

Call for Papers
Safundi (Taylor & Francis Group) – 2027
Special Issue:

After Memory: Dementia Narratives in and from the Global South

Guest editors:

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Today there are some sixty million people worldwide living with dementia, by which clinicians mean forms of cognitive impairment that are severe enough to interfere with everyday life. With lifespans extending around the world, such conditions are now widespread – a silent ‘epidemic’ (Zimmermann, 2017) – as forms of altered or damaged memory that exceed natural ageing become (somewhat paradoxically) a normal part of human old age. By 2050 the number of global cases is expected to triple: almost 70% will be concentrated in lower and middle-income countries, with the African continent witnessing the greatest shift in the prevalence of neurodegenerative conditions that affect memory, language and personhood.¹

Given that many influential texts in the field of (for example) Alzheimer’s memoir have emerged from Euro-American contexts, this call seeks to foster research into the arts and literatures of memory loss as these take shape in cultural production from Africa and the Global South. We are broadly interested in research that considers interdisciplinary perspectives on: altered or damaged memory, dementia, care, medicine, technology and personhood from the perspective of the humanities, particularly in literature and related arts. We welcome research that explores dementia and cognitive impairment beyond a ‘pathologizing medical gaze’ (Burke, 2014) and understands dementia care as a communal responsibility.

Dementia is a difficult subject in many ways: hard to define, not easy to diagnose, agonising to witness. One immediate challenge is the relation between its prevalence and absence – or absence of representation. The wrenching experience of dementia is, on the one hand, an ordinary fact of life, something right in the midst of all human societies; yet at the same time it is in some senses (particularly in its late stages) quite unthinkable, possibly unrepresentable, perhaps unimaginable. As a phenomenon that ‘uniquely thwarts our ability to comprehend it through traditional modes of investigation’ (Block, 2014), a condition like Alzheimer’s Disease offers a radical challenge to working notions of the self – of personhood, social being, intersubjectivity – and presses at the limits of language.

Literary and artistic responses to dementia now form a large and complex body of work, ranging from life writing, prose non-fiction, novels and films to more experimental modes in all kinds of media: visual arts, photography, drama, music, sound art and gaming. Much of this, however, has emerged from Europe, North America or the United Kingdom. For this special issue, we invite contributions that will take the enquiry beyond prosperous societies (with comparatively well-resourced health systems)

¹ These include vascular dementia, Lewy-Body dementia and frontotemporal dementia, along with the more well-known Alzheimer’s Disease, which occurs in a form widely distributed through elderly populations, but also as a rarer, early-onset variant that runs in families. For definitions and statistics on the epidemiology of dementia, we are indebted to discussions with the staff and fellows of the Neuroscience Institute (NI) at the Health Sciences Faculty, Groote Schuur Hospital, University of Cape Town. The proposed special issue will, we hope, be linked to an inter-disciplinary colloquium at the NI. Its research strategy and mission statement – concerned with brain health across the life span – includes the following: ‘As populations live longer, promoting brain and neurological health in later life has become an urgent scientific and societal priority. Our healthy aging research focuses on understanding the biological and social determinants of cognitive decline, dementia and neurodegenerative disease within African populations that remain underrepresented in global research.’

and into those parts of the world where this transcultural phenomenon – an epidemic of dementia-induced forgetting – is not always named, diagnosed or understood as such. We seek critical perspectives on how writers and artists have broached the difficult questions of loss, care, nostalgia and social belonging that such conditions open up.

How can we think, theorise and widen the question of dementia narrative from social, cultural and healthcare systems in Africa, South America, South Asia and beyond?

What lenses do ageing, critical gerontology, dementia narrative and end-of-life writing provide for social and political thinking within the Global South?

How are individual (or neurological) and collective, political or intergenerational memory entangled in the work of narrating a life?

How can we understand dementia and the politics of care in profoundly divided societies?

Given the fraught, often scrambled relation between internal time and external time that is part of the dementia experience, what happens to questions of home, belonging, security and nostalgia in the context of a painful past?

Within cultural responses to this so-called epidemic of forgetting, there is inevitably a figurative pull towards allegories of amnesia that go beyond the literal or clinical condition, and gesture toward a much wider set of anxieties about how societies remember, and what they forget. We are particularly interested in contributions which consider what might be called the politics of dementia: how clinical and cultural treatments of damaged or altered memory play out in postcolonial, post-repressive or post-conflict societies. Like other scholars working in the terrain where the medical or health humanities encounters memory and trauma studies, we have a sustained interest in ‘the ways dementia – as a specific set of illnesses, a concept and a cultural metaphor – is employed to produce memory on individual and communal as well as political levels’ (Krüger-Fürhoff et al., 2021). Enlisting dementia narrative in an account of places with difficult, violent or unresolved pasts then becomes a way of ‘approaching and exploring the “multidirectional” paths that forgetting can take, ranging from the organic or age-related to politically willed or socially endorsed’ (Krüger-Fürhoff et al., 2021).

In the context of societies emerging from past trauma, for example, the dementia experience may have the potential, ‘to complicate a person’s previously “clear” perpetrator or victim status, as notions of chronological time dissolve for the ill person and the potential safe distance from past atrocities melts away’ (Krüger-Fürhoff et al., 2021). End-of-life narrative, in this sense, has the ability to ‘braid together past and present in unexpected ways’; it ‘reconditions the way we might face our past, or dimensions of it that still hauntingly linger in the present’ (Golomski, 2025).

In this sense, we are also interested in how forms of dementia narrative and end-of-life writing may paradoxically enable a form of untimely remembering. That is: how the disinhibitions and temporal dislocations associated with dementia conditions may function as a form of access to a previously suppressed or disavowed past – a past that might be inappropriate, unsayable or unusable. Forgetting oneself, in this sense, means a departure from a conventional or acceptable social script: a reckoning with difficult, politically unresolved, complicating or even shameful elements of a shared history.

As dementia becomes an ever more common narrative trope within 21st-century fiction, memoir and film, we invite contributions on how such different forms of forgetting – neurological, cultural, historical, political – come to touch on, infuse or figure each other within literary and artistic production from the Global South.

Works Cited

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Suggested topics and themes

We welcome proposals on topics including, but not limited to:

- **Dementia and the politics of care:** Where does the burden of dementia care fall, who cares for whom, and how are such questions taken up in literary and artistic works?
- **Individual and collective memory:** How does the loss of individual memory mirror, refract or inflect community histories, collective memory and political history in the Global South?
- **The language, phenomenology and textuality of dementia:** What role does (literary) language play in dementia writing when confronting supposedly un-narratable or post-verbal experiences? How are the key concepts of fragmentation and lack of continuity articulated in narrative? What literary devices and/or strategies do writers use in order to represent the lived experience of people with dementia?
- **Historical trauma and dementia:** In what ways does dementia or end-of-life writing engage, resist and/or redefine traumatic experiences; for example: apartheid, the partition of India, or Argentina's 'dirty war' (*guerra sucia*)?
- **Narrative ethics and mediation:** How does authorial or narrative voice merge together with that of the person living with dementia? What are the aesthetic strategies and ethical challenges of familial or 'filial' dementia memoir (i.e. memoirs by partners, children or family members who are usually also caregivers?)
- **Dementia and family history:** How are dementia conditions taken up within family history and inter-generational dialogues, whether in fiction, memoir or documentary forms?
- **Ageing and care in the Global South:** How does an older cultural ideal of family-based care contend with newer care home models (often unaffordable for large segments of the affected population) and a more commodified, medicalised or neoliberal approach to end of life? How is the 'care home' / 'old age home', the experience of carers and the institutionalization of care (or lack thereof) represented?

- **Diaspora, migration and care:** How does a diasporic history and imaginary relate to questions of parents, ageing and care? What experiences do diasporic subjects embrace and/or reject? What happens to dispersed families in the context of dementia or end-of-life care?
- **Health humanities, theories of mind and personhood in the Global South:** What is the relation between biomedical, psychosocial, vernacular and indigenous understandings of dementia and cognitive decline, and how are these encounters taken up by writers, artists, activists and thinkers?
- **Stigma, metaphor and cultural constructions of dementia:** How do writers and artists engage with common but stigmatising metaphors associated with dementia (e.g. death before death; a loss/theft of self; 'retrogenesis' and a return to childhood; bewitchment). What conceptions of neurology, mind and memory emerge from literary and cultural investigations by writers and from the Global South?
- **Memory (loss), speculative imaginations and the digital:** How are writers and artists engaging questions of the extended mind, AI, 'neuralink' technology, transhumanism, cognitive enhancement or impairment. How are digital cultures shaping and altering memory and cultural constructions of dementia, ageing and bereavement?

Submission guidelines and deadlines

- Abstract submission deadline: July 31, 2026
- Notification of acceptance: August 31, 2026
- Manuscript submission deadline: November 30, 2026
- Expected publication date: June/July, 2027

Please submit an abstract of 200-250 words, outlining your proposed manuscript's topic, main argument and theoretical framework. Include a provisional title for your manuscript. Along with the abstract, please attach a short bio-note (around 80 words).

Submission method

Online submissions only. Email your abstract and bio-note (as a MS Word doc) to oscar.ortega@wits.ac.za. In subject line please include 'After Memory: Dementia Narratives in and from the Global South'. Upon notification of acceptance, authors will be required to submit a full manuscript of about 7,000 words to initiate the peer-review process. Further instructions will be provided in due course.

Thank you.