves as a way to police women's identities and behaviours.



Derogatory labels

We captured these labels on colourful post-it notes, creating a stark visual representation of the stigma women have faced. These words were a mixture of the explicitly offensive, like “slag” or “bitch” and seemingly benign, but equally limiting labels such as “wife” or “mother”. Even positive terms like “goddess” or “feminist” were explored for their hidden layers of expectation. This exercise laid the groundwork for our creative response, where each participant would use art to reclaim and redefine these labels.

Creative defiance through printmaking

At the heart of our response to this societal unravelling is the act of reclamation through art. Each participant selected one or more words that resonated with her, whether because it had caused pain or because she saw an opportunity to reshape its meaning. Through the process of carving these words into foam sheets and lino-blocks, inking and pressing them into prints, the group were able to transform these once-harmful labels into powerful symbols of defiance and self-expression.

One particularly poignant example came from a young woman who chose to reclaim the term “Cat Lady”. This label is often used in a derogatory way to suggest loneliness or eccentricity, but for her, it symbolised independence and survival. Having grown up in care and experienced homelessness, owning a home and a cat was a profound achievement, a marker of stability. Her print, adorned with a heart and paw print, captured her pride in having created a safe and stable space for herself. The act of creating this print allowed her to reject society’s narrow definition of who she was and replace it with one of her own making.



Carving for cat lady

Other participants reclaimed words like “tight”, “bitch”, and “queen”, stripping away their negative connotations and filling them with new, empowering meanings. The prints created were bold, intricate and deeply personal, reflecting their journeys of resilience and strength. Through this process, I have seen each participant transform the labels that once held power over them into art that speaks of survival, defiance and creativity.



Carvings

Acting and finding hope

What brings us hope in these challenging times? I can confidently say that the hope I witness comes from this very act of creative resistance. Watching women reclaim language that had been used to hurt or limit them has been a profound experience. Through our work together,

we are not only pushing back against the unravelling of societal norms but also building a sense of solidarity and empowerment. We are allowing women to take control of their own narratives.

Generational dialogue and shared experience have been essential to this hope. The intergenerational aspect of our group revealed how the power of words changes over time, but also how deeply embedded societal expectations of women remain. By using art as a form of action, we have created a space where these women can subvert those expectations and forge their own identities, independent of the labels that society has tried to place on them.



Slut transformed

Art as empowerment in times of crisis

The prints created by the group will be featured in a zine which we are making to celebrate the work of this project. The zine will not just be a collection of art, but a statement of resistance, challenging the societal norms that control women's identities. It will help assert that only women themselves have the right to define who we are. Each print will be a powerful declaration of survival and defiance.

In responding to the "great unravelling", we are not sitting back in numbness or despair. Instead, we are acting through creativity, through community, through art. We are taking harmful labels, stripping them of their negative power, and transforming them into something hopeful, bold and unapologetic. This project has shown me that in times of crisis, art is not just a form of expression, it is a form of action. The young women involved in this project have turned stigma into strength, and our zine will serve as a reminder that these women are not defined by the names society has given them. They are reclaiming their voices, their stories and their futures.



Author Nic, word has been obscured for this publication

Acknowledgements

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About the author

Dr Nic Dickson works as an artist-researcher with community groups and as a Research Associate at the University of Glasgow's School of Health and Wellbeing, specialising in participatory, arts-based research approaches to amplify the voices of marginalised groups. As Co-Chair of SCUTREA, she promotes the advancement of adult education research. Her work bridges artistic methods and rigorous research. Current projects at the University include Systematic (using visual methodologies to inform AI healthcare solutions for disadvantaged communities); Communiversities (empowering residents to design research exploring barriers to physical activity); and Conversation Cafés (co-creating a Public Information Comic on the impacts of substance dependency).

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Responding to the “Great Unravelling” through Composeher, a Feminist Music Intervention

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Abstract

The action by the Composeher project of the Glasgow School of Art is a powerful, creative response to deaths of migrants trying to enter the UK. The Choir commissioned seven female composers to create new choral pieces, one of which was a tribute to the children who had drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. Composeher is responding to the Great Unravelling with joyful, playful defiance.

Keywords: migrants, feminists, choir, music

Introduction

Every day, it seems, that the UK media report new deaths of migrants attempting to cross the English Channel. These deaths are reported as tragedies. Smugglers and traffickers are blamed. Law and order is called for through calls for strict border control, detentions centres, and even deportation from the UK to Rwanda. There is total historic amnesia about why “they” are trying to get to the UK in the first place. They are categorised into deserving (women and children, from certain places) and undeserving migrants (men from Albania, in particular). They are decontextualised, dehistoricized and vilified, framed as threats to the UK “way of life” and citizens.

One joyful, playful and powerful response to this humanitarian crisis is the Composeher project of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) Choir. In an explicit attempt to address gender inequality in music, the GSA Choir commissioned seven female composers to create new choral pieces for the choir. The initiative featured workshops at Glasgow Women’s Library, highlighting the composers’ creative processes and the industry’s under-representation of women. The new works premiered in May 2023 and our recording of the work was released in 2024 (<https://composeher.co.uk/> - available on all music streaming apps). I have been in the GSA Choir for nine years singing in the Alto 2 section. I would like to reflect on my experiences of singing “The Alphabet of Jasmine”, one of the compositions in the Composeher project.

The composers were given free rein on their topics for their music, and the topics could not be more diverse. I include a summary of them here as they all involve reclaiming the contributions of women in various fields. **Bridghe** by Pippa Murphy (lyrics by Karine Polwart) is a celebration of the legend and lore of St. Brigid, Ireland’s newest patron saint. **Within the Living Eye** by Rebecca Rowe (lyrics by Kathleen Raine) highlights the poetry of Kathleen Raine (1980-2003), a British ecofeminist. **Angel of the Battlefield** by Ceilia McDowall (lyrics by Clara Barton and Seán Street) is inspired by the life and work of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. **Papilionum** by Sarah Rimkus (lyrics by Maria Sibylla Merian) draws on the work of Maria Sibylla Merian, an influential 18th Century naturalist who studied insect transformation. **14 Weeks** by Jane Stanley (lyrics by Judith Bishop) reflects on the early stages of pregnancy.

Margaret’s Moon by Ailie Robertson (lyrics by Jackie Kay) draws on Jackie Kays’ beautiful poem written at the death of her birth mother.

The seventh piece, “**The Alphabet of Jasmine**” by Dee Isaacs, with lyrics by Gerda Stevenson, is a tribute to the children who have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. It is dedicated to Matina and Spiros Katsiveli, who have spent their lives aiding refugees arriving by boat on the small island of Leros in the Dodecanese, Greece.

Dee Isaacs and Gerda Stevenson have been working supporting migrants for years. The music is infused with their deep lived experience. Dee (Isaacs, n.d.) recounts:

“Both of us are involved in work that tells stories of people past and present and more recently those people who have been refugees. My work for the last three years has taken me to one of the Aegean Islands – Leros, Greece – where I go every few months to work in a refuge for vulnerable children arriving on European shores. Even when I return to Scotland their stories are ever-present. Gerda’s work with the [Scottish Refugee Council](#) has meant that she too has heard first-hand these terrible human trials and the challenges of migration.”

The lyrics of Nine Fathoms Deep are:

Nine Fathoms Deep
Nine fathoms deep we lie tonight
far from the homes we know
Nine fathoms deep on the cold seabed
Our bodies drift like snow
Nine fathoms deep we lie tonight
Far from the homes we know
Numb to the silken sharks and whales
That brush us to and fro
The ghostly moon above us sails
In a black careless night
For all their light the stars are blind
We are lost to humankind
Our dreams migrate like paper kites
Dissolve
Fade
Evaporate
Dissolve
Fade
Evaporate...

When we learn a piece of music we seldom start at the beginning and work through it sequentially. Often, we start with the final 12 bars of the music and work backwards through the composition. It took me some time to piece together the powerful message in this music. The line, “For all their light the stars are blind/We are lost to humankind” is particularly beautiful to sing. The music is written in a way that makes you feel like you are floating in water, descending, as you sing. This is accomplished through octave jumps between notes, and gentle

semi-tone toggles that feel like rocking waves. It is a beautiful piece of music with haunting lyrics.

I am immensely proud to be part of this project, which aims to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of women in music. As a feminist, I see this as a powerful act of resistance against the historical and ongoing marginalization of women in cultural and artistic spheres. By addressing these challenging issues through song, we confront the world's harsh realities directly. Singing about difficult subjects with joy becomes a form of playful defiance, demonstrating that even amidst tragedy, we can express hope and resilience. This duality of joy and sorrow coexisting is a testament to our ability to find light in the darkest times. Dee Isaacs summarises the Alphabet of Jasmine in this vein:

“The Alphabet of Jasmine is a triptych of songs written to honour our fellow human beings who have fled from conflict: those who didn't make it, those, often bereaved, who did, and all who, sadly, will have no choice but to attempt these unimaginable odysseys (Isaacs, n.d.).”

Being part of the GSA Choir means I am not facing these challenges alone. Choirs are inherently communal, bringing people together to create something beautiful. This sense of community is crucial in times of crisis. This collective strength is a form of resistance against the isolation and fragmentation that often accompany global crises. Music for me has always been a source of joy and a means of expressing complex emotions. Being involved in the GSA Choir and the Composeher project is a powerful example of responding to the Great Unravelling with joyful and playful defiance. Through music, we find joy, build community, and raise awareness of critically important issues. This helps us to cope with the global challenges and contribute to a more hopeful and connected future.

About the author

Bonnie Slade is Professor of Adult Education for Social Change at the University of Glasgow. She explores how adult education in various contexts can drive social change and empower individuals. Her interdisciplinary research spans adult education, labour studies, migration studies, gender studies, and arts-informed research. Since 2001, she has presented at over eighty national and international conferences and published in academic journals and edited books, including “Learner-Centred Education for Adult Migrants in Europe” (Brill, 2021). She serves on several editorial boards and is the Programme Leader for the International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (Erasmus Mundus).

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Teaching and Learning through Play

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Abstract

The play *Reclaiming the P... Word*, written and performed by female staff and students, talks back to female body violence and is an example of embodied feminist pedagogy beyond the classroom. Through my years of drama work, I've learned how feminist transformation occurs when women truly personalise and embody the political.

Keywords: feminist pedagogy, violence against women, drama production/performance

Introduction

The recent massacre of women on 28 September 2024 in Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, evoked strong emotions. These murders underscored the unabated violence against women. That this could happen despite South Africa's extensive legal and policy framework to protect women is mind-boggling. The paradox makes me think of how easily formal and publicly visible measures for ensuring social justice have been steadily eroded or betrayed. In particular, I am reminded of the de-politicisation of the feminist notion of Violence Against Women (VAW) vis a vis the now popularised and ostensibly inclusive term Gender Based Violence (GBV). The latter negates the unprecedented violence that is perpetrated against the female body whether it occurs in times of peace or war.

It is against this background of overt and covert forms of Violence Against Women that the feminist drama production "*Reclaiming the P...Word*" was created at the Gender Equity Unit based at the University of the Western Cape in 2006. (The "p" refers to the Afrikaans word "poes" meaning "vagina" in English). This was a year which set out to celebrate what South African women had achieved. It was the 50th celebration of the women's historic march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria and the 10th celebration of the democratic South African constitution. But the statistics showed that the cases of violence perpetrated against women and girls were astronomically high and vicious. We used these statistics as the foundation to design a play where women students, staff and women from the community could reflect and write about their own lived experiences. We worked from the premise that the university as a site of learning reflects what transpires in society.

A pivotal question raised during the collective workshopping of the play was: How could we speak about violence without being the perpetual victim? During the struggle against apartheid, we often used protest theatre and prose to talk back and teach about oppression and de-humanisation. These audience-engaged forms of activism rarely spoke the language of suffering, and frequently prioritised the politics of resistance. We drew strong inspiration from this resistance tradition, especially because the play focused on black women, and in South Africa black women are generally stereotyped as being victims and lacking agency.

Using feminist tools and methodologies through the spoken word offered the ideal vehicle to raise awareness. The narratives that were created used music, poetry and dialogue to

speak about painful experiences, but every piece ended in triumph. One of the pieces I want to draw attention to is entitled “Taxi Queen” written by Wahseema Roberts. Kombi taxis are an essential part of the public transport system in South Africa. They have surpassed rail and other forms of passenger transport. While taxis are convenient they are also literally and metaphorically the transporter of violence and danger for women. Every time a woman steps into the taxi she is filled with fear and trepidation - this is true for students, especially women students. The title given to the woman passenger who is sexually favoured by the taxi driver is “Taxi Queen”. Roberts aptly debunks this so-called “privilege” in her piece where she disdainfully describes the experience of being sexually objectified. She ends the piece with the triumphant declaration both to her harasser and to the audience: “I am my own Taxi Queen”.

In reflecting on this piece now, I recall the many forms and occasions of creating, wordsmithing and claiming power in what became an organic and dialogic teaching and learning. There were numerous feminist didactical moments for the writers, the subsequent performers and the audiences throughout the years.

The play was deeply transformative in the way it provoked writers, who were often the actors, as well as the audiences who came to watch the show, to rethink the various forms of representational and physical violence inflicted on black women’s bodies. Although the subject of violence against black women has been almost obsessively written about in the media and the academy, it is sadly the case that many accounts lack passion and force. Most importantly, most fail to convey the agency of black women.

In working with the students as a producer and director I was most gratified by the evidence of each of them embarking on a personal journey of claiming their stories and their dignity. It is often said that feminism connects the personal to the political. Working on this drama over several years has made me realise that feminist transformation occurs when women are able to truly personalise and embody the political. `Reclaiming the P word`, which evokes women’s triumphant struggle to refuse others’ control over and vilification of their bodies, powerfully conveys feminist messages through its content; its processes of working with women’s own stories; its emotional engagement with audiences, while provoking critical questioning; and the unchecked passion of all who were involved in the production and performances of the play.

About the author

Mary Hames has retired as the Director of the Gender Equity Unit at the University of the Western Cape. Currently she keeps herself occupied with various projects including curating exhibitions for the organisation Rainbow Archives and Narratives which focuses on the political history of lesbian struggles in the Western Cape. She is also researching her maternal history in Namaqualand. She is an ardent gardener and dabbles in pottery.

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Porosity in translation for different women: living métissage as Practice as Research

Gaia Del Negro & Silvia Luraschi

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Abstract

In this article two feminist Adult Educators reflect on what they learned around translation as a vital process characterizing their daily lives, a strategy to become more daring knowers in relation to others and the world, as well as more caring beings in between the lands where they pass.

Keywords: translation, practice, identity, women

Research as Practice

We are two feminist Adult Educators based in Milan (Italy) where we work as independent researchers and practitioners in social work. In academia, we have experienced how thinking is disconnected from daily living, and words are abstracted from bodies. As Adult Educators, we try to interrogate the language we use for exploring new degrees of freedom.

We [now do the academic thing and] present a reflection on “the more visceral, embodied, and experiential aspects of language and identity” (Ros i Solé, Fenoulhet and Quist, 2020, p.401) starting from a research project on Experiential Translation (Campbell & Vidal, 2019) we conducted in Italy in 2021-2022, Ospitare/Hosting others (Del Negro et al., 2022). The project involved a group of adult educators in the collaborative translation of a performance (Delorenzi, 2019, <http://www.teatrodellemoire.it/ospitare-lavoro-divenire/>) and of two poems in a public park in Milan.

In July 2021, eight participants met twice in Parco di Trenno on a Sunday morning. After a practice of experiential anatomy (about 40 minutes) in perceiving our body (immune system/border, from the skin to the digestive system) for exploring coexistence inside our own bodies, in relation to space and others, we constructed a personal safe space with unrolling wool strings and small personal objects (translating Object 1-the solo performance). Finally, the participants translated the two poems (Object 2) by writing significant lines on cardboard, placing them in the space and doing a voice performance.

After the events, we collected texts on the relationship with translation written by three women: Cinzia Delorenzi, the choreographer, our partner in the project, a participant translator, and the poet Antonella Anedda, author of the poems (Anedda, 1999). We analysed them asking: “How does a concept of porosity emerge from engagement in translation of

different women?” framed in a Practice as Research approach (Tarantini, 2021, working from Kershaw et al., 2011).

We became curious to reflect on the dimensions of entanglement (in the environment), embodiment (experience in the body), and material interaction that emerged in translating in the park, and on how they suggest a creative strategy in a time of crisis, for professional life and academic research.

We engaged in a feminist *métissage* (Bishop et al., 2019) with the women's texts and photos from the park – a method for selecting and assembling materials guided by personal resonance and sensory engagement, through steps of writing and dialogue. In the process of uncovering new patchworks, we enjoyed making visible the potential “prismatic” multiplication of meanings latent in any act of translation (Reynolds, in Gould and Tahmasebian, 2020, p. 50) as a resource for living [no more academic parenthesis for a while, promise].

By performing *métissage* to reflect translation from the lived experience of three different women, and our own, we take back the idea of a “practice-based” research approach that began to emerge in Art & Design in the UK in the mid 70’ and early 80’. Like Carol Gray (1996) [ok we did, but this is a manifesto!], “By ‘practice-led’ I mean, firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice” (p. 3).

Our *métissage*: Practice of research

In our *métissage* the idea of ‘trans’ emerges as a form of passage:

“We all write in a language of passage, living is passing, passing, will pass. Nothing is certain, precise, and yet as we pass, we also let pass in the sense of leaking a dampened, subterranean trust precisely in something that passes, that can pass like a liquid pass through a cloth.”

(Extract from Silvia’s *métissage* about materiality)

The idea of movement in translation reminds us of the reflections by cognitive science researcher and professor of Work and Organisational Psychology, Ugo Morelli (2022), about landscape and identity processes that continuously evolve through interaction in social and environmental relationships. On the value of porosity to regenerate a sense of community, by lowering walls and defences in a safe and vital way, he writes:

“The fact is that we have difficulty thinking in terms of relationships and insist on not investing in them. Not even education deals with it as it could and should. We continue to think and speak in terms of entities, as if we were autonomous islands. Every autonomy is defined in the dependence of its sources. It therefore emerges from the relational porosity it allows itself and of which it is capable.” (Morelli, 2022, p. 19, our translation). [I am still thinking about the liquid that passes through a cloth]

The boundaries between verbal and nonverbal communication are porous. During activities in the park, our bodies, by moving, communicate with each other without speaking. What are we saying to each other? We are practising an ecology of relationships in which human beings communicate not only with each other but are in constant connection with all (non-human) beings and the environment.

This porosity during translation allows the emergence of new points of view and new ways of acting, by experiencing displacement - “In fact, translating text is not just moving the words into another language” [straight to the point the different women speaking from experience!].

(Extract from Silvia’s métissage about materiality).

Translation is porous in reminding us that we live in bordered countries. Our very life is embodied, and what we know is created through conflict, and creativity. In our métissage, the porosity of language is evoked by the metaphor of soil:

“The language, [...], a soil, like a skin, absorbs but also transpires. Only with this awareness, that it is not 'smooth', innocent, indifferent, 'pure', can it perhaps resist. I think of language as a living organism, precarious, mobile, full of potential. Poetry does not cure, poetry does not save, but by writing we preserve the species-poetry.”

(Extract from Gaia’s métissage about materiality, our translation)

[this Poetry-Animal thing is taking us towards environmentalism! PEACE! AWARENESS!] At the same time, this dimension of translation in social life as well as in literary endeavour is like an open land where we see no end. To inhabit the uncertainty of not knowing and being lost in translation, multimodal translation (Campbell and Vidal, 2019) offers to fill the gap between languages by introducing other expressive languages. We do it all the time: we make gestures, faces, we introduce objects, we use space, voice, and touch. We tell stories. We slide into artfulness.

In conclusion, the porosity of language and identity which emerged in our research inspired us as a liberating dimension, however always contradictory and open, that different women including ourselves explore. In a patriarchal society, there persists a rigidity of language and sense- and self- making that defy the porosity and becoming of all social institutions [oh it sounds familiar]. And still we dance, for us that means, we can be “strange” and open to multiple voices speaking inside us, and outside! We want to bring explorative sensitive practices in everyday institutional spaces. Experiential collaborative translation, as well as feminist métissage, are approaches to construct knowledge that is intentionally open to in-habit the world with others [try it out!].

About the author

Gaia Del Negro, PhD., is an Adult Education researcher and social projects evaluator and community welfare trainer in Italy. She collaborates with the University of Milano Bicocca as Secretary of RUIAP Italian Network of Universities for Lifelong Learning. Her research interests include relational and multimodal methodologies. Silvia Luraschi,

PhD., is a pedagogist, Feldenkrais method practitioner, counsellor, Adult Education researcher, and social service coordinator in Milan, collaborating with the University of Milano Bicocca. She is a lecturer of Social Pedagogy at the University of Bergamo (Italy). Her research interests include embodied narratives, aesthetic practices, and walking methodologies.

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The great unravelling – in defence of laughter

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Abstract

This text considers dancing as defiance and rebellion, in the face of catastrophe, acknowledging the necessity of creating meaning in a world that appears senseless. Drawing inspiration from existentialist writers, the text suggests that radical popular education has roots in existentialist ethics. Collective laughter and dancing are energy-giving, inspiring solidarity.

Keywords: existentialism, dancing, laughter

In defence of laughter

When I feel stuck, I turn to literature to help me scramble out. Sometimes, there is a wonderful re-acquaintance. At the end of ‘Zorba the Greek’, the novel written by Nicolas Kazantzakis in 1952, Zorba observes how the cable railway, a structure that was to transport logs safely down the hill, collapses like a domino-run. After the stunned shocked silence, Zorba begins to dance as he has no words to express his feelings, ‘so I’ll dance them for you’. His dance “was full of defiance and obstinacy” (p.313), and he teaches his friend what has become known as the “sirtaki”, a line-dance in which dancers put their hands on each others’ shoulders. Then he stops, contemplates the shattered cableline and laughs: “have you ever seen a more splendiferous crash?”

His message is to live “the full catastrophe of life” with passion, helped by “a little madness” that makes us free.



In the 1964 film *Zorba* dancing is not about “laughing it off” as if nothing had happened – rather, it is about viewing the disaster from a different perspective, putting it into the larger context of life and living, and acknowledging how each small thing, each occurrence is connected to the whole and must be seen in relation to others, in time and space. It’s also about embracing ruin, death, as part of living – and rising above, because life continues. This workman, whose hands could handle the pick and the santuri (a kind of dulcimer, of Persian origin,) with equal care, a man who is shown as not yet severed from mother earth, is a great existentialist, who defies the hardships and set-backs, and even death.

The progressive unravelling of the world is no laughing matter. Surely, confronted with rising violence and morbidity, dancing the sirtaki must be considered wild and heedless?

Existentialism emerged against the backdrop of another great unravelling: World War 2 and the massive experience of senseless violence, murder, and death. Confronted by the meaninglessness of living, Samuel Beckett had his characters waiting for Godot; Ionesco showed human beings turning into rhinoceroses as they embraced fascism and, like the real animals now, living under the threat of extinction. Confronted with the unreasonable silence of the world in response to people’s search for meaning, Camus suggested revolt. If life is both precious and meaningless, and the only certainty we have is death, it is up to us to create meaning. Existentialist writing taught me that we live in a continuous tension between freedom to choose how we act, and the responsibility for other life-forms. In South Africa, this is called ‘ubuntu’: living through the other. Ethical being means acknowledging and owning up to our freedom, and taking full responsibility for our choices, by acting in such a way as to help others to realise their freedom. This is what gives meaning to life: the engagement with and transformation of the material conditions that limit the possibilities of choice for those who are oppressed and marginalised.

Radical popular education has, in this sense, always been existentialist. My experience is of working class women and men relating playfully, making space for connecting and building relationships. We consider the Sisyphus task of endless hustling for food, for cash, for peace in the home and communities. We work to make sense of the strictures and structures that limit healthful life, to create and deepen understanding of the machinations of power and interest, to define how to create productive action – and welcome the endorphins that come from laughter, from joyful working together, the tunes that inspire the soul to surge and the feet to tap. In popular education we initiate games and playful interactions, knowing that laughter can offer great stress relief. We shift mood from relentless tales of woe in order to re-charge with energy and a positive spirit that helps the imagination. What appears to be reckless may be a deliberate move to stop, pause, breathe and start again, taking responsibility for our actions, with the light steps of a sirtaki, and a song. In defiance of current obsessions with identity, we try to create meaning through actions, taking responsibility for generating the courage to confront difficult questions and not flee towards read-made answers that lay the blame at conveniently chosen perpetrators.

And so, let us dance like Zorba in the face of catastrophe: step by step following a tune (much like the rhythmic chanting of workers to help them lift a heavy object together, or

people locked in due to the pandemic, leaning out of windows to sing and clap together) that coordinates the movement in synergy with the surrounds, in order to accomplish a difficult task, collectively and joyfully. Solidarity emerges in the midst of the greatest stress – as every culture practises the arts to grieve, as much as build a-new, structures that take care of safety and living.

About the author

Astrid von Kotze is an activist academic in South Africa, doing all sorts of popular education with working class women. In the past, she was a university professor of adult education and community development, and a theatre practitioner.

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Welcome New PIMA Member

PIMA welcomes Professor Vaughn John.



Professor Vaughn John is a peace educator and activist-scholar in South Africa with over 35 years of experience working on projects on conflict transformation and peace education. He is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where he holds the NRF/DST Chair in Peace and Justice Education (SARChI). Vaughn's research explores the relationships between structural and physical violence, how trauma fuels cycles of violence and the role of education in trauma healing and peacebuilding. Vaughn's current work through the Chair in Peace and Justice Education researches, develops and evaluates educational interventions which advance agendas of transformation, humanization, and healing for broader peacebuilding and justice. This praxis seeks to contribute to a more peaceful, just and sustainable world, aligned to the goals of the PIMA network. In November 2024 he was inducted into the Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame.

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PIMA is incorporated in Victoria, Australia, as Friends of PASCAL International Association. It is an expanding global network of diverse individual adult and lifelong learning educators, activists, and scholars. It grew out of PASCAL.

We collaborate with PASCAL <http://pascalobservatory.org/> and many other bodies, towards greater social, economic, and ecological justice. We contribute to “outside-of-the-box” thinking to address the contemporary local/global crises and issues. We encourage members to work together and in solidarity with one another to bring the expertise of adult learning and education (ALE), within a lifelong learning orientation, to the resolution of everyday issues and problems.

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