EDITORIAL

Hessel Willemsen, Massimo De Mari, and Wayne Bodkin

Across the world today, public discourse is saturated with accounts of violence, coercion, and the manipulation of reality—phenomena that, while often framed as political or social crises, are equally matters of psychic life. We witness governments weaponising disinformation, families torn apart by ideological polarisation, and children increasingly exposed to forms of emotional and symbolic violence that leave no physical trace—social platforms, AI, the internet—yet shape their development profoundly. The contemporary landscape is one in which truth itself has become contested terrain, and the erosion of shared reality has begun to resemble, at a societal level, the very dynamics forensic psychotherapists encounter in the consulting room and in institutions.

Against this backdrop, the articles in this issue speak with particular urgency. They remind us that the roots of violence—whether enacted by states, families, or individuals—are fundamentally psychological, and that the collapse of reality-testing, empathy, and symbolic capacity begins not in parliaments or police stations but in homes, attachments, and early relational environments.

Brett Kahr's article confronts a disturbing but under-recognised phenomenon: the murder of pets, literal and symbolic, as a displaced form of infanticidal attack. His six clinical cases show how parents who cannot tolerate their children's dependency or vitality may direct annihilatory impulses towards the animals those children love. In a cultural moment increasingly attentive to non-physical forms of harm, Kahr's work underscores that cruelty towards animals can constitute a direct assault on a child's psychic foundations, precipitating psychosis, dissociation, and lifelong vulnerability.

Massimo De Mari's contribution examines the defensive illusion of normality constructed by children forced to adapt to abusive or neglectful caregivers. In an era when public conversations increasingly acknowledge the long-term effects of childhood trauma, De Mari's murder–suicide cases illustrate how relinquishing psychotic solutions requires mourning not only the imagined life but also the omnipotent fantasies that once protected against unbearable truth. His work is a sobering reminder that forensic practice often involves guiding patients through psychic disillusionment that feels, to them, like annihilation.

Leslie Lothstein and Jim Rymer O'Malley turn our attention to the "ghosts" of early trauma that haunt the consultation room. Their discussion of adults whose emotional lives were shut down in childhood echoes current debates about intergenerational trauma and the rising prevalence of emotional numbing in young adults. Their emphasis on right-brain, non-verbal modalities—particularly art—offers a clinically grounded pathway through impasse,

affirming that forensic psychotherapy must adapt to patients whose trauma has rendered language itself unreliable.

Alfred Garwood revisits his traumatogenic triad—annihilation anxiety, powerlessness, and loss—first articulated in the context of Holocaust survivors. His contemporary application to politically motivated torture resonates with current global concerns about state violence and the systematic dismantling of psychological defences. The extraordinarily high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among victims highlight how trauma can be engineered with chilling precision, reminding us that forensic psychotherapy must continue to engage with the psychological consequences of political oppression.

Finally, Hessel Willemsen presents a clinically rich case of a young boy caught between incompatible parental narratives following his father's transition. Thomas' splitting of reality—oscillating between biological truth and enforced historical erasure—resonates with contemporary debates about identity, origin, and the psychological consequences of contested narratives. Willemsen's argument for preserving a child's access to biological truth is developmental rather than ideological: children require coherence in their story of origin to build a stable sense of self. The article's parallels with adoption and surrogacy research broaden its relevance far beyond the specific case.

Together, these articles illuminate how violence—physical, symbolic, psychological, or epistemic—shapes the developing mind. They remind us that forensic psychotherapy must remain attuned not only to overt criminality but also to the subtle, often invisible assaults on truth, attachment, and psychic integrity that occur within families and institutions. In a world where reality itself is increasingly contested, the forensic psychotherapist's task is both clinical and civic: to help restore the conditions under which minds can think, feel, and know.