exiled ink!



War and Its Long Shadows
poetry • prose • articles • reviews

Winter 2006

Editorial Team

David Clark
Janna Eliot
Miriam Frank
Rachel Hofford
Kristen Hughes
Ziba Karbassi
Jennifer Langer
Isabelle Romaine



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Editorial Office

Nathalie Teitler

Exiled Writers Ink
31 Hallswelle Road
London NW11 0DH
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8458 1910
jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk
www.exiledwriters.co.uk

Design and Layout

Angel Design.net



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Editorial

The Long Shadows

he legacy of war inflicts deep wounds in the survivors' psyches. Our world reeks of blood and perpetuates massacres. The discovery of mass graves across Iraq illustrates mankind's legacy of mass murder. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children began a grim trek to the sites where they were fearful of finding the remains of their missing relatives and friends. The search for parents who had 'disappeared' during genocide is a haunting and maddening endeavour. In Srebrenica, where eight thousand Muslim men were killed by Serb forces in 1995, women are still searching for their missing husbands, brothers and sons with the sole aim of having them buried with dignity. War has left indelible scars on the Kurdish victims of the *Anfal*, vivid images of massacres haunt the survivors' minds, or sometimes amnesia is used as a defence: these are known as traumatic memories, the long shadows of war which pervade the day-to-day life of survivors of carnage such as the brutal folly of the Rwandan genocide.

The gathering of these dark shadows form a history of loss, which permeates the next generation of survivors. With the death of the relatives who shared the experience of genocide and massacres, photographs, memorabilia and stories, repositories of the past, are passed down to the second generation. Disconnected from their forebears, the second generation grows up dominated by narratives of genocide and massacres internalised as familial memory and cultural legacy. Subsequently, this second generation will attempt to analyse its cultural legacy in the context of identity and family history.

In turn, testimonies of Bosnian, Kurdish and Rwandan genocides will become repositories of the past. The article on the *Anfal* for instance, shows how the poet Choman Hardi constructs memories within her cultural and generational framework. In her handbag she carries books and pictures of the Kurdish genocide as objects which trigger memory and allow her to identify with her own people. Similarly, in Rwanda, the sites of memory will enable the future generation to *remember* the traumatic events as though they were memories of their own.

The shadows of war will linger over the descendents of genocide survivors who will carry on the task of constructing personal and collective memory out of fragments of narratives, relics and photographs which keep in store stories from the past.

War and Its Long Shadows

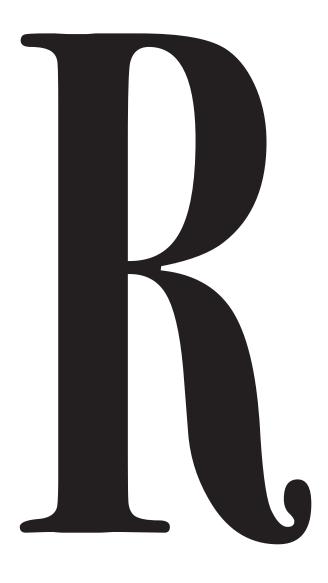
Humberto Gatica (Chile) The Prison After the Raid Translated from Spanish **Window** after through it the raid came and the pieces unexpected of blue firing of sky machine guns the traveling there dance only remains of a cloud a dark the brief village shadow an ambiguous of a soaring sky bird far away the swing a rainbow of the rain the furious in the wind sound of a waterfall the rainbow and the never came uncertain emptiness of the absentees

Shadows of War... Shadow of Imana

Isabelle Romaine



Kofi Setordji



wanda is also known as the Land of a Thousand Hills. Slopes roll down into valleys then ascend to form more hills, and so on. Its capital, Kigali, is calm, people go about their daily business, chat, joke, laugh ... And yet! The ghosts of horror are always close by to disrupt this apparent tranquility; and the recollection of a people slaughtering their own kind confirms the extent of human folly. Imana, the God of life and protector of Rwanda, was momentarily absent when its people butchered one another with unrestrained frenzy!



Kofi Setordji

Irony must have compelled Véronique Tadjo - a writer from Ivory Coast, now living in South Africa - to entitle her book on Rwandan genocide, The Shadow of Imana. Travels in the Heart of Rwanda: the book relates the stories of traumatised victims, haunted survivors and mesmerised perpetrators. But Tadjo's title choice also stresses her faith in the future in spite of man's brutal folly. Hence she confidently states that "death is not stronger than life. Life wins over eventually." Her book is the result of a project "Writing as a duty to memory," initiated by Fest'Africa, the literary festival of Lille. Tadjo was not the only writer involved in the project. In 1998, ten African writers agreed to break the silence about the genocide in Rwanda. Their aim to write as a duty to memory would take the forms which they found most suitable: novels, short stories, essays, poems. They came from Senegal, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Chad, Djibouti, Kenya and Rwanda, and stayed in a popular suburb of Kigali, Nyamirambo. The writers were overwhelmed by what they saw: mass graves, whitewashed skeletons, and stunned by the survivors' stories. Soon they found themselves confronted by the inevitable questions: How do you tell madness? How do you write down the horror, the hatred, and the fear after the genocide? and ... How did it come to this?

It all happened in one hundred days! On 6 April 1994, the assassination of the president of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana, triggered the genocide of the Tutsis. Between April and July 1994, one million people –Tutsis and moderate Hutus - were systematically killed under the authority of the interim government by the Rwandan Armed Forces and the 'Interahamwe' militia (informal armed bands trained for the purpose). The massacres were often carried out with the complicity of the local authorities who supported the Hutu's party line of Tutsi's extermination. More strikingly, it has been a genocide of proximity where neighbours, friends, siblings and parents murdered their kin with machetes, axes and hoes in an unfathomable frenzy. Finally, on 4 July, the Rwanda Patriotic Front, a Tutsi Rebellion force in exile, captured Kigali and put into effect a coalition government with Paul Kagame as Rwanda's current president.

How did it come to this? Where does this inter ethnic hatred originate? Tutsis and Hutus share the same Kinyar-

wanda language, culture and traditions. Over several centuries the Tutsis were the ruling class but this did not stop intermarriages between Tutsis and Hutus. Distinctions between the two groups where essentially political and not racial. The colonisation of Rwanda by Belgium after the First World War contributed greatly to widen the rift between Hutus and Tutsis. Belgian colonisers used the Tutsi nobility as a shield against the Hutus to enforce their taxes and forced labour. Influenced by the development of Eugenics in Europe, which advocated selective breeding, the Belgians introduced the concept of racial distinctiveness. Tutsis, who were taller and of lighter skin, were said to be of "Hamitic" descent and thus were superior to the dark Bantu Hutus. By introducing identification cards which legalised each citizen as Hutu or Tutsi, the colonisers established a racial divide. This was to have dangerous consequences during the genocide, when tall people were seen as Tutsis and swiftly killed. Eventually, upon Rwanda's independence in 1962, the Hutus took the power. From then on the Tutsis became a permanent target of violence and discrimination. Thousands fled to neighbouring Uganda, while hundreds and thousands had been murdered in series of massacres. In summary, Juvenal Habyarimana's death in April 1994 sparked off a genocide which had been planned and was waiting to happen. Anti-Tutsi propaganda was already in place and the 'Interahamwe' role was clear-cut: to kill the entire Tutsi population.

Today, sites of memory shape the landscape of Rwanda. Most of these monuments used to be parish churches once: Nyamata, 35,000 dead; Ntamara, 5,000 dead; Kagamara, 20,000 dead; and so on. Then, there is Murambi! The site of the wailing corpses. The monument which was a school once reveals thousands of mummified corpses exhumed from mass graves. Many hold out their hands as if begging for mercy. Out of the 50,000 civilians who took refuge in the school at the time, a few dozens have survived.

Academic studies, analyses and essays aim at defining the specificity of the Rwandan genocide. Analyses look at how the genocide has been perpetrated, researches try to establish the manner in which victims were hunted and slaughtered. The titles of some works are at times strikingly explicit, such as Philip Gourevitch's Rwandan chronicles, We have the pleasure to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed; or Yolande Mukagasana's, Death does not want me; while Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa's essay title, The Genocide of the Tutsis explained to a Foreigner hints at a Western world ignorance of the genocide.

For their part, the African writers who were invited by Fest'Africa offer a different perspective: their novels, tales, travel notes or poems, do not linger so much on the ethnic conflict; their emphasis is on human folly, and the difficulty to surmount the memory of the genocide. The five writers' works shortly summarised below encompass two subjects of concern: they portray the human complexity, while underlining that evil is in each of us; and they recall the importance of an organic link between ancestry and the modern day in postcolonial Africa.

In *Murambi, The Book of Bones*, Boubacar Boris Diop (Senegal) lets his hero confront the reality of the genocide. Back from exile, Cornelius visits a school in Murambi, his hometown, where his father has organised the massacre of several thousand people. The skeletons of his Tutsi mother and his brothers are among the piles of bones. Diop demonstrates the complexity of genocide, man's folly and emphasises that Rwanda is inside each of us.

Tierno Monémembo (Guinea) takes us through the journey of *The Eldest Orphan*, Faustin, a wayward fifteen year old, who survived a public massacre in Nyamata; he has witnessed the killing of his father and mother. He runs away to Kigali and, from one ramble to another, finds a precarious refuge where he commits the murder which condemns him to death: he kills the friend who has been involved with his sister. At his trial, Faustin is unrepentant and arrogant. Monémembo describes the consequences of genocide on children, the banality of evil which renders them cynical.

Monique Ilboudo's *Murekatete* (Burkina Faso) describes the difficulty to live with the memory of genocide. The 75 page story unravels the evolving relationship between a survivor, Murekatete and her rescuer, Venant, a FPR soldier. Murekatete means 'let her live', such is the name she was given at birth after she narrowly escaped death. She survives a second time while her family is killed during the genocide. In an attempt to exorcise the demons of the genocide, Murekatete and her friend Venant decide to visit the sites of genocide. Venant cannot take on the sight of mass graves and takes refuge in alcohol. Guilt, remorse and the unbearable duty to cope with collective memory dismantle the couple's relationship.

Koulsy Lamko (Chad) chose the allegory of a queen, *The Butterfly of the Hills*, who has been raped then murdered by a priest. Her rape symbolises the violence in Rwanda. Under the guise of a butterfly, she haunts the living world and demands that her mummified corpse is buried. Only then will she rest in peace.

The Shadow of Imana. Travels in the Heart of Rwanda by Véronique Tadjo (Ivory Coast) is essentially a collection of travel book records. Some captivating stories portray the contradicting nature of human character. For instance the following story goes that a widow became the lover of the neighbour who killed her son. The man, a nurse, devoted his time to the widow who was suffering from AIDS, and love grew out of compassion. To the offended people who saw treason, the widow's reply was scornful: "This man saved my life. This man shares AIDS with me. Who among you would have done the same?" This story illustrates the victim-torturer bondage in which the boundaries of moral standards collapse and in which love seems to play the counterpart of death: "This love was born out of death" concludes Tadjo, "death is its beginning and the end. Death is love, the bond."

Tadjo's style is sober and subtle; she interspaces the tales of horror with fiction, traditional tales, poetic thoughts; she is trying new ways and new forms to tell this



human madness. She gives an illustration through a symbolic tale "The Wrath of the Dead," which gives a voice to the dead who feel abandoned by those who are alive: "The dead knocked on doors and windows, but they remained closed. He cried: "Why are you abandoning me? Now that I am a corpse you do not rec-

ognise me. Don't you feel my presence among you?" This symbolic representation underlines the issue of preserving the memory of genocide and identity. The living are afraid of the dead who remind them of their past sufferings, furthermore, they are so focused on surviving on a daily basis that mourning is not a priority. On the other hand, the dead cannot rest until they are recognised as the holders of collective memory and mourned by those who are alive. The link between the two worlds, so important in the African tradition, has been broken. The plight of the dead is also a concern in Koulsy Lamko's novel. Both *The Butterfly of the Hills* and *The Shadow of Imana* point at the significance of death in postcolonial African societies where spiritual closeness between the living and the dead is disappearing.

The works produced by the writers and Fest'Africa constitute a literary monument to Rwanda. The festival took place in 2000, and although it appears to be in a distant past, the event carries its relevance today. The intention to break the silence on the Rwandan genocide might have been fruitful but twelve years on Rwandans continue to struggle with the legacy of genocide.

In September 2006, Survival Fund – SURF – a charity dedicated to aiding and assisting the survivors of the Rwandan genocide held an exhibition entitled: Heroes of our Time: Rwandan Courage and Survival. The exhibition, which took place at the SOAS, presented a history of the genocide and focused on the plight of the survivors, including the recorded testimony of four survivors. Among a plethora of issues, the prosecution of perpetrators is of great concern. There are today an estimated 40.000 detained, and the problem is that prisons are over crowded. Many prisoners are released in the community where there will face the traditional system of trial, Gacaca, be judged by the public and set free. Formally, this system should work towards justice and reconciliation, but in reality some perpetrators continue to threaten the survivors. Although the words "Tutsi" and "Hutu" have been officially banished from the vocabulary, and notwithstanding that there are no more ethnic identity cards, fear and hatred linger still. There is an old saying in Rwanda, which goes as follows: "I know that you hate me, but I am not telling you. You know that I know it, but you are not telling me."

Healing will come, and it will come with the young Rwandese generation. As Véronique Tadjo puts it convincingly: "A long eclipse does not mean the extinction of the sun." Eventually, the long shadows of war will retire from the Land of a Thousand Hills and give way to Imana's goodwill.

Aimé Kongolo

(Democratic Republic of Congo)

The Grief of War – Le chagrin de la guerre

Translation by Sylvie Hoffmann and Tom Cheesman Pagaille, confusion et impudique guerre mauvaise. Ô, guerre mauvaise!

Shambles, confusion and shameless, vile war. O, vile war!
Where is my father?
O, family of vipers!
Where are the innocents?
You took them with no pledges.

Why are you so senseless?
You who plant them, the innocents, in a garden of death – Why did you make me so wretched?
You've taken them on an eternal journey
Without looking back
Knowing that each child's life is a search for the father.

When will your raging hunger be satisfied? Even the new-borns, you come and take them constantly. Accursed be you who call us to that feast – You killer of innocents.

O war, where have you taken them? You have left me only grief. Where did you lead them? Bring them back once more onto this long path, Onto the human road along which we carry our sufferings, Our tiredness and our hunger each without end.

Woe to the warriors who ruin our fates.
Despite the bombardments, the earthquake,
We walked after we had suffered.
Bring them onto this unsure road where we suffer
unwillingly

And where there is jealousy, envy, hatred and despair, Despair which makes us unable to live, unable.

You who inhibit the innocents in living — You who inhibit them as they walk on this unsure road — On this path through a pitiless universe of brutal conflict — Stabs in the back too common, innocent passers-by too easy prey,

And all one breathes and all one sees is only pain, grief And blood upon human blood.

Et tout ce qu'on respire et qu'on voit n'est que douleur, chagrin Et les sangs humains

from Nobody's Perfect: Refugees Writing in Wales, Swansea: Hafan Books, 2004.

The Bata Shoes

Reza Jalali
(Kurdistan, Iran)





was ten years old when I saw my first public hanging. Even now, in some dreams, the hooded man, his limp body swinging in the gentle breeze of the dawn, comes to visit me. I went to see the hanging with my elder brothers. It was still dark outside when my brother, Ahmad, woke me up. Three of us walked in silence passing the dark houses that seemed to hug one another, napping, on either side of the narrow lanes that took us to the town square. As we got closer, I could hear the crowd gathered there. My heart was pounding in apprehension for I did not know what to expect. To keep up with my brothers, I hopped over the narrow gutter filled with the last night's downpour when one of my shoes fell right into the rushing water. Turning my head, I saw the black boat-like shoe bobbing in the muddy water, moving with the current.

"My new shoe!" I shouted and stood still. The boat vanished in a curve just as Ahmad turned around to help. Kneeling on his knees, he pushed his long arm to hunt for it. I searched his face for a clue.

"The prisoner is being brought in. Let's go," my other brother said, looking annoyed, "he will have to manage with one shoe." I swallowed the lump in my throat that was swell-

ing while starting to limp behind my brothers.

My shoeless foot felt cold touching the paved road's cool surface. I thought of the one-legged boy, almost my age, who came to our house, singing Kurdish songs and asking for food. Ahead of us, the crowd drifted closer to the fences in expectation of the prisoner's arrival. I climbed halfway up to watch. Soldiers poured out of the dark green trucks to stand guard, facing us. The doomed man was struggling with his guards as he was being pulled out of the army jeep.

With his hands tied behind him, he was dragged to the center of the square where a wooden platform stood. The condemned man, shoeless and his pants down to his narrow hips, whimpered now. His bare feet, as if done with walking for good scraped the road, ready to fold underneath him. I glanced at Ahmad. His face was white as if he had seen a ghost. I tugged at his sleeve. He did not respond. I looked at my other brother.

"What has he done?" I asked him.

"He's a spy. He works for the Iraqis," he said. The soldiers were putting a black hood on the man's head. The crowd surged forward. The policeman who faced us used his smooth baton to push the on-lookers back. On his wide forehead, beads of sweat were forming.

"Curse be on the Devil!" someone yelled and the crowd stirred. I watched the officer's lips move, reading from the page he was holding with one trembling hand. I could not hear a word he was saying. Hooded and besieged, the man's body sagged like a melting candle. Above our heads, the day was breaking, leaking patches of white light in the dark blue sky. A wind started, chasing the pink clouds out of the way. On rooftops looking over the square, women huddled to watch. Some of them covered their eyes just as the crowd went mute. The policeman standing by us put his large hand over the hand gun on his belt.

On the way home, I was limping next to Ahmad when he broke his silence. My other brother was walking ahead of us, whistling.

"What a waste," Ahmad said.

"But he spied for the foreigners," I said, feeling confused.

"It's a lie," he said softly, "he wrote poetry; Kurdish poetry." Patches of red moving up his slender neck covered his ears. Tired of limping, I started to hop on one leg. Ahmad looked lost in his thoughts.

For days, nobody said anything about the missing shoe.

"Father will get angry if he finds out," my mother said while hiding the one useless shoe underneath the coals stored for the winter in the niche by the garden.

I missed the pair of the almost new English-made Bata shoes. They had been smuggled across the porous border for my feet and I had to lose them, I was feeling sad thinking about it. Father had business contacts in neighboring Iraq. Every now and then, mostly for the start of the school year and the New Year, he ordered shoes for all seven of us. He maintained an account for this purpose at the nearest western-style Bata shoe

store. On these occasions along with the shoes, he sent for a handbag for my unmarried teacher sister, skirts for the younger sisters and a few yards of crushed velvet enough to make a dress for my mother. Weeks later, the imported goods arrived on horses, delivered to our doorstep by Haji the Kurd, the family smuggler. Depending on when Hajji and his tired animals arrived, my mother would invite him inside to rest and have tea. The time he brought the now missing shoes, I was home. My mother gave me the tea to take to him. Inside our living room. Haji sat on the floor, his large body barley touching the fine Persian carpet. I thought he looked embarrassed by his dusty clothes and the socks which had holes. He asked for an ash tray. He slurped the hot tea and leaned on his legs to hand roll a cigarette. I stood by him trying hard to not to stare at his large hands picking up pinches of tobacco. He looked up, grinned and lighted his cigarette. The blue smoke escaped out of his nose and mouth with force.

Out by the gate, his horses whinnied.

Haji was our connection to the world beyond the hills. He supplied us with stuff we could not find in our side of Kurdistan. In summer months, his horses arrived, carrying long watermelons grown in the Kurdish villages inside Iraq. Hidden between the melons were boxes of the American-made Winston and bottles of whisky for my father's friends. Once I saw Haji showing pictures of naked women to my other brother. He had brought with him packs of playing cards with pictures of nude women printed on the cards' outside. When I took him more tea, boldly I asked him to show me the cards.

"You're too young," he said and laughed. His mouth looked like a dark wet cave. I pestered him. He looked around to make sure we were alone and then reached inside his baggy pants to fish out a pack of cards. I pressed the pack between my fingers and my sweaty palm and left the room. I climbed to the roof top to sit and ogle at the fifty two naked blond women, all of them smiling at me. My hands then were trembling as I put the cards inside the pack to take it back to Haji.

I knew Ahmad wrote poetry. I knew this and other secrets about him for whenever he was out, I was in his room rummaging through his books and papers. I did not know what I was looking for. He was a mystery to me, and to others. I came across his poetry by accident. The words written neatly, one line below another made no sense to me. The same was true every time I looked at his thick books with no pictures. Ahmad had books hidden under his bed. Strangely, with all the books he already had he was asking, as I overheard them once, Haji to bring him books from the other side. Haji grinned and said "Insha'ualah."

As the trees by the square, once filled by the noisy sparrows, lost their leaves and became bare, more men, some young, some old, were hanged in our town.

"These are bad days for the Kurds," mother said and sighed. Father forbade us to go and watch the hanging. One day, Haji showed up with his restless horses. I was excited to see him. Haji was unloading when I saw him slipping a book to Ahmad. I brought Haji a tray with tea and a plate of moist dates. The dates were my idea. I lingered around hoping he had more pictures of the naked women. I asked him if he had something for me to look at. He smiled and took out a folded magazine-size poster out of his breast pocket. My heart was pounding. I unfolded the black and white picture and saw a woman who was fully dressed and not smiling. She looked almost like my teacher sister except, she was wearing the *peshmerga* uniform. Haji was watching my face.

"She is a famous Kurdish fighter. The Iraqis have a prize on her head," Haji said.

"You're lying. Who is she?" I asked, hiding my disappointment well for I had hoped for some thing else.

"Samiramis. That's what the guerrillas call her," he took the picture out of my hand and folded it back to put it inside his pocket.

I was playing the cop and thief game with the neighborhood boys when the plain-clothed police came, riding in a dusty jeep with no license plate. They asked for Ahmad. Mother standing in the doorway argued with them.

"Wait until his father comes. He'll fix this mess," Mother was pleading. The thick vein on her neck was bulging. It looked like a fat worm that throbbed under her skin, crawling up her neck.

I ran to the covered bazaar to get my father. When we came back to the house, the jeep was gone. Mother sat by the door surrounded by the neighborhood women. Her cheeks were wet.

"They took Ahmad with them." Mother said to us, her voice raspy, wiping her eyes with the loose end of her scarf. Father chased away the young on-lookers.

"Go away, the show is over," he yelled. The boys scattered around, the way ants do when water is poured inside their nests.

With Ahmad in prison, the house became quiet. Father was in a bad mood. Mother prayed more and stared for hours at nothing. I no longer spent time outside the house. In Ahmad's room, I lay in his bed, thinking of him. Most of the books including the ones under the bed were gone. One day, I found a book that was somehow left behind. By its looks, I knew it was the same book that Haji had given to Ahmad. I flipped the pages. There were pictures of the ancient maps of Kurdistan. Tucked between the pages, I found the folded picture of the Kurdish woman fighter. I pressed the book to my face. It smelled of Haji and his horses.

Father went to see his powerful friends to ask for their help. One night, I heard my parents argue.

"With all these people you know, how come my son is still locked up?" she said. Father cursed her in anger.

Next day, Father took us to see Ahmad. Mother had me carry a bundle that was warm to touch with cooked rice and lamb for Ahmad and his guards. I wanted to carry the shoe box that my brother was holding to his chest. Outside the prison compound, families stood milling about. Oblivious to their parents grim faces, younger children played hide and seek. Guarding the large green prison gate stood soldiers with guns. Father walked to them. I watched as he pushed packs of Winston into their hands as they protested weakly. They let us in. Through the twisting and dark hallways which smelled of urine, we came to a yard filled with sun shine. We followed Father, crossing the yard, passing the same jeep that had brought the soldiers to our house, to stand by a door that was guarded by a uniformed man. Father asked us to wait outside as he marched in. I stood by the open door observing the room. The officer behind a large desk asked my father to sit down. Above them, on the bare wall, the framed picture of the ill king looked crooked. The pigeons sitting on the edge of the building cooed. Father signaled for me to take the shoe box to him. He lifted the cover and pushed the box, filled with cash, toward the officer behind the desk.

We sat and waited in a room. It took a while before Ahmad showed up, limping. He looked thin. My mother raised an arm to her own chest, pretending to beat herself in sorrow. Her gold bracelets, glittering in the bare room, clinked.

"What have they done to my poor son?" she said.

"Not now," Father said and frowned. Ahmad looked tired. He hugged Mother and smiled weakly at me.

"You've grown taller," he said to me. You look old, I almost said to him.

Father opened the food bundle and took some to the guards. He offered them cigarettes.

"I want to see the bottom of your feet," Mother said. Ahmad's face went red. I looked down to glance at his feet. They had grown fat.

"Lift one foot up so I can see," Mother insisted. Ahmad, sitting on a chair next to me brought one foot up for Mother to see. There were raw pink scars on bottom of his foot. Mother bit her lower lip and cursed the guards.

"The food may turn to poison in your mouth for torturing my son," she whispered to the guards' shadows, eating by the door

"Be quiet now," Father said.

Mother fed Ahmad, careful to give him the best pieces of the cooked meat. She told Ahmad how a suitor had come to ask for our sister's hand. I listened as this was news to me.

"We told the family to wait. No decision, one way or another, as long as her brother sits in jail." she said and smiled.

"Electric cables," my brother whispered to Father as they stood by the door, watching the guards.

I was arguing with a boy bigger than me in the soccer field as someone called my name.

"Your brother is free," the neighbour boy yelled and ran in the direction of our house. I rushed to catch up. The game came to a stop as most boys followed after me.

I was out of breath as I reached the house. There were patches of fresh blood on the ground by the gate. One patch resembled the map of Europe which I had colored red as part of school homework weeks before. I went through the open gate and saw the butcher cutting the sheep carcass that had been slaughtered outside. Ahmad sat next to mother, with his feet up on a pillow. Father was laughing.

Haji and his horses never came back. Ahmad was certain Haji is dead.

"He was caught and hanged by the army," my other brother said, smirking. I wondered what happened to his horses.

"He was a double agent," he added.

"What does that mean?" I ask.

"He was spying for both sides," he said. I have no idea what that meant.

I shut my eyes tight to imagine a hooded Haji, hanged. I tried again but could not picture Haji's grinning face hidden under a hood.

"Be careful with this one!" my father said, handing me a pair of canvas basketball sneakers. They were not Bata. We had started to learn English at school. I peeked inside them and read the Made in USA tag. I ran my fingers inside it and touched the ankle patch. It felt soft.

"What happened to that one shoe you hid?" Ahmad asked mother.

"I gave it to the one-legged boy," my mother said, her face beaming. I pictured the boy trying on the almost new Bata, standing and walking on his one good leg, and singing. I brought the sneakers to my nose. It smelled of rubber and the distant foreign lands.

Ada Aharoni (Egypt - Israel)

Trigger Fingers

"What passing-bells for those who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the guns...."

Wilfred Owen

They met at right angles of a white marble tomb, then off again on spirals of darkness and sorrow, he with his deft trigger fingers on guns and canons, she with her green fingers on chrysanthemums.

I'm moved you remembered his cartridges in the air.
How could I forget?
Her words
of earth,
sprinkled on the tomb
where their soldier son
was buried, and
was buried.



Ernesto Kahan

(Argentina - Israel)

Ceasefire at Eight O'Clock

Tel-Aviv, August 2006

Translated from Spanish by Ernesto Kahan and edited by Jennifer Langer



Hunar

9 minutes have passed. On the horizon, silence The tree brushing my balcony sings with goldfinches and new hues

I hear them in my core, my deepest core
The source of the breeze presaging life
And I walk slowly not to awake the forces of evil
I keep on walking. Walking is the way I feel reality
Walking and watching TV. Three war fronts.
No mushroom clouds in Haifa, no explosions in Tyre
And on the border... Oh, the border!
Tension but Ceasefire.

Lwalk slowly

Dreaming of those two towns by the sea
Oh the sea rhythmically in love with them!
Walk to absorb the silences of The Pastoral
But man is man and does not forget
In the North each sings his belief in victory
In the South a missile, reminder of war lingering

I walk back the roundabout way And arrive at my cup of coffee Oh coffee!

Aroma of mornings for those who awake with plans and projects

Smell of grief for those inconsolable in mourning The parents who bury their soldier sons

Eight Thirty-Three,

A chain of tanks wends its way home An endless queue of strategists knocks on press doors In political party offices, speeches are written Workers transport spades and cement to reconstruct the city

New commissions, new evaluation committees And preparation for the next war.

The city awakes to pursue its human evolution
Witness of gregariousness lacking compassion
Asphalt
Soft winds of the Mediterranean
Soldiers embrace at Eight Forty
And me, I carry on walking
And David Grossman, writer of peace,
will bury his son this afternoon
Yet not his writings

And I have another social coffee in town And when I am convinced the cease-fire is undeniable I smile

With the bread fresh out of the oven I will turn up the sound of The Pastoral.

Nine Thirty

The bombs remain silent. How good that is! Yet bombs are being stored in the city.

Landscape of socialised man 21st century. From yesterday we started counting.

Mois Benarroch

(Morocco - Israel)

Friday

Before the six days war
my father came home with a
new car
Renault 4
awfully
green
in exchange for the old
Simca
and told us that he bought it from a priest
and that the car was very well maintained
because priests
knew how to take care of their cars
and it was the car in which we drove
until we emigrated.

And two days before the war an Arab friend met my father and told him that the end of the state of Israel was near only a few days away and that the Arabs would destroy Israel. For a whole week we didn't leave the house and went to a holiday resort near the Spanish border in case we had to run away and two weeks later my father met the Arab who was afraid even to say hello or stare into his eyes.

Mois Benarroch

(Morocco - Israel)

The Hamass Terrorist

After Wysalva Czymborska 'The Terrorist, He Watches' and dedicated to Asaf and Meital and to all the victims who lost legs, lives and futures.

In a few moments he will blow himself up he is young, has no children has no wife, in a moment nothing will be left of him. No one will know who he was he left home years ago and disappeared forever. I am sitting very close drinking an espresso and smoking a cigarillo my friend asks me to come with him to the place of the bomb I tell him I am tired which is not true and that I will wait for him. he doesn't know and I don't know that in a few minutes the terrorist will explode the hope for peace will explode and that Meital's leg will explode and her brother Asaf will go to heaven. Meital's husband, a doctor will hear the bomb and run to help the wounded not knowing that his wife and her brother are there. I am savouring the espresso It is a sunny day in Tel Aviv and after this bomb nothing will be the same again for months people will be afraid to come back here Dizengof Street will be deserted. No one can stop him now it is too late he will die for Allah and for being young, virgin and indoctrinated. Even if I go there I can't stop him. My friend disappears.

2.
Suddenly there is a boom
and then there is silence
Fifteen seconds of silence
like the moment before God created the world
or it is like the silence before
being born
It is a screaming silence
that can cut the air,
then there are police cars
shredding the silence
first comes a Peugeot 205
one, two, three,
fifteen of them,

then people come from the place
they have to tell the story
they talk to everybody and to themselves
a mother doesn't know what happened to her
daughter
people are making calls
on telephones and mobiles
very soon the whole system collapses
this is the centre of Israel
Dizengof centre in Purim
everybody is here or could be here.

I sit,
hear what happened
don't know what happened to my friend
(he reappeared five hours later)
I am left speechless
for half an hour
I stand
try to talk to the waitress
I can't manage a sound
I go back to my seat
drink the water left.

I think of the whole day then I am really afraid. How I bypassed the place of the bomb a place where I always go or pass through I took many side streets and my friend didn't understand why he just followed me I wanted all the time to go back to Jerusalem "Half hour by the sea That's enough for me" I said but he wanted a coffee "let's drink it here in Sheinkin and then go back" but he insisted he wanted to drink it in Frishman, and so on for the whole day. He has promised not to insist again and just follow me.

4.
My religious friend said it is a sign but a sign of what of being right or being wrong.
What kind of smoky shadowy cloudy world is this that when there is a sign we can't decipher it.

then the ambulance comes

Shireen Jayyusi

(Palestine)

Good times, Falasteen



And a half-acknowledging nod to the sunburnt-fresh young student refilling my champagne glass and my inward curse as his canapé-bearing friend bypasses me, and the sunset sharp over the yacht club marina, wash-wished like sponge through my vapid bubbly flutefuls

And I, decorously pull down my skirt (just a little) arranging its pleats in order and tell you, since you ask, "I'm from Tulkarm". My refugee family, al naqba, what does it finally mean for me? an existential, intellectual graze, wedding party conversation now, worthy, if you are interested enough to engage me in it, will never urge it on you, unthinkable (never amongst this gentle party hum, this pâté, this dusk water vista) would my sisters recognise my mutated form? or call me for a fraud who patters as she clinks her flute while they walk, the walk, the walk with their brothers, mothers, children arms, legs, sniper shots, broken teeth, the shit defacing their floors,* the normalised fear in their bowels, their husbands' shirts off their backs at 2 degrees at the checkpoint last Sunday

March, 2006, Sydney, Australia

^{*} a reference to the act occasionally carried out by Israeli soldiers (and experienced by a number of people I have known) of damaging the property and defecating on the floors of homes they are raiding or inspecting before vacating.

'The House is a Casualty': Memories of the Present in *Lebanon, Lebanon*

James Graham

since 2000 and until 12 July this year, Lebanon had managed by and large to extricate itself from the escalating series of pronouncements, events and conflicts known by some in the West as the Middle-East 'peace process' and others as the 'War on Terror'. Sovereignty had been regained, the economy was growing steadily and a new kind of normality had been instituted: peace. Following the abduction of two Israeli soldiers by Hizbullah, however, that soon changed. Israel was given an excuse to welcome Lebanon back into the 'peace process'. An old kind of normality returned – that of bombs, destruction and refugeeism.



Around 1,200 Lebanese were killed in a conflict that officially lasted only three days. Thousands of others were injured and over a million displaced. But the penumbra of this conflict, itself in the shadow of the ongoing violence in Israel/Palestine and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, falls across many more borders, and in many more homes. The history of Lebanon is marked by fruitful cultural exchange and translation, but also by conflict and diaspora. As a result, Lebanon occupies a place in the imagination of a great many people throughout the world: people who are and remain Lebanese to their core, but also those for whom Lebanon exists through relatives or a friend, in a treasured passage of poetry or as an unforgettable taste in a Beirut restaurant.

The British public was made aware of the suffering of those in Lebanon and on the Israeli border through the familiar media channels. The camera-feed was virtually instantaneous. Yet sadly it was all too virtual and instantly forgettable to a great many amidst the deluge of images and reports from all over the world and, of course, coming so soon after the collective 'heartache' of Germany 2006. But the events in Lebanon cannot be forgotten by those who witnessed them, nor by those who live in its diaspora. The ethical and practical problems of how to channel these memories into

the international public domain, how to convey some sense of the complex ongoing reality they emerge from, has seen Anna Wilson assemble *Lebanon*, *Lebanon* for Saqi books, a truly remarkable collection of poetry and prose, cartoons and pictures.

The fifty contributors range from British literary heavyweights Harold Pinter and John Le Carré, to a selection of the finest writers of the Arab world, including Mahmud Darwish, Adonis and Hanan al-Shaykh. In between we find the quintessential in-betweeners, Orhan Pamuk and VS Naipaul, and numerous other new and re-worked pieces by an eclectic and cosmopolitan group of writers and artists. Lebanon is both a concrete reality and a diffuse set of ideas, events and memories in their combined offerings - what the German Jewish exile Walter Benjamin would have described as a 'constellation of awakening'. Perhaps the most arresting aspect of the collection, however, comes from the graphic images – cartoons, drawings and pictures – that intersperse the text. They provide compellingly succinct images for the complex play of emotions and ideas that the poetry and prose evoke.

In a flurry of charcoal slashes, Fabio Guzman's 'untitled' depicts a storm in which dozens of stick-men fall headfirst to the earth. Before reaching the ground they transmute into the ugly barbs of wire on a security fence that cuts across the picture. It deftly captures the brooding ambivalence toward the aims and consequences of the conflict found throughout the collection. Each falling bomb has the potential to transform into a fallen man, yet another embittered protagonist in the 'War on Terror' – yet another reason for bombs to fall. While most of the pieces implicitly protest the actions of Israel and the US in Lebanon, by and large they avoid bolstering sectarian politics in Lebanon itself.

Throughout *Lebanon*, *Lebanon* the 'War on Terror' is distilled into images and fragments of its purest essence: a vicious circle of self-deception. Its brutalised actors live in denial of the wrongs they perpetuate on the innocent. On the one hand this is fed by the oxymoronic media-machine of Western powers. Blake Morrison's cutting lampoon, 'Stop,' expresses its morbid irony:

As of today the peace process will be intensified

through war. These are safe bombs, and any fatalities will be minors ...

We can confirm that many personnel now enjoy peace,

underground. Several Terrorists have been created overnight.

On the other hand, Lebanon's place in the shadow cast by this 'war' has not been helped, according to the Beirut based writer and journalist Hassan Daoud, by a collective lack of will to transcend internecine politics. The conciliatory tones sounded by the Lebanese government to Hizbullah following the 'abduction,' are "evidence of Lebanon's implicit acceptance of a seemingly endless vacillation between war and peace." What right has such monumental self-deception to infiltrate the innocent lives of the hundreds of thousands of Lebanese children forced to flee their homes? Perhaps the most moving pieces in the collection are the pictures (reproduced here in bright, glorious colour) produced in a workshop for displaced children: a smiling sun that contains the world; a butterfly; a crayon drawing depicting a house with two inhabitants, possibly parents. These images – happy memories of life in peacetime – form the kernel of a substantial part of the collection that dwells on the relationship between the everyday, memory and, as the child's ambiguous portrait of his/her family home seems to suggest, loss.

A number of these pieces meditate on the relationship between the things war takes away and what is left in its wake. In some, the suffering of the present is redeemed through the daily chores, routines and mundane objects of what 'normal' life is left. In others, however, such objects and quotidian activities are themselves irrevocably marked by loss. The observations of Zena el-Khalil in 'With love from Beirut' contain the stoic humour born of a strong home, but also the tragedy of other homes' ruin. She dreads going to the supermarket. There, she finds

long life milk. my hand reached out for a bottle, and then another, and then a third. but as I stared into my trolley, I took one out and put it back on the shelf, and then the second, and finally the third. Better leave them for a mother's children.

People imbue their memories in domestic spaces and objects, and through this process these things take on lives of their own. The destruction of such spaces, such objects, by bombs or bulldozers, is the letting of yet more blood. To write about such objects is to re-live the traumatic separation, the impossible distance of loss, in the disconsolate pursuit of consolation. The acclaimed Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish writes in 'Diaries' that "in every object there is a being in pain ... a memory of fingers, of smell, of an image", and the locus of this being – and this pain – is the house itself. For Darwish the house is a *casualty*:

Photographs, toothbrushes, combs, cosmetics, shoes, underwear, sheets, towels like family secrets broadcast loud in the devastation. All these things are a memory of the people who no longer have them and the objects that no longer have the people ... destroyed in one minute.

The house, as a store of memories, a place to live in but also a home to return to, is *the* perennial casualty in the wars that keep returning to Lebanon. Houses can – and will – be rebuilt. But what of the memories they contained? In a 'A possible poem on Dahiya,' Abbas Beydoun, poet and cultural editor of *As-Safir* in Beirut, suggests that though these memories might never be redeemed, even by the poet, life goes on

as the survivors adapt and improvise in Dahiya, the southern suburb of Beirut devastated in the bombing:

The heaps and rubble fall in our memories too and in our inner selves. We say: let us only continue the wound of our life, the disease of reality here, where it is possible for misery to become a style, where we have learned how to be healed. No one is now asking for atonement, because the doors here don't shut out anybody ...

Housing a majority Shia population and largely controlled by Hizbullah, Dahiya bore the brunt of the Israeli assault on the city. However abject Beydoun's refusal of atonement may be in these circumstances, it nonetheless displays an exemplary humane consciousness. It is the wounded yet resilient humanity he evokes that most clearly connects his intimate evocation of Beirut during the conflict with the contributions of those, Lebanese and of other nationalities, who live in the penumbra of these events abroad. Expressing the positive mood of the collection as a whole, these writers and artists mourn for their Lebanon, but in so doing they also celebrate it.

Mai Ghoussab's Beirut, for example, is a "space/mood that has always known how to include 'the other' and turn it into a 'self'." When she arrived in London in 1979, she did not bring the city with her in memory alone. It travelled with her as this "mood," as an *attitude* to others that translates across borders and, potentially into all the spaces of the Lebanese diaspora:

Without Beirut, the city of the south, without its life in translation, I would never have been capable of surviving happily in the north. It was thanks to my background that I felt that my duty was not only to integrate positively into another urban space, but also and mainly to feel unashamed about dreaming of influencing, of making an impact on 'the other', on the shifting identities of 'the desirable' urban spaces, the metropolises of today.

When the Israeli army's chief of staff General Dan Halutz hubristically declared that his forces would 'turn back the clock in Lebanon by twenty years,' he did so with inhumane confidence in their destructive capability. Much of the country's infrastructure has indeed been bombed into the past – the house, as Darwish impresses upon us, is a casualty – yet its people and their memories, as this *vital* collection testifies, remain stubbornly rooted in the present, at home and in the diaspora.



(Palestinian-American)

The Ballad of Haya

And a hand was left
nothing more of her
And the memory of
a bullet through
her uniform was left
nothing more of her
And the old gold colour
of her hair
and the silver dark beneath her eyes
and the borders of her heart
falling as she walked
block after block was left
nothing else of her

I Never Made it to Café Beirut; Nor I Heard, Did You

You told me that I should wait at the Lebanese border. You told me not to fear the Hezbollah, the gunshots. the missiles or grenades, told me

that I would not see the shadows of corpses in the stained grey clouds, would not see the refugees and the UN trucks waiting for God. You told me that no one would

be singing war songs, or speak of liberation, Saddam, Bush, the Israelis. you said nothing about the trumpet of flames, the shattering glass.

You insisted, meet me at the Lebanese border. Told me to bring my favourite poems of Baudelaire and Gibran, my dreams wrapped in my black hair, my questions –

the ones you could not answer at the time, the simple facts – your real name, age, nationality – and also why the night was held in siege why the souks were so quiet, the mountains

so quiet and the dead still struggling. And why I had to meet you at the border.

The Uncertainty of Fear

We weave tiny heavens between our prayers, Between the lips of dying soldiers, a warning The roads are not lit, the way obscure, But we continue anyway, looking for The tide in our voices
The words death forbids us to repeat, The musicians who play the oud or the lute The pregnant women without shoes
The objects we kept from Room 242 – a remote control, a red ashtray, a pillowcase, toothpaste – nothing we need. We continue without asking why this small silence, this bitter wind, this cold darkness blocking our lungs, Then we stop, and try to tell each other

something.



Rafat Asad

Nora Nadjarian

(Cyprus)

About the recent Middle Eastern troubles.

The Young Soldier

I told the young man with violent eyes there is something I want to ask you shoot me

I told him take off your uniform and show me your khaki skin show me where your heart is

I pressed my lips on his naked mouth and said kill me I do not want to live do you hear me do you

hear me

I screamed until I had no voice and the soldier stared with his big khaki eyes

I begged him please please please I want to go away to that place where you took my children to the sea of blood and drowning angels

I have a mother too he said and when the bullet reached him in the dazzling light I let out a cry when my heart exploded 2006

Impossible

For N.

I wake and dream of my love: that we are beneath an exploding sky. That there is dust on his face, soft water in his eyes, on his cheeks, fallen debris in his hair which I smooth and comb with my fingers.

A dog smells our love, whimpers incessantly in front of the only house left standing – impossible, an impossibly white house, even in a dream – the *mezuzah* still on the door for luck.

I lick his lips which have cracked in the war, fall asleep with the taste of death and parting.

The Representation of the Anfal by Kurdish Exiled Poets

Jennifer Langer

Currently, Saddam Hussein and his henchmen are on trial charged with the crime of genocide during the Anfal campaign. Most European and North American capitals witnessed mass pickets by Kurdish refugees outside Iraqi embassies on 21st August 2006 to coincide with his first appearance in court on this charge.

The Arabic word Anfal, cited in the Koran, means 'spoils of war' and Saddam Hussein invoked this in his infamous military campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan from 1987-88, aiming to purge large areas of northern Iraq of Kurdish guerrillas as during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the Kurds were perceived by the Iraqi government as supporters of Iran. The Anfal was a special operation of genocide bureaucratically engineered by the Ba'ath Party against the Kurds of northern Iraq. In late 1987, large areas of the Kurdish north were defined as 'prohibited zones' where anyone would be considered a guerrilla and subject to a shoot-to-kill policy. Following this, the first of eight waves of the Anfal campaign was launched, moving systematically across north-eastern Iraq and lasting until the end of 1988. The military bombarded and razed several thousand villages, sometimes with mustard gas and nerve agents, then sent in troops to raze the communities. Families were taken to camps while in some cases men were executed on the spot. Thousands were taken to prison camps in northern and central Iraq, where men and boys were separated from their families. Most of the males disappeared, executed by firing squad and buried in mass graves. Women, children and the elderly were held in crowded, unsanitary conditions that caused further deaths. It is estimated that approximately 182,000 Kurdish men, women and children were victims of internal deportation and disappearance. The chemical attack on Halabja in March 1988 caused the death of five to six thousand people. However, this was by no means the first time chemical weapons had been deployed, the first being in April 1987 against partisans in the mountain villages and against the Iranian army in the early 1980s.

How do Kurdish exiled writers represent the Anfal? This genocide is a trauma which constitutes a deep wound in the collective and individual unconscious. Traumatic memories can be considered those that remain present for the subject with particular vividness and/or totally resist psychological integration. However the exiled Kurdish poets do not enact amnesia in response to the trauma but many construct a poetics of resistance – of peshmergas, of martyrdom, of valiant Kurds engaged in a perpetual struggle of liberation, fighting against the powerful military and dying for their homeland. Sherko Bekas' poem 'Impossibility' is dedicated to the gallant peshmergas who became 'lamps of sacrifice'. Bekas,

considered the Kurdish national poet, is exiled in Sweden where in 1987 he was presented with the Tucholsky Prize for writers from oppressed nations. Numerous poets focus or the armed struggle and the courage of the freedom fighters and Rafiq Sabir writes defiantly in 'The Road of the Gun':

'But when they came
to change my skin
deform my face
I wore the snow and thunder
Carried my homeland on my shoulders
And took to the road of the gun.'

Somehow, a sense of victimhood is not transmitted because of the articulation of a strong, idealised Kurdish identity and the fortitude of the people. The flowing poetic forms articulate these deep emotions. Kamal Mirawdeli's poem 'Kurdistan' is an example of this:

'Always I will come back to your arms Always I will revive with the breath of your spirit Always I will sing the ancient songs of the mountains And sacrifice myself to you, beloved Kurdistan.'

Rafiq Sabir suggests that this type of poetry is an attempt to inspire hope and the love of Kurdistan in the people and in fact, a great number of poets express their love of Kurdistan through describing its natural beauty in ecstatic terms. Newroz is a further recurring theme with the New Year festival symbolising struggle and resistance but also the hope for a better future in spite of Shahin Sorekli's lines in his poem 'Newroz' about the atrocities inflicted on his people in the Anfal.

Hashim Kochani, exiled in Sweden, writes emotionally and metaphorically about Halabja in his poem 'Testimony'.

'We shall return as mountain birds, once again, to Halabia

We shall rekindle Newroz fire over the crest of waves We shall not forget Halabja It is a forest of stars.'

Despite the horrific atrocity, he is inspired to write in a spirit of hope and renewal for the future whereas Choman Hardi constructs a harsh reality which is poignant in its detail. In her poem 'The Spoils, 1988', dedicated to the victims of Anfal, she describes the effects of Anfal and the fact that those who chose to leave or could not bear to return to their villages, were haunted by the memory of Anfal which they had attempted to repress. Sorrow and suffering is articulated by many of the poets. Mirawdeli mourns for the suffering of his mother who spent one year as a captive in the deserts of the south of Iraq. In 'The Snake and The Cross, excerpts from Bekas' book-length autobiographical poem, the poet

weeps and expresses his frustrated anger and despair for all the impotence and sorrow. He proclaims in a very different tone to Kochani's:

'Anfal, Anfal, Anfal, Anfal

Anfal of the warplanes in the skies of catastrophe

Anfal of the bombs of poison in the spring of death.

Halabja, Halabja, Halabja'

In 'The Penelopes of my Homeland', Choman Hardi describes the female Anfal victims' lifetime of waiting for their menfolk to return, from the perspective of Penelope perpetually weaving by day and unweaving her shroud at night while waiting in vain for the return of Odysseus. This grief has similarities with the constant waiting by the widows and mothers of the 'disappeared' in Argentina who have no graves and

therefore no physical site of mourning for the relatives. The general silence of Kurdish women poets about the effects of the Anfal is noticeable although some of the literary work may not yet be translated. It appears that exile is not a safe space to write about gender specific persecution and the female body and it may be many years before Kurdish female exiled writers externalise the events of the Anfal persecution. The experiences may be too painful or unacceptable to articulate and the consequences may be dangerous in the Kurdish patriarchal society. This paradigm of silence is symptomatic of women victims of other genocides; for example, few women Bosnian writer-victims have written about the mass rape in Bosnia.

The sorrow and suffering is frequently projected onto the trees, mountains, rivers and stones of the beloved land of Kurdistan which is described as if it is human. This is illustrated in the poem 'Land' by Sherko Bekas.

'When I touched the bough of a tree

It trembled in pain'

In some poems the deviant behaviour of nature is a metaphor for the distortion of life and the oppression and persecution of the people, suggesting that even the land is a victim suffering pain.

Nevertheless, the poets' memory-work in exile is one of mourning for the loss of the original home which is part of the self. The memory of loss is their history with the poets 'haunted' by the past, signifying that it endures in the present for the subject although the past has ended. Mourning for 'home' is internalised as loss in perpetuity but I suggest is not Freud's melancholia because the lost 'object' can be defined although home is amorphous. Nazand Bagi Khani mourns



for her scattered clan in her prose poem 'A Song to My Clan' while Mirawdeli mourns for his razed village that no longer exists except in nostalgia and idealised, imagined space. For him, the missing of home is in itself a traumatic experience that according to him, is exacerbated given that identity, history and psychology have been destroyed. He experiences repeated nightmares because of conscious anxiety and fear due to the genocide events that took place in Kurdistan between 1981 and 1990. Likewise, Choman Hardi has internalised the traumatic collective memory of the fate of her people:

'I carry it in my handbag every day in books about genocide – pictures of mass graves, of leaders hanged, children mutilated by chemical weapons.'

Sheri Laizer suggests that poetry is a means of maintaining the continuity of Kurdish iden-

tity across the generations in spite of the struggle for existence and recognition. It serves to inspire pride in the past and hope in the future and sustains the Kurdish community in their suffering and resistance. However, Rafiq Sabir in 'The Sorrowing of Odysseus' finds himself wandering and endlessly journeying in the search for his space and during the period of genocide, Mirawdeli found himself questioning the function and power of poetry, becoming alienated from it. Like many Kurdish poets, he writes primarily for himself for a range of reasons including the need to assert his national identity and his love for his people and language.

Gun and Grave

Latif Halmat

Suddenly electricity was restored
The film started up again
Men were making guns
Women were shedding tears
Then the lights went down once more
Now maybe the men are digging graves
Maybe the women are wearing
black

Poetry from:

Zangana, Haifa, ed., Halabja, London, 1989

 $Kurdistan \ Solidarity \ Campaign \ and \ Yashar \ Ismail, \ eds., \ \textit{Anthology of Kurdish Poetry}, \ London, \ 1994$

Mirawdeli, Kamal, Passage to Dawn, London, 2002

Hardi, Choman, Life for Us, Bloodaxe, Northumberland, 2004

Sabir, Rafiq, Mirawdeli, Kamal & Watts, Stephen, eds. & translated, *Modern Kurdish Poetry: An Anthology & Introduction*, Uppsala University, 2006 Information on the Anfal campaign: KurdishMedia.com and Mohamad Tawfiq Ali

Nasrin Parvaz

(Iran)

Poppies



This portrays the current situation of women in Iran awaiting their sentence: stoning to death.

I would like to keep you for ever. If only time would stay still and we could live together forever, even with you unborn inside me. I know you want to come out, but are you ready for your birth that would bring death to me? I'm not blaming you. It's my chance and yours that we can only be together while you are inside my body. But don't rush. This world isn't worth it!

I love you more than a mother that likes her foetus. Because it is not only me that gives you life, you give me life too. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be alive now. They let me live until your birth. The time of your birth is the end of my life. I'm happy that they let you live and didn't kill you with me. It happened to some others that were stoned to death with their babies in their womb. I don't know for how long their babies stayed alive after they were killed by stoning. Perhaps they were buried while their babies were alive in their bodies. Then their babies would die a few days later. I'm lucky that I can be extended in you. If it wasn't for the bribe we would both be dead by now. You see, you are lucky. You are going to live; some didn't because of the baby-killers around here.

We both are prisoners of the time. The time of development of your body in my womb is your prison. For me too it is the same, the time that I have you keep me alive. Then you'll be free from your misty confinement; and I'll be free from my cement cell. You'll walk to another stage of your life, and I'll nourish the soil for more poppies. I wonder if the places where the stoning has been taking place are full of poppies like the sites of battles. It was said that poppies grow in great numbers in the places where once battles took place and the soil was nourished with blood. But will poppies of my blood be the same colour? Will they be as red as those that are grown in battle sites for religion or country? They ought to be, because of the iron that we all have in our body! No matter how some people would look at them, as poppies of shame or 'heroism', they all are poppies of our blood.

I wish you to grow up with love and be proud that you are not the fruit of rape but love. I hope you love me when you grow up and are told why I was stoned to death. You should know that you are made of love and that is the reason that I shall be stoned to death as soon as you are born. I wish you to live with love and only love.

A Tale of Resistance

here is perhaps no point in the history of literature in Iran when the pen has not struggled against the powers that be, testament to its immense influence. The power of words, long recognised, has led to the prohibition of countless books and the muzzling of those magicians so adept at conjuring ideas and with such eloquence that their restraint becomes crucial.



The Islamic Revolution in 1979 in Iran was the death knell for all forms of artistic expression. Dance was banned outright and other art forms such as music, theatre and cinema were in June 1980 all required to submit to the watchful eyes and firm hand of censorship of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council (SCRC). Literature was no exception.

'Pens which do not write for Islamic values,' declared Ayatollah Khomeini, the father of the Islamic Revolution, 'must be broken'. And indeed they have been. And along with their pens, writers too have been crushed; arrested, imprisoned, tortured and even executed.

Although it is important to note that the arts, especially in terms of human rights violations, have progressed a great deal since the early revolutionary years, writers in Iran today, continue to face a myriad number of difficulties when endeavouring to publish their work.

In order to obtain permission for publication, writers must contend with the rather Orwellianly-entitled Ministry of Culture and Information Guidance (MCIG), a subdivision of the SCRC and an elaborate system of councils that regulate and monitor all realms of artistic expression. Literature of any kind is subjected to a thorough examination by the MCIG, as it is scrutinised and often torn limb from limb. The writer is informed of any amendments needed to make the work acceptable, that is, in line with the tenets espoused by Islam, in order to obtain a stamp of approval. The term artistic licence has consequently assumed an altogether different meaning.

Censorship, needless to say, is firmly entrenched, as is its corollary, self-censorship. Although it is interesting to note that in Iran, it is not necessarily possible to separate these two words as decades of censorship, both during the Shah's reign and after the revolution, have firmly implanted a culture of censorship within Iranian society and blurred the line between what is imposed by the state and what has become inherent. 'Self-censorship has almost become a kind of method in Persian literature of the last let's say 60 or 70 years,' says Reza Baraheni, distinguished poet, novelist and literary critic.

Writers in Iran face a series of hurdles designed to filter material deemed inappropriate; books are subject to a number of different levels of censorship before they are released. Firstly, there is an extensive set of regulations governing book publication. These guidelines are both proscriptive and prescriptive in their nature, outlining both what writers should avoid, as well as what they should endeavour to embrace. On the whole, the MCIG encourages material which promotes, strengthens and guards Islamic principles and disapproves of writing which propagates moral corruption or profanes against Islam. Yet like all religious tenets, 'Islamic principles' are open to interpretation and depending on whether the reformists or conservatives are in power, the same work of literature can be accepted or rejected. Writers are as a result, vulnerable to the changing currents of Iranian politics and recurrent waves of repression.

Mr Baraheni's novel *The Mysteries of My Land* was certainly a victim of this political instability when it was banned under the conservative government, after being published under the reformist president, Mohammad Khatami. A more subtle ruse, according to Mr Baraheni, is the refusal of paper, which in Iran is regulated by the state. As many of Iran's paper plants were destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war, paper is imported and rationed by the government which dispenses it, subject to its whims. The MCIG allocate paper for all approved publications, while other aspirant writers are left to purchase paper on the black-market at ludicrously high prices.

Publishers too face an indirect form of censorship as although they are free to select manuscripts, they do so with the utmost care. They justifiably have reservations about scripts, which they consider might be rejected by the MCIG. Once a manuscript has been chosen, a number of copies are printed and one copy submitted to the MCIG, who will respond in one of three ways. The first response is one of approval, the second of disapproval and the third, quite simply, no response at all. The second response will often be accompanied by a demand for modifications, required to render the book more palatable. If the book is then approved, a further number of copies are provided to the ministry for subsequent authorisation and pricing. Once again, further amendments might be insisted upon, or the MCIG might decide not to respond at all which is itself tantamount to complete censorship.

Pricing is another less ostensible tool of censorship, as books can be priced too expensively to be affordable, or too cheaply to cover production costs. Nor does official permission guarantee that a book will be reprinted or circulated for a long period of time and in the past, books have been withdrawn only a matter of weeks after their publication. As with all other spheres of artistic enterprise in Iran, the public is the final arbiter of morality and so a book's shelf-life is subject to their reaction. Literature deemed 'immoral' is often met with violence from hardliner vigilante groups, who take it upon themselves to destroy or set fire to publishing houses, or attack and intimidate writers or publishers.

There does, however, exist in Iran a vibrant underground literary scene, including the distribution of banned books and poetry. Unfortunately, materials tend to be expensive, circulation is limited and this kind of activity carries with it the risk of punishment. Penalties include harassment, arrest, flogging, or worse still, imprisonment. Mohammad Sefryan is a student who recently fled Iran after coordinating one such underground project. Mr Sefryan and a group of his friends rented a house and filled it with books and films forbidden by the government. Their key objective was to reproduce and distribute this prohibited material, but close friends also used the house as a library. After some time, the house was discovered, the items seized and his friends arrested. Fortunately for Mr Sefryan, he was not in Tehran when the authorities raided the house and not long after, he crossed the border into Turkey.

As a writer himself, Mr Sefryan had experienced first-hand the unfavourable outlook of the MCIG. His writings were refused publishing permission on several occasions. One such piece of work, a philosophical treatise that examines paths to contentment, was rejected because of its failure to reference Islam as a factor in the attainment of human happiness. According to Mr Sefryan, 'The government opposes free thinking because it is threat to Islam.'

But it is perhaps poetry that is most afflicted by the censorship process, as poetry is in a sense the most fragile art form; a single edit by the censor's pen is capable of completely devastating a poem. For poet Robab Moheb, currently living in Sweden, 'Censorship is much more serious,' than she had realised. Not only did Ms Moheb wait eight years to hear back from the MCIG about the publication of what she considered to be innocuous poetry, but even when her book was eventually published, she discovered that two of her poems had been omitted, words in her poems had been changed and verses and lines shifted around so that their rhythm and sense were radically altered. She was also greatly baffled by the clear lack of logic behind the censorship process as more provocative lines were left intact while other, perfectly harmless words were modified or altogether removed. The absence of any apparent rationale behind the expurgation of her poetry has led Ms Moheb to believe that censorship in Iran is an 'obsession' without rhyme or reason.

The situation of writers in Iran is not, however, a closed book and recent years have seen a new chapter of Iranian literary history being written, predominantly on the Internet – a medium that has proven to be a particularly powerful tool in the liberation of expression. Iranians have turned to the Internet in unprecedented numbers and Farsi is now the fourth most frequent language used for keeping weblogs in the world. Although the government has continued to do its utmost to prevent this revolution from progressing, including being the first country ever to imprison a blogger, the Internet as an arena where free expression is able to flourish is so far proving unconquerable.

But this development should not detract from the highly repressive environment within which Iranian writers must manoeuvre. Although writers are continuing to find alternative methods to disseminate their writings, such as through the clandestine distribution of their work or via the Internet, they are still a long way from attaining freedom of expression. The seeds of dissent and rebellion, although present in Iran, require sustenance and support so that they may one day mature, allowing artists to be able to express themselves without the fear of repression.

This article was written by an independent researcher for the human rights organisation ARTICLE 19. It is a summary from a much larger report, entitled 'Unveiled: Art and Censorship in Iran'. For a copy of the report, please contact ARTICLE 19 or visit the following webpage http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/iran-art-censorship.pdf.

Mogib Hassan

(Yemen)

The City Spoke

And the city spoke
About minarets, houses that were destroyed
landmarks and road signs.
She screamed loudly on the face of civilisations

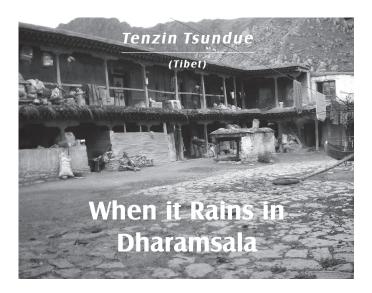
She asked about aged men killed Women deprived of everything Crying for help from nations, Nations having nothing except slogans.

The city spoke
Of disasters experienced and yet to happen.
Again she asked
About the millions of youths
And their pure blood that coloured earth's face.

Will the rivers of peace dry up Just like those resolutions did The city asked?



Perspectives in Exile



When it rains in Dharamsala raindrops wear boxing gloves, thousands of them come crashing down and beat my room.

Under its tin roof my room cries from inside and wets my bed, my papers.

Sometimes the clever rain comes from behind my room, the treacherous walls lift their heels and allow a small flood into my room.

I sit on my island-nation bed and watch my country in flood, notes on freedom, memoirs of my prison days, letters from college friends, crumbs of bread and Maggi noodles rise sprightly to the surface like a sudden recovery of a forgotten memory.

Three months of torture,
monsoon in the needle leafed pines
Himalaya rinsed clean
glistens in the evening sun.
Until the rain calms down
and stops beating my room
I need to console my tin roof
who has been on duty
from the British Raj.
This room has sheltered
many homeless people.

Now captured by mongooses and mice, lizards and spiders, and partly rented by me. A rented room for home is a humbling existence.

My Kashmiri landlady at eighty cannot return home. We often compete for beauty Kashmir or Tibet.

Every evening,
I return to my rented room;
but I am not going to die this way.
There has got to be
some way out of here.
I cannot cry like my room
I have cried enough
in prisons and
in small moments of despair.

There has got to be some way out of here.
I cannot cry,
my room is wet enough.

I'm Tired

I am tired,
I am tired doing that 10th March ritual,
screaming from the hills of Dharamsala.
I am tired,
I am tired selling sweaters on the roadside,
40 years of sitting, waiting in dust and spit.
I am tired,
eating rice 'n' dal
and grazing cows in the jungles of Karnataka.
I am tired,
I am tired dragging my dhoti
in the dirt of Manju Tila.
I am tired,
I am tired,
I am tired,
I am tired fighting for the country
I have never seen.

Robert Kabemba Mangidi

United Kingdom

Your name is United Kingdom You are our nation You are in the heart of our people You are in the heart of our children

United Kingdom My nation, *mboka na ngai* Your nation, *mboka na yo* Our nation, *mboka na biso*

United Kingdom We are one people We are one nation *Ekolo moko*

United Kingdom
We are brothers
We are sisters
Let us be together
Let us work for our nation

United Kingdom I am black, *moto moyindo* You are White, *mondele* He's Indian All we are one *Biso mbaso eloko moko*

United Kingdom
Let us love each other
In the government, we are one
At school, we are one
In the market we are one
In football, we are one

United Kingdom In the hospital, we are one At work, we are one In the church, we are one Everywhere, we are one

United Kingdom
Say no to racism
Show a Red Card to it
Say no to discrimination
Show a Red Card to it

United Kingdom Say yes to social cohesion Say yes to unity Diversity is a privilege

United Kingdom You are in the heart of our nation You are the future of our children Let us be together One world, many people

INTERVIEW with Chenjerai Hove (Zimbabwe)

conducted by Isabelle Romaine



henjerai Hove is a poet, essayist and awardwinning novelist. He is currently International Cities of Refuge Network guest writer in Stavanger, Norway, and recently appeared at a Poetry Café event hosted by Exiled Writers Ink.

You have been in exile in France. How did you cope with the French language: its sounds, the logic of its structure...?

I studied French for two years in the 1970s. So when I went to France, it took me a few months to recall the language. I speak the language at a functional level. It was not difficult. Of course, every language has its own ways of arranging ideas through words. It is a different way of thinking. I believe language is a way of thinking, of conveying those ideas, a way of seeing the world as well. The way a French man sees the world and analyses it is not the same way an English man does, or an African who speaks an African language. Every time one has to learn, and I was learning.

Back home you would be engulfed by familiar sounds, the voices and mannerisms of your people - an experience you are deprived of in Norway. Do you feel restricted (in body and mind) when you write in exile?

In exile, I have the privilege of looking at the language, the people, the nuances of speech, from a distance. They become fresh and the language has a new appeal. My mother tongue is like my staple food, sadza. When I do not have it near me, it tastes better in my imagination. The same applies to language. When you speak to someone on the phone in your language after many days of not speaking it, the language becomes juicier. It assumes a different and more cherished meaning and depth. Sometimes being in a flood of familiar sounds and voices can obscure the capacity to select. From a distance, one is like a person looking at the valley from a mountain top or vice versa. I am only

restricted after the isolation sitting alone and writing. Normally I want to go out to meet people who help to replenish my linguistic capacity. I do not have them now. So I can only imagine my characters in their reality without the possibility of cross-checking the freshness and authenticity of their being in the home or in the streets or in whatever social situation I choose for the occasion. In exile I deal with different sounds, different colours, different landscapes. Everything is different. But the act of writing becomes also the act of revolting against those many things which I cannot name. When I was in France, I wrote a children's story. I needed African wild animals. But the story is set in France. So I had to invent a zoo, and I had to invent a lost African boy who goes out to the zoo and opens all the doors of the zoo so the animals can escape back to Africa, miraculously, in a mist. There is a lot of mist and fog in Europe, and the animals escape back to Africa, to their freedom.

Right here, in Norway, could you write in Shona and still capture the essence of home?

Creativity is desire, longing. It is a search. As I said above, when I write in Shona, I am searching for the essence of the language as one using it in far away places. The famous Norwegian playwright, Henrick Ibsen,wrote all those famous plays in self-exile in Italy. And the Norwegians worship him for capturing in the best way the Norwegian spirit and personality. Every Norwegian has studied Ibsen. There is a big statue of him in the centre of the capital, Oslo. Sometimes the best national literature is written from outside one's own country. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder. It is true with language. But of course I carry my language in my body, in my mind and in my movements and rhythms.

What are your views on national languages?

National languages are an important part of the national psyche, but I do not believe in monolingualism. Citizens of a country should be able to speak at least two languages of their country as well as other languages. Sometimes national languages are used to instill a dangerous nationalism instead of the beauty and diversity of human experience which all languages should describe. A language is a system of thought, a system of feeling, a system of being in the world. Everyone has the right to be taught and to learn their national language no matter how small that language is. I cannot understand, for example, why the United States denies that a large percentage of their population is Spanish speaking. Why not let them learn Spanish in schools, speak the language at work, have some states with two official languages. A country which speaks only one language is like a nation forced to wear the same uniform, like school children. I hate school uniforms. They are a lie, making everyone falsely believe because they are dressed the same, so they are the same. Life is not like that.

Once you wrote that all Zimbabweans are in exile because they are not allowed to participate in the af-

fairs of the country. You also wrote that the very act of creativity is an act of exile. Do you mean that any individual who does not interact with the community, or socially is an exile?

Every individual is part of the collective. Sometimes our societies emphasise aloofness too much, the individual at the expense of the collective. We are individuals but at the same time we are part of the collective. Western societies teach that the individual is more important than the collective identity in all of us. That forces people into exile. Look at the type of new diseases which arise from solitude, from being alone in the midst of a crowd. So, one has to find a balance and not revel in loneliness. Creativity feeds from the community. After all, language is community-constructed. Society nourishes creativity. But at the moment of creating, especially in the western sense, one is alone, in a form of exile. In other societies, a story is a communal effort. Songs are communally composed. Look at the work songs in Africa. Everyone contributes a line as the song develops. If you ask a villager who the author of the song is, she\he gets surprised because they are working together in what I would call collective creativity. It becomes exile if the creator is forced to be away from where they should be. It becomes exile if citizens are not able to participate in shaping their own destiny at all levels of society - politics, education, business, the media, public debate. That is why I wrote that Zimbabweans are all in exile because the people are ruled through instilling fear in their hearts and minds, in their everyday language. They cannot name their surroundings in the language of their hearts. They look around first before saying what they genuinely think. Everything has to be sanctioned by the state system of terror and intimidation. Every citizen, in such circumstances, becomes a victim, an object, not a citizen.

Your novels Bones and *Ancestors*, have been acclaimed internationally. Both novels contribute to the construction of national memory. Your latest collection of poetry, *Blind Moon*, not only condemns the violence of the current government in Zimbabwe, but also invites the people to struggle to regain their humanity and freedom. How do you reconcile the two subjects?

Memory and freedom are closely intertwined. Repressive regimes try to recreate memory, to blur certain aspects which they think are not pleasurable for them. People are forced to forget the real ingredients of their dignity and humanity in order to be dosed with a false humanity. After so many years of oppression, people will actually believe that life was always like this. They are forced to forget even their own dignity.

The struggle to regain one's humanity is the struggle against national insomnia imposed on the citizens by dictatorships through warped media images. Stories like 'Animal Farm', 'Bones', 'Ancestors' and many others, are stories which try to restore human dignity through the restoration of memory. Historical amnesia is the bedrock of all misrule. Political propaganda is designed exactly for that: to erase history from memory in order to replace it with falsehoods.

The African literatures, written in English, French, Portuguese and diverse national languages, are part of a "world literature". Would you say that the literature of exile is part of the world literature, as well as a literature of the future?

The world is shrinking. Every literature is part of the orchestra which we call world literature. Maybe there is even nothing called world literature. Every literature is born of a particular space because every creator is in a particular space. The grain of sand is the mountain. The raindrop is the sea. Nobody sets out to write world literature. The exile sets out to create a literary work about the condition of exile in particular circumstances just as the creator who is home does the same. I don't understand why people concern themselves with 'world literature.' Why do we not talk about 'world food.' We talk of African or Chinese or Norwegian cuisine. If it is good African food, it is particular, and if people eat it and find it good on the palate, it transforms itself into 'world food.' That is the same with literature. When I was touring Japan once, a Japanese villager told me Bones was like a story which happened in her own village after World War II. But I did not set out to write a world novel. I set out to explore that particular experience of a village in a small corner of Africa, in a smaller corner of Zimbabwe. So, world literature is in the particular literature created passionately in particular places.

There is a new generation of African writers who assert that African literature does not exist. These writers see themselves as authors first and do not wish to lock themselves into "Afro-African" themes. How does that agree with your view that writing is political?

The decision to deny that African literature exists is also a political decision. As far as I have followed that argument, writers also have to refuse too much categorisation. Usually if a category is created, we find the book stores create a special exotic corner for African literature which is an area for specialists and literary tourists. That is demeaning for the writer. Hence the denial. But whether we like it or not, literature is always situated in our historical, geographical, psychological and emotional spaces which we have no choice over. An African is stuck with African eyes and ears, African sensibilities which one cannot escape. We are born in particular spaces, under certain skies, and we carry that story in our artistic visions and perceptions.

I also hate categorisations, especially when they are to my disadvantage as a writer. Some people think the writer has to be a poet and nothing else, a novelist, a playwright. What if the writer does everything?

African literatures exist, and they will always exist alongside other literatures. There are African voices just as there are Asian or Latin American voices.

Whenever you give talks or attend poetry events, do you get a large audience of Zimbabwean people to remind you of home?

Most Zimbabweans in exile are too busy struggling with the hard life, too busy to take time off for poetry. Sometimes I meet a few Zimbabweans who come to my performances, especially in countries where they are organised. Unfortunately, Zimbabweans in the diaspora are so badly fragmented that the passion of poetry from home does not feature too high on their list of priorities. But it was different when I was at home: huge audiences who come and challenge the poet about the images and metaphors which they can see around them. Maybe in exile they do not want to suffer the nolstagia which my poetry evokes.

A Handsome Encounter

almeen pushed her long silky hair away from her face, looked in the mirror and smiled. She definitely liked what she saw. Her sparkling eyes, full lips, long and graceful neck, but most of all, she was in love with her tiny chiseled nose. What a nose, she contemplated. Every creature she met admired this precious nose, even her cat licked it admiringly many times whenever she got the chance to do so. She smiled again, picked up a brush and started brushing her long cascading hair.

She'd better hurry up, she thought. Tina, her English neighbour, would be on her doorstep any minute. Hurriedly, she put on her favourite jeans and matched them with an incandescent red top. She grabbed her Gucci bag, again her favourite, and squeezed her dainty feet into four inch Manolo Blahnik stilettoes. She certainly did not need high heels. But being a fashionable girl, she loved heels and anything that had them.

She opened her front door and there was Tina, with her round smiley face and plump cuddly body, dressed head to toe in Laura Ashley. A floral pinkish sleeveless dress, which reminded Salmeen of the curtains of a dreadful hotel in Portsmouth where she had stayed few years ago with her mad American friend. A cute pink summer hat and tiny glittering shoes.

'Hi Salmeen, you look beautiful,' beamed Tina.

'Thanks Tina, and you look, er, cute,' quipped Salmeen.

'Are you ready for our Sunday walk?' asked Tina, suspiciously eyeing Salmeen's high heels.

'Of course I am,' replied Salmeen. And she carried on defensively, 'These sandals are very comfortable, you really should try them.'

'No thanks,' Tina said firmly. 'Shall we leave?' she inquired impatiently.

'Oh yes, we'd better move. What a gorgeous day!' declared Salmeen.

Indeed it was a gorgeous day, one of those occasional glorious English summer days. This obscenely beautiful summer day reminded Salmeen of many similar days she had spent as a child in Toukara, that little Mediterranean mountain village in the north east of Libya.

Everything about this exceptional day reminded Salmeen of her beloved hometown. Even Tina's asymmetric huge rear. It reminded her of her auntie Nouria's and how she used to follow her, along with the rest of the kids in the family, singing and clapping loudly: "wiggle wiggle your bum, wiggle wiggle that is fun." They even sang louder and louder when auntie Nouria started deliberately wiggling her huge soft bum. And sometimes, when auntie Nouria was in a very good mood, she would put her right hand over her mouth and release one of her trademark zagroutas. A high-pitched and long ululation, which was always very effective in summoning the rest of the clan to join in this short-lived outburst of joy and ecstasy. Auntie Hamida would emerge from one of the rooms



shaking a tambourine in her hands; another auntie tying a scarf around her spaghetti-thin hips ready for a session of belly dancing. A neighbour would clap her hands feverishly and would start an outdated song she had sung thousands of times which was suitable for grown-ups only, as she warned the kids many times:

Wounds, wounds, wounds, Blocking my soul, Breaking my bones, Deafening my ears, Blinding my eyes, Weakening my heart, Mincing my liver, Still, no physician could cure the

Still, no physician could cure them ever.

Whereas grandma sat lovingly, like a nursing mother, tending attentively to her simmering teapot on a charcoal brazier. She never joined in those bursts of joy but never disapproved of them either. Like an Egyptian queen, she would adjust her headgear, put a mysterious smile on her beautiful tattooed face and rock back and forth rhythmically and approvingly.

"Alas, what beautiful days!" murmured Salmeen to herself.

'That bitch did it again,' said Tina suddenly, interrupting Salmeen's delicious daydreams.

'Bitch! Who?' inquired Salmeen surprised.

'That bitch, our neighbour, you know, the cow who was married to a Moroccan guy. She was fucking her boss all night long and kept me awake.' exploded Tina.

'Ah, that slut! Another live show, eh?' remarked Salmeen giggling. 'I think you should talk to her, or better still, talk to her boss.'

'Talk to her? Have you forgotten how she reacted when you talked to her about the door slamming?' said Tina.

'Then what about the boss's wife?

'What about her?' asked Tina 'Are you nuts!'

'Well, if you can't talk to her because you dread her reaction, she will carry on her night activities, and you'll have to put up with...'

'Whoa!' interrupted Tina. 'Please, stop being philosophical and look at that gorgeous thing.'

Salmeen followed Tina's gaze and froze. There he was. Gorgeous was certainly an inadequate word. Stunning was even more inadequate. Breathtaking. Dazzling. Not enough, not enough, thought Salmeen. Quickly she lowered her gaze and examined her beautiful expensive stilettoes. Thank God she had worn these gorgeous sandals, she thought. What if she had worn those ugly trainers she had got as a birthday present, as Tina had suggested one day. Then she looked at him again and their eyes met. Staring deep into his eyes, all sorts of ideas, thoughts and even stories came gushing into her mind. One story in particular she had heard hundreds of times from her grandma about a poor beautiful girl who had huge limpid dark eyes. So enormous as if they had been slit open by a mad person, her grandma had declared. Presumably made with generosity. The bigger, the better, the mad person must have thought. And those huge hypnotic eyes were no different. And what about that luxuriant moustache he wore elegantly! Just like Clark Gable in Gone with the Wind, mercilessly handsome, painfully unreachable. But she had never liked moustaches, Salmeen thought. Actually she hated them with a passion and they even put her off any creature that grew them. What was the name of that guy who looked liked a 1940s New York street pimp and was desperate to win her heart but failed miserably, due to his bushy moustache and uneasy looks she wondered? Was it Masoud or Juma? She tried hard to remember. Poor guy, he had even sent his mother to meet hers.

On that infamous day, for Salmeen at least, a state of emergency was declared at her family's house. Luckily this state of high alert was never the norm. Four times a year maybe; five days before the month of Ramadan, five days before the two Eids, Eid-Ul-Fiter and Eid-Ul-Edha, and five days before her grandma's yearly visit. The early signs for such a state were always signaled by her mother and always picked up by her younger sister Nawal. She would whisper into Salmeen's ears: 'It is up, it is up' referring discretely to their mother's left eyebrow. Sometimes she would shout uncontrollably: 'the quiver, the quiver!' again, referring to their mother's unfamiliar lower lip quiver. All those uncontrolled and unfamiliar facial movements and more embarrassing ones, at least from Salmeen's point of view, were signs of an imminent state of emergency to be declared by their mother. And that plainly meant cleaning, scrubbing and more scrubbing. Those dreadful days, as they were always viewed by Salmeen, were not always hated and despised, at least by the younger sister Nawal who was fanatically passionate about all sorts and forms of cleaning and scrubbing, and all types and methods of cooking. Like the majority of her countrywomen, she excelled at housework activities. With the exception of that dainty creature Salmeen, who up to the age of twenty two, was unable to tell the difference between a broom and a serving spoon. That was scandalous, by her mother's standards. She lectured her thousands of times about the merits of mastering the techniques of domesticity. At the top of those merits, as her mother pointed out, was the matter of securing a husband. Poor woman, she tried desperately to transform her housework-illiterate daughter into a low profile copy of Nigella

Lawson. But she failed miserably and attributed her failure to convert her daughter into a domestic goddess, like the rest of the good obedient girls in their country, to black magic and the evil eye. She even sent the younger daughter, Nawal, on a discrete errand to summon Haja Fatouma, a well-known and reliable evil-eye-buster. But the stubborn fashionable daughter Salmeen refused to drink the suspicious concoction made by the Haja. And her desperate mother hopelessly declared that her daughter Salmeen would never get a husband. That sweeping statement thoroughly pleased Salmeen. But it did not stop her mother from working strenuously to find her a husband. She could not remember the number of suitors her mother tried to thrust on her. Maybe twenty, she thought. And that guy with a bushy moustache was a favourite candidate by all means. He was a rare catch, according to her mother. Got his own furnished flat, a Mercedes-Benz, despite the fact that it was a battered one, and an aspiring career as a primary school teacher. The only downside, as her mother put it politely and quietly, was the fact that he had been brought up by a divorcee. Boys who were brought up by divorced mothers tended to remain boys forever, confirmed her mother. As for the bushy moustache, she could easily persuade him to shave it off, her mother tried to convince her. But Salmeen had no problem in getting rid of this intruder, as she liked to call those potential husbands, like the many others before him and the many others who followed. 'Tell this woman to get lost or I will tell her myself', she remembered threatening her astonished mother.

Salmeen looked down and examined her polished nails this time. She had known since she was only five years old that she would never get married because marriage meant the end of her creativity. She knew that it would kill her soul and smother her talents. It would transform her into a soulless barren piece of meat, whose sole functions were biological. She adamantly refused to enter that golden cage, marriage, as people in her country called it. She fought fiercely like an injured lioness, not to be locked up in that cage, even if it were made of gold and lined with silk. She badly wanted to taste the forbidden fruit and celebrate her freedom as her people celebrated the virginity of a young terrified bride with a blood-stained handkerchief and collective hysteria. Barbaric, she always thought. And now she wanted to be barbaric and merciless in her choices, in her taste, in her decisions and in her love. She looked up and smiled at the thought of love. She always thought of herself as a creature of love, with no immunity against the love bug. She wanted to be in an everlasting state of love. She wanted to move in the gardens of love from one pleasure into another, just like a butterfly, spreading the seeds and ravaging the nectar. Salmeen felt a deliciously tortuous warmth travelling through her body. She was always aware of the signs of a new love and at that moment she knew that she was about to embark on a new exciting one. Another gorgeous creature would be the object of her affections.

She approached him. Ran her hand over his lithe tiger's body. Touched his ruffled hair. Placed a quick hesitant kiss on his forehead. She wanted to hug him, to take him home, to lock him up in her own cage and take care of him for the rest of his and her life. But she knew that she could never do that because she always believed that love and cages just do not coexist.

'Oh, I love you gorgeous', whispered Salmeen.

'Oh yea, what a lovely cat!' said Tina.

Malcolm Peltu

My journey

If I were black, with feet set firm on African veldt and sand, perhaps I would have had no cause to roam. I would have had a land that I called home.

But I yearned for grey skies, soft-kissing rain and shy girls an ocean away: in a strange familiar land where the glacial syllables of Empire reshaped colonial vowels until I spoke the language like a native – but posher.

Yet I have never learnt the chameleon tongues of my ancestors, who once stepped firm on desert sands then fled; trod securely on Spanish plains, then bled, converted or escaped the burning bush East to seed dreams deep rooted in sour soil

before riding the fanged whirlwind again, this time towards southern sunshine and the future ghost of me:

a lifetime away, uneasily seeking sanctuary in oases of citypark grass or on a hill-perch sipping tea while caressing the river's gently snaking flow.

And when the 7 July bomb-blast came, splattering flesh and the shrapnel of dreams through fractured metropolis veins under blitz-scabbed London ground,

I felt my city burn deep in me – my cuckoo's nest refuge, welcoming but indifferent, cruel but forgiving.

Here I have etched my life in concrete, steel and brick, hoping to glide on aging freedom-pass wings along pathways where my poems – my heartbeats – have sung.

And although my footsteps may grow unsteady on cracked pavement stones and the flowing sands of time, at least I know:

If the fire comes for me,
I will have nowhere else to roam.
I have found a place that is my home.



Their feet also once stepped firm on desert sand and olive grove, without a cause to roam from the land that they call home.

Until, returning to what they also call home, my side of the family gave cause to flee, to bleed: planting crops of reciprocal hate that grow new diasporas of grief.

Oh chaff of a shared bitter harvest, is there still a space where we can meet face to face:

to sow sweeter seeds in our common soil.

Ziba Karbassi

Breath Poetry: Elixir Poetry



Ziba Karbassi

Oxygen is the component of air that makes breathing possible and although it is only one fifth of air, it is the crucial one fifth that makes life possible.

The poet starts the process of creativity from the body and the senses, touching and watching. There is a concentration on breathing that leads the poet to a new consciousness and awareness which heightens the senses of sight and sound. Poetry without this elixir is exactly like air without oxygen but living words need this elixir which makes the words metamorphose with the born poet being the elixir poet who achieves the highest level of sublimity. The poet can reconstruct the word so that it bears warmth, energy and ecstasy and is a happening not just a commodity and this word is capable of distancing itself from the sheet of paper, rising up and taking someone's hand. Language which possesses closeness to breath will instill warmth, pulse and beat into the poetry itself or to express it another way, the pulse of the senses will be internalised in the language by the poet. In this way, poetry becomes the music of the body, the poet's movement and senses, gradually working with the poet, observing and creating a life of its own.

The poetry of breath retains the energy inside the language and suddenly in a leap of the senses, will explode the energy. In breath poetry, words do not die in language but develop into another word as if one word is an open womb for another. The words continuously enjoy each other as if they are 'coming' in love-making in the supreme emotions of pain, joy, hatred, love, caring, desiring, yearning, vulnerability, madness and revenge. For an instant, the poet cannot breathe and it is in that moment that transcendence occurs when the senses are crystallised into that feeling and a few words are released. The rest is what an expert poet can add.

Yashar Ahad Saremi is a breath poet whose creative process is unimaginable. I have read and heard his poetry with enormous desire and can contemplate on his poetry for weeks.

The Song of Ibn-Salam 1

Translated from Farsi Edited by Richard McKane

because I believe the word of the red rose I'd say you are the red rose's son because I know all the receivers are hopeless I'll put red phones at each table so you can call those who have hands wounded from birth please check your emails before you begin the last supper I bought the airplane tickets for you if you are able to come I give you my word that I'll change places with Judas so the price of wine and cigarettes won't go up now for my sins and for the goats who wag their tails on the edge do not give away your flesh and your blood to them, your deep redness, come over, smoke, and give life to the woods

The Song of Ibn-Salam 2

Translated from Farsi Edited by Richard McKane

I had been listening to memories of iron bars and chains then I started flying the Indian face that was behind the wheel was not smiling and said: "there it is, sinbad's tower" the waiter with a smile from outer space took me to one of the tables that were flying in the air as soon as I saw the bird in the saucer the deepest scent of rose came out of my hands - what would you like to eat tonight? you lover, the waiter asked. when I extended my hand to the bird, suddenly my friends appeared around the table still sitting on their chairs and words wandered from mouth to mouth "we desire your flesh and blood, you red rose" while I was looking for my father, the phone rang it was Judas who was calling me, he said "Stravinsky ordered the fire bird for you" when he showed up he was wearing a red shirt and leather jacket this time he had his hair cut short he extended his hand to the bird when he bit the wing he turned into a swarm of golden flames I saw my father leaving on his wooden horse

From Sonnets of Tabriz

Worm Head by Bart Wolffe

A New Novel From the Doyen of Alienation PublishAmerica, 2006

Reviewed by Brian Chikwaya

The title of the novel – *Worm Head* – announces that this is Bart Wolffe, actor, poet, and veteran Zimbabwean playwright. *The Man In The Cupboard, Killing Rats, A Legacy of Stone, A Question Of Alienation, The Art Of Accidental Stains, Beast, Daughter Of Darkness, Easy Come Easy Go, Two Men on A Bench etc; these are some of the many plays that Wolffe has penned and directed or appeared in. Wolffe's plays stand out for their unflinching stare at issues of alienation and identity, and <i>Worm Head* is an apposite continuation of Wolffe's exploration of being.

Worm Head is a story that can be read at two levels, one being that of the salvation, through love, of John Citizen, a schizophrenic Hararean who has been diagnosed as being '...possessed by a worm.' As his psychiatrist says, this though '...is far beyond simple Freudian obsession, the complexity evidenced by the few scribbled images found on scraps of cigarette paper in his pocket....'

One has to agree with the psychiatrist that this is a tale that goes beyond possession by worms because at another level. Worm Head is an existential story that looks at the burden of whiteness in Zimbabwe: the angst and paranoia that has lodged itself at the core of the white identity. There is a pounding purposelessness about it, and Wolffe articulates it by gazing at the world through the troubled John's eyes: "And what made Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, anything special? The streets were filled with black ants, running round in random riot. Ants dressed in rags and colours. These ant-humans had no name, each face an echo of a tribe. He knew that the more they moved through the termitarium of the city, the more he was being spun into forgetfulness." With John's paranoid tendencies, one gets the impression, Wolffe is again magnifying and teasing out what probably resides in the heart of paranoid white Zimbabwean: for John, a stroll through the city can be a petrifying encounter with otherness - "...pedestrian faces in some strange game that pass him like undeclared enemies. That is, ones he has not yet identified. He does not know them and they do not know him, John, the citizen. Yet the challenges are there on strangers' faces. Does he look that guilty, he wonders? Is it because he is white and this is black

Whilst the novel tackles angst and identity, albeit obliquely, the narrative thread that holds it together is that of John Citizen's fragile relationship with Susan, a psychiatric nurse.

At the beginning of the novel, John is an institutionalised man struggling with his illness, but hope of any escape from his situation lies in Susan, who gradually becomes obsessed with him the more she continues to secretly read his diary. While her professional relationship with John becomes less and less of a straitjacket thing, it begins to change both patient and nurse. Susan has ethical issues to deal with: if she fails to live up to her obligation to uphold the patient-nurse relationship she will find herself on a slippery slope. On the other hand, John's recovery clearly hangs on her tearing the rule book apart.

Wolffe's novel, which clearly makes use of his playwright talents, is a fascinating treatise on alienation and a fitting addition to Zimbabwe's literary tradition.

Migrating Birds: A Selection of Poems by Jaleh Esfahani

Translated from Persian by Rouhi Shafii Shiraz Press, London, 2006



Reviewed by Jennifer Langer

Jaleh Esfahani is a distinguished, pioneering, female Iranian poet who has published over twenty volumes of poetry with her

first collection having been published in 1944. Her work has been translated into many languages including Russian, German, Czech and Arabic, yet astonishingly, *Migrating Birds* is the first translation of her work into English. This endeavour has been lovingly undertaken by the writer, Rouhi Shafii.

Jaleh Esfahani was the first of a group of Iranian women writers who created a new tradition of women's poetry in Iran in the middle of the twentieth century and in fact, was the only female poet to recite her work at the first Iranian Congress of Poets and Writers in 1946. These women were intensely involved in self-reflection and selfrevelation, writing about the domain of the private which was traditionally taboo and attempting to reconcile the emotional, sensual and social aspects of the female self. However, an extremely important focus of Esfahani's work was the poetics of struggle for free speech, liberty and equality, and some sixty years ago she called on Iranian women to assert themselves to gain freedom from slavery in order to become equal partners in society. This was considered a courageous act:

'Time to fly out of the cage sisters spread your wings and fly away.'

However in 2001, in 'My Pen Weeps', she expresses her profound grief for the narrative of the lost struggle for women's freedom in Iran.

'The tale of the veil,

your tale

oh, woman,

so drowns me

in Sorrow

Esfahani was born in Esfahan, Iran in 1921 but in 1947, she and her husband were forced to leave Iran because of his political views as a member of the communist Tudeh Party. Having settled in Baku, Azerbaijan, they eventually moved to Moscow where Jaleh gained her doctorate in Persian Literature. With the intention of re-settling in Iran in 1980, she returned to Iran, but with the turmoil of the Revolution, left for London where she currently lives.

The poems of Esfahani in this collection can be referred to, broadly speaking, as 'modern poetry', which is the collective title for all Persian poems in which Iranian

poets follow the lead of Nima Youshij as far as form is concerned. Her forms also derive, to some extent, from her Russian environment and its culture and literature so that it could be suggested that her work combines Persian and Russian modernism. Literature continued to evolve in the Soviet period although the government attempted to control literary expression and to exploit the popularity of verse for party propaganda. Despite this, Russian poetry of this period preserved and expanded the rich inheritance of Russian Modernism of the early twentieth century.

With Esfahani's history of moving from country to country, it is not surprising that migration and alienation are one of the dominant themes in her work.

'Latitude of migration

gradual discolouration of identity.'

Her poem 'Moment by Moment' articulates the notion of being positioned between different worlds of reality - the past and the existing space which possesses neither presence nor absence, with the presence of the absence becoming a potent force for memory in exile. Yet, Esfahani is aware of the problematic of the long ago past and the constant process of re-interpreting memory from the perspective of the present:

'So distant I am from the past, as though I were born

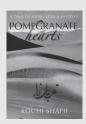
a thousand years earlier.'

She articulates the desire for beginnings and lost origins which focus on Esfahan and the River Zendeh Rood which are constantly mediated by her dreams as the site of an imagined past. Return to her home town in 1980 fulfils some desires of belonging but following the Revolution, they are subverted by the blood, martyrs' walls, destruction, refugees and soldiers, images which she attempts to obliterate. She realises that the past life of her youth cannot be regained and that regrets are pointless. Yet, although nostalgia is articulated in many poems, this is not melancholic but powerful poetry, as Esfahani suggests that she has gained from her exilic life in Azerbaijan, the communist Soviet Union and London. Given that her notion of existence is crystallised in her belief that life has meaning and beauty, she attempts to transcend borders of time and space with much of the beauty derived from images of nature.

Her poetry is not only of the personal but her concerns are with suffering people so that her work is infused with optimism aiming to inspire hope.

Pomegranate Hearts by Rouhi Shafii, Shiraz Press, 2006

Reviewed by Isabelle Romaine



Pomegranate Hearts is a tale of women and endurance. Against the backdrop of a turbulent twentieth century, three women: Suri, Sara and Shireen, live through the social changes and political turmoil of Iran. The story of Suri, the mother born in the days of ancient traditions, and that of her daughters Sara and Shireen, who engaged in the political effervescence of

the '60s and withstood the effects of the Islamic revolution, span across a whole century.

Mute from birth, Suri is married at the age of nine to Javad, an intellectual and twenty five years her senior. Their relationship settles into a student teacher routine and Suri acquires the tools to emancipate herself. She becomes proficient in languages and a poet in her own right. In the middle of the Second World War, anticipating a worldwide revolution, Javad goes to Russia to fight the Nazis. He leaves behind his wife, their two daughters, Sara and Shireen and their son Saran. He will never return. While Suri learns to adjust to a life without her husband and mentor, the chapter of history turns towards her daughters and the political events which affect their lives.

Rouhi Shafii gives her full attention to the plight of women in the midst of political and social changes. She describes how the despotic measures installed by the Islamist administration in 1980, forced Sara and Shireen to leave Iran making them exiles. Shireen seems to be particularly assailed: her fight for divorce and the custody of her daughter is of no avail. Furthermore she is forced out of her job as a university lecturer. Shafii cannot refrain from pointing at the injustice done to a generation of Iranian women who fought for civil privileges in the sixties, and played a vanguard role in the Shah's downfall in the 1970s, merely to have their civil liberties denied by the new administrative power. Anger sparks off Shafii's denunciation of Iranian men. She accuses them of agreeing with the laws which obliterate Iranian women's freedom: "Shall we accuse Iranian men of collaboration with the leader who thought nothing of Iranian women? History proved they did collaborate." This disquieting statement is partially echoed in the men's predicament in the novel. Indeed, as the story unfolds, the men who captivate the three women's hearts disappear into the background, transforming our heroines into decision makers. Suri's husband, Javad, vanishes in Russia, Sara married and quickly divorced, Shireen is separated from her husband.

For Suri of course, the fight to express her demands did not take the same form as Sara's and Shireen's struggle. Brought up in an ancient traditional context, she did not have to fight the tyrannical laws enforced by the Islamist administration, but she had to face the restricting codes of patriarchal order. When Javad left for Russia, Suri found herself economically dependent from her family. In order to sustain her children and see them educated she had to make some concessions which hindered her accomplishment of newly emancipated woman.

Rouhi Shafii draws our attention to the implications of our actions and our decisions in history. Her text is suggestive and poetic. Favourite metaphors such as 'desert' and 'milky way' abound. Other recurrent images of wombs and unwelcome pregnancies herald the world's apocalyptic march towards war and bloodied death. Implicitly, we are reminded that Iran is traditionally renowned for its love of poetry and beauty of nature.

Rouhi Shafii has edited a book on the history of women's movements throughout the world. She is also the author of Scent of Saffron: Three Generations of an Iranian Family, Scarlet Press, 1997.

Qissat: Short Stories by Palestinian Women

ed. Jo Glanville, Telegram, 2006

Reviewed by Ghada Karmi

This anthology of Palestinian women's short stories should be a welcome addition to a literary field where such books are few. Palestinian literature is a recent arrival on the artistic scene, and in comparison to the reams written about the politics of Palestine, it is minuscule. There is only a small number of Palestinian narrative writers, whether novelists, short story writers or playwrights. This is not because Palestinians are less gifted than others. On the contrary, there is a long tradition of story telling in the Arab world, and itinerant story-tellers used to travel all over Palestine, where they regularly held audiences spellbound with their art. That is probably why the short story has taken on amongst Palestinians more than the novel, as the editor of this volume explains.

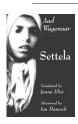
There is no tradition of novel writing in the Arab world. Literature has usually taken the form of history writing or poetry. Although that has changed in recent times with the appearance of many prominent Egyptian, Lebanese and other novelists. it is still a relatively undeveloped literary form for Arabs. In the Palestinian case. narrative writing appeared even later on the scene and not just for this reason. The Palestine situation for many decades following the 1948 Nakba, or catastrophe, was not conducive to artistic expression as people struggled to survive. After 1967, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza added another obstacle, sapping people's energies in resisting it. Nevertheless, the visual arts were the first to develop amongst Palestinians, and Palestinian art has become an established genre. Filmmaking was another art form favoured by Palestinians as a way of bringing home to viewers the experience of military occupation. Narrative writing was the last to appear on the Palestinian scene, but it is picking up momentum.

A number of memoirs have appeared in the last decade, telling the story of Palestine through personal histories. A few novels have also been added, and more, popularly, short stories. Lacking a tradition of such literature, unlike say, Britain or France, Palestinian writers have struggled to create books of quality. They have succeeded in only a very small number of cases, but as time goes on, this will doubtless change. The present collection of stories edited by Jo Glanville is not great literature but it serves an important function. By allowing readers access to Palestinian experiences of military occupation and exile, it brings the reality of the Palestinian predicament to life. Most stories come from writers in the occupied territories, but a minority are by women living in other Arab countries. Israel casts a long shadow over all of them in one way or another, all of them malign. Regrettably the standard of writing is uneven and the quality of translation could be better. Many Americanisms jarred on me, phrases were sometimes clumsy and the text should have been more carefully edited. With a few exceptions, notably the pieces by Jean Makdisi and Basima Takrouiri, the literary standard is mediocre. It would be a pity if, on the strength of this collection, readers thought that Palestinian writers had nothing better to offer.

Settela by Aad Wagenaar

Translated by Janna Eliot, Five Leaves
Publications, 2005

Reviewed by Esther Lipton



Little is known about the plight of the European Gypsies during the Nazi régime. Their fate often is referred to as the *O Parrojmos* – the Holocaust or rather, the Forgotten Holocaust. The Sinti and Roma com-

munities of Gypsies were, like the Jews, looked upon as inferior, *Untermenschen*. In 1940 about 400 Sinti and 3 Roma families resided in the Netherlands. On 16 May 1944, the Nazis arrested 578 caravan dwellers and identified 245 as Sinti. They were sent to camp Westerbork. On 19th May when the famous film, lasting just seven seconds was taken, all 245 were forced to board cattle cars which were then, bolted and locked. They were sent to Auschwitz II/Birkenau for extermination in Hitler's Final Solution. Only 30 Sinti survived.

Throughout Europe the number of Sinti and Roma murdered by the Nazis varies between 200,000 and 500,000. Many

Gypsies were not registered upon arrival in Birkenau and many were killed or died in transit so the true number who perished is unknown. But numbers are impersonal and meaningless and it is only when an individual's story is told that we begin to understand, to relate and to empathise with their suffering as representative of the cruel suffering of all persecuted peoples whether they be Jew or Gypsy. For over fifty years the face of the young girl framed between the closing doors of a cattle train bound for Auschwitz, had haunted Aad Wagenaar. In 1992 he began his search which led to the Westerbork transit camp in Holland, investigation of war archives, meetings with Jewish survivors and eventually to the Gypsy Community.

The story of Settela also serves to further document the fate of the Romani people. The picture of the young girl was long accepted as a symbol of Dutch Jewish suffering during the Holocaust but the discovery that she was Sinti does not and must not detract from the tragedy that befell her and other such children whatever their background or ethnic origins. Settela (Anna Maria Steinbach) murdered in Auschwitz at the age of nine, is a symbol not only for her own people but also, like Anne Frank, an icon for all the children who perished at that time.

Ze Tubia: Cycle of the Repeated V Millennium

Reviewed by Christopher R. Collins



In the labyrinth under Croydon Clocktower can be found an exuberant exhibition, *Cycle of the Repeated V_ Millennium* by the 31-year-old Angolan artist, Ze Tubia, who is currently living in Croydon with his wife and children.

Ze Tubia was seven years old when he lost his right eye and both of his arms at the elbow whilst playing with friends passing around a found hand grenade in Lobito, on the east coast of Angola. Recuperating after a two month stay in hospital, he learnt to draw holding a pencil or chalk between two elbows, a technique he still uses today.

Manifest in Ze Tubia's work is the working through of trauma evident in his surreal paintings, evocative of Picasso and Dali, by exploding fragmented and distorted shapes, some suggesting limbs or body parts, boldly and cathartically represented in vivid, in-yourface, exuberant colour. Primary colour is the main composite force in all the paintings on show with the exception of the subtle and monochromatic tones of The Hand, a painting which courageously refers to the artist's own limbic loss and a video work in which Ze Tubia speaks of the abominable effects of landmines in his native homeland alluded to by close-up scenes of cracked, desiccated earth contrasted with surprisingly, The White Cliffs of Dover, on reflection, maybe his first sighting of his new homeland. Returning to the traumatic force inherent in his fragmentary compositions is to gaze upon, indeed the dislocated eye is ever present, distorted representations of a personal traumatized memory presented in accessible cultural forms. These drawings, paintings and the video work are evidence of Ze Tubia continuing to integrate his spatial and temporal representations of continuous fractures into his psyche resulting in a healing, redemptive process.

Ze Tubia's vision is an apocalyptic one as the title of this exhibition and the title of one of his energetic paintings suggests: Cycle of the Repeated V_ Millennium. This refers to our present time based on biblical chronology – four millenniums of the Bible's Old Testament and two of the New Testament and his message seems to be what come around goes around.

MAPS: an exhibition by Rafat Asad



Reviewed by Kristen Hughes

A decidedly Cartier-Bresson-esq decisive moment framed my experience at the recent solo exhibition by artist Rafat Asad. The exhibition, MAPS, hosted by Delfina Studios, showcased Asad's London work created while acting as artist in residence for ArtSchool Palestine, an organisation that supports promising young Palestinian artists. When I arrived at the gallery, I took a cursory glance around the room before settling on a salty, icy blue-white seascape. Black crisscrossing and converging paint lines covered the warm creamy sands and oranges that filled the right half of the canvas while swirling tides of aquamarine and ultramarine wisps figured primarily in the latter half, occasionally overstepping the dark borders created by the aforementioned black lines. Enter the decisive moment: the gallery space fills with sunlight filtered through the glass roof and a web of ceiling supports and light fixtures. Instantly, the pictorial landscape is echoed formally and physically by the shadowy grid lines that inscribe the gallery walls; Nature gives her blessing to Asad's translations of landscapes into abstract relief maps of color and emotion. An instant later, the clouds overtake the sun and the room is once again filled with the even lighting of a painting exhibition. The relationship between art and life continues; the gallery viewer physically experiences the sort of ephemeral impermanence suggested by the quick speed of the artist's brushstrokes and the paints' ever-spreading lattice lines.

The constant motion featuring heavily in Asad's work seems essentially at odds with the notion of maps as relatively static objects or receptacles of simple truths and information and yet there is a lot of the 'map' present in his paintings. We see this first in the forceful refiguring of natural landscape to a planar surface. Maps often visually stretch some areas while condensing others, creating figurative bulges and pockets of earth with little regard to natural topography; reducing the landscape to the most essential legibility of lines, color and symbols. In much the same way, Asad's canvas is cut into regions and regions are cut into streets until the pictorial landscape is filled with overlaid borders and boxy demarcation lines that wrestle with the ever-shifting landscape below. Simultaneously, the endlessly refigured dripping borders and thick paint strokes communicate the hand of the artist and the act of map-making. The function of conveying geographical or political information (for maps are essentially political documents) is replaced by a depiction of subjective emotional experience and physical interaction with the environment. Moreover, by forcing the act of map-making to the forefront of 'Maps', he signals his viewer that the involved, even palpable process of aesthetically figuring land is analogous to the moulding and shaping of natural land into territories and nation states that is filling up borders and spreading out political regions. He thus questions the validity of the view of maps as solid locii of ultimate truth and authority, a particularly poignant observation coming from a member of those who have been long-time victims of maps and their political implications. Ultimately, it is perhaps this acknowledgment of the violence of the cartographer that lodges the haunting shifting and slipping forms of Asad's landscapes firmly in his viewer's consciousness.

The Persian Revolution

(30 Bird Productions/Iran Heritage Foundation)

Written and directed by Mehrdad Seyf Lyric Hammersmith, 26 September – 14 October 2006

Reviewed by Robert Spain

Although set around the Persian constitutional revolution of a century ago, The Persian Revolution maintains a contemporary edge. US imperialism, the power of small nations and a changing world order, acquisition of atomic energy, the most pressing issues currently facing Iran are juxtaposed with those of its history in this finely woven play.

An experienced playwright and director, it is obvious that Mehrdad Seyf is deliberate in all parts of his creation. Not content with merely telling the story of the 1906 revolution, Seyf tells it from all sides, giving each character long enough to portray their view – each in their own style – before disappearing back into the sands of time. The play thus starts with a Joyce-ian soliloquy from an unsympathetic revolutionary character and ends with the execution of an Ayatollah. Through these and more characters, events are played out in such a way that even an audience with no knowledge of Persia can fully understand what is taking place – and why.

With a small stage and limited cast (of five), the play makes good use of movement to make marked character and scene changes. Ali Amadi especially, seemed to change his very essence each time his director required only that he change his character.

Yet despite the good acting and direction, parts of the script are hard to follow, but deliberately so, as mentioned. The use of readings from Tin Tin to raise the nuclear issue has little in connection with the rest of the play. It is just there. And the ending of the revolution, which established a parliament and constitutional monarchy for the first time in the region, is never made fully clear. Similarly, the fusion of different artistic styles, while intriguing, can make the play seem somewhat disjointed. As a consequence, this is more a play to be liked than enjoyed – confusion occasionally outweighs the pleasure. Nonetheless, it will be worth keeping an eye out for Seyf's future work.



Biographies

Ada Aharoni born in Cairo, Egypt, lives in Haifa, Israel, having been uprooted from Egypt. She has published twenty-five books including *From the Nile to the Jordan,* (1994), *The Peace Flower,* (1996) and *Women Creating A World Beyond War and Violence* (2002). She is founder of The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace.

Mois Benarroch born in Morocco, lives in Israel. He has published books of poetry, prose and novels in Hebrew, Spanish and English and has read his poetry in Israel, Spain and the US.

Brian Chikwava is a Zimbabwean writer currently resident in London. He is the 2004 winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing and is currently working on a novel alongside a short story collection. Brian is also a Charles Pick fellow at the University of East Anglia.

Christopher R. Collins an artist and writer, was born in Camarthen, South Wales and is now settled in London. He is currently completing an MA in Cultural Memory

Soad El-Rgaig born in Benghazi, Libya, lives in London. Her first collection of short stories is *Days of the Gentlemen*. She has MAs in Translation Studies and in Applied Linguistics. She is a freelance translator and teaches at the London School of Economics, Language Centre.

Humberto Gatica is a Chilean exile who arrived in Britain as a refugee from the Pinochet regime. He writes in Spanish and some of his poetry has been translated into English, Welsh, French and German and included in poetry magazines and anthologies. He lives in Swansea and works as a photography technician.

James Graham has recently completed a PhD in South African and Zimbabwean literature. He lives in London and currently teaches comparative literature at the University of Warwick and Birkbeck, University of London.

Nathalie Handal is a poet, playwright and director. She is author of *The Neverfield, Spell* and *The Lives of Rain*, shortlisted for the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. She is editor of *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology.* She has Palestinian parents.

Mogib Hassan, born in Yemen, is a dual Yemeni and Dutch national whose poetry has been published in Dutch and Arabic. He was a 'Fonds voor de Letteren' international author in 2003 and in 2004 toured Dutch and Belgian cities as part of 'World Podium'. He lives in London.

Kristen T. Hughes is a recent graduate from Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, USA where she earned her B.A. in Art/Art History and Literature. She is currently working in London at a medical non-profit.

Reza Jalali born in a small border town in Kurdistan, Iran, left when young for fear of persecution. He lives in the US where he is a human rights activist. He works at the University of Southern Maine.	Esther Lipton is a retired lawyer and is currently studying for a MA in Jewish Ethics at London University. She has been writing for many years and has had articles, short stories and poetry published.
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Shireen Jayyusi is a Palestinian who was born in Lebanon and grew up in Kuwait and London. She has been living in South America for the past two years and is currently based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is currently working on a collection of poetry.	Robert Kabemba Mangidi is from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo and studied in South Africa. He came to the UK in 2003 and currently lives in Oldham where he has written about one hundred poems
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Ernesto Kahan born in 1940 in Argentina, fled to Israel during the 1976 military coup. He is author of numerous publications and editor of the anthology <i>Escritores del Alba</i> . Dr. Kahan received the Albert Schweitzer Peace Award 'for his courageous work for peace in the Middle East'.	Nora Nadjarian is a Cypriot poet and short story writer. She has published three collections of poetry <i>The Voice at the Top of the Stairs</i> (2001), <i>Cleft in Twain</i> (2003), and <i>25 Ways to Kiss a Man</i> (2004).
	Nasrin Parvaz born in Tehran, fled to the UK after
Ziba Karbassi, born in Tabriz, Iran, came to England in the late eighties. Her five collections of poetry are: A Scorpion under the Pillow, With a Broken Star in my Heart, The Sea will Drown, Water or the Blue and Collage	eight years' imprisonment in Iran from 1982. She is currently working on a series of short stories based on her life in Iran and Britain and is studying for a PhD on the psychological and social effects of the Islamic republic on the people of Iran.
Ghada Karmi is a well known Palestinian writer and academic at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Her recent memoir, <i>In Search of Fatima: a Palestinian Story</i> was widely acclaimed for its narrative power	Malcolm Peltu was born in South Africa and has lived in England since 1960. As well as writing poetry, he has been a technical journalist and is now an editorial consultant specialising in the social implications of information and communication technologies.
Aimé Kongolo comes from the Katanga province in Congo-Kinshasa. He was studying child psychology and pedagogy before he came to the UK in 2002. He writes in French and English.	Isabelle Romaine a French Cameroonian, graduated in Geography at Lyon II University. She taught History and Geography in a lycée in Dakar, Senegal. She has an M.Phil. and an MA in Cultural Memory.
	Yashar Ahad Saremi, born in Tabriz, Iran, emigrated to California in 1994. He has published three books in Farsi: <i>Arthur's House</i> , 2000, <i>Yashsar's Quartets</i> , 2004 and <i>Son</i> -
Jennifer Langer is the founding director of Exiled Writers Ink and editor of <i>The Bend in the Road: Refugees</i>	nets of Tabriz, 2005.
Writing, Crossing the Border: Voices of Refugee and Exiled Women Writers and The Silver Throat of the Moon:	Robert Spain is an accountant living in London. He
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views books on politics.

Robert Spain is an accountant living in London. He has worked as a journalist in Honduras and currently re-

Memory at London University.

Writing in Exile. She is completing an MA in Cultural

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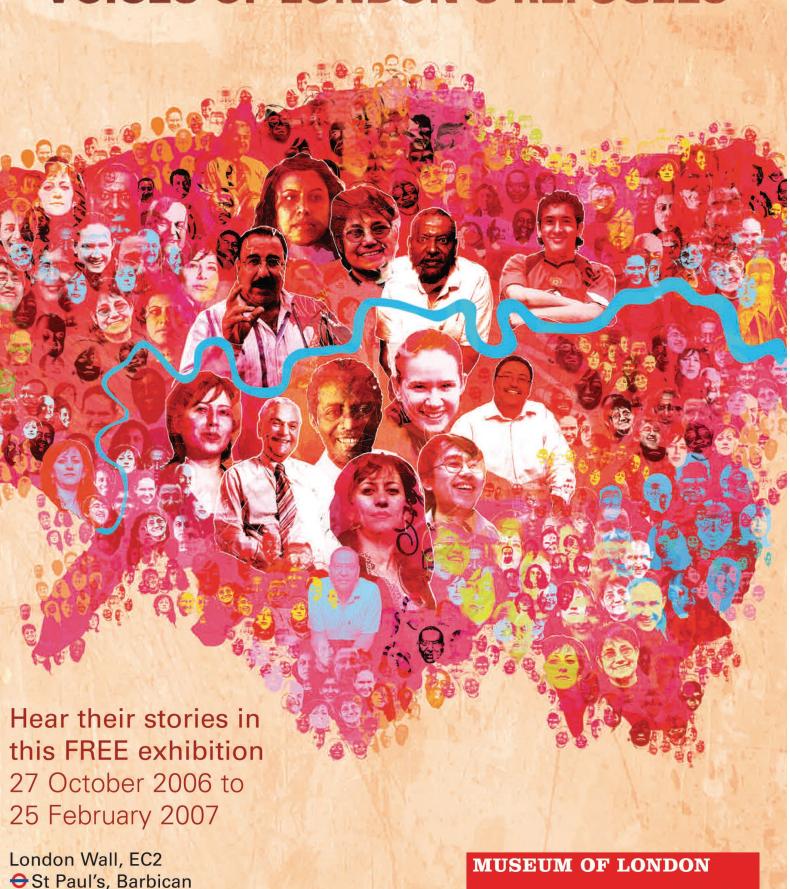
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