

Exiled Ink

e-mag



Issue 3 2019

Resistance

Editorial

This third volume of the Exiled Ink e-magazine focuses on the theme of resistance. A timely topic, as it feels as if we are living in a time where we are faced with so much to oppose, to stand against and to rise above.

Throughout these digital pages we find so many examples of what it means to resist. A poet who has spent over half his life in a tiny cell in Istanbul where he serves a life sentence for an afternoon tea with a woman he barely knew, resisting insanity through poetry. We resist imperialism and nationalism as seen in the powerful poetry of Omar García-Obregón where he urges us “to forge passports, And transgress fear through barbed wire, That others insist on raising.” We resist the false promises and contradictory values of Western democracy in Nasrin Parvaz’s short story ‘Brexit’ or Alemu Tabeje’s poem ‘O, Western Democracy.’

And through our resistance we also sow the seeds of hope. We find hope in poet and artist, Kholoud Charaf, who fled civil war in Syria and now runs an art workshop for local residents in Poland. We learn to resist resistance itself, as Meltem Arikian urges us to do in her ‘Letter to My Friend the Trees’ and to pay attention to what is happening around us. Though it might not be what we wish to see, it is necessary in order to ensure humanity’s survival.

We also move ‘Towards an Open Land’ in the final section, where we explore the poetry that came out of the initiative that was inspired as a means of taking on the increasing hostility against Muslims and Jews and to draw strength and solidarity from one another through creative writing workshops organised by Exiled Writers Ink.

We offer you this magazine as our own attempt at resistance -a way to bring forward important artistic works from a diverse sea of voices and experiences. As a means of celebrating what unites us and a resistance against these increasingly divided times.

Danielle Maisano

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Cover image: Women: Forty Years of Fighting for Their Rights © Nasrin Parvaz

Ilhan Sami Çomak writes poetry in his tiny cell in an Istanbul prison and it is writing poetry that has kept him sane - writing of memories, hopes, ideas. Ilhan veers between deep depression and then excitement that people outside like us are reading his lines far away in our free world. When his cousin visits him, Ilham talks to her through the glass screen and asks that they pretend they are chatting on a beach, a mountainside or a park.



A Photo of Ilhan Sami Çomak

Ilhan has been in prison for the last 26 years now and was condemned to lifetime imprisonment three years ago, but has committed no crime. The police picked him up because he was having tea with a Kurdish girl he barely knew who had a sibling in the outlawed PKK. He was only 22 and studying geography when he was detained and severely tortured.

He remains a poet in prison with seven collections of poetry published.

Thinking of you

By Ilhan Sami Çomak

Translated by Canan Marasligil

Do you know what's on my mind for you?
A mountain. Not only a mountain, its whisper
A whisper that brightens and multiplies with the zeal of stars,
The immobile whisper of a shadow that started a journey.
The whisper of the fire of worry pouring into the heart,
The whisper of a misty bed and warming mornings,
The whisper of our bodies standing in flames, in silent idleness.
In my mind is the heavy weight of memories,
The deep scents exuding from lush forests,
Touching the sleep we handed over to the rain
Leaking into the mirrors ; let it flow.

The wire of existence is strained.
Fingers touching the notes I know .
Clustered memories are squeezed by forgetting.

In my mind is the roof of night and day,
Every name of the sun, every name of darkness is in my mind,
The wet face of clouds pouring out of shapelessness
Gives taste to the tongue through the cracking lip.

Do you hear the owl's cry?
In my mind the owl is perched on the branch.
Sky wanders door to door with fear of solitude
The wings of little Joseph beat midday's heat
On my mind is the fountain of drying distance, dew, plants , love.
Windows breathe looking at the garden,
Water trembles from a lack of fish in the lake.

It is the knowledge of the wind that hurls the ash.
It is the law of the moon that wakes you up startled.
Dreams bleed, leaves fall, the stone' s fate changes its shell,
The heavy look of time rises in my mind.
I think of you.

Scheherazade

by May AL-ISSA

Wake up

That deep sleep

Wake up

That millennium slumber

Come Scheherazade

Wake up

Sing the nights away

Multiply them

Thousands upon thousands upon thousands

Wake up

Scheherazade

Let's be in the nights

Keep us away from the days

Wake up

Hey Scheherazade

From the interwoven art

Spin us into devotion

Take us into your illusion

Don't trick us anymore

Hey Scheherazade

Wake up

From Scheherayar relieve us

With Sinbad take us

On his island put us

Hey Scheherazade

Wake up

Wake up and liberate us

Under the datepalms shadow us

Wake up

Scheherazade

Wake up

Your sleep silenced the generations

Raised the hymns of cracking rocks

Wake up

Hey Scheherazade

Wake up

Scheherazade

The world is shaky

The future is hazy

Oh Scheherazade

Sleep away

Sleep away

Sleep

We are Aisha, Katherine, Elizabeth, and Rachel **By Amirah Al Assif**

we are all washing the dishes
cleaning the floor
but we still have big wishes
we are all that girl who put her dream

as a dear flower in her book
we are all the seekers who want to mean
we are the breakers of the same rock!
we are all washing the dishes
stitching the clothes
but, we have big wishes
trying to find our "because"
we are Aisha, Katherine, Elizabeth, Rachel, and Lili
we are those described by you as dangerous, silly
pick your weapon as a fighter
sign her upon all walls
say: I am a woman /I have to enter the wars
we are all showering under the tears of our grandmothers
we are told by authorities
sisters do not equal brothers
you have to wait at the back yard
until the men end their game
you have to celebrate your loss
without protest/with no need to blame
we are all cutting carrots with a smiley- dreamy face
we all heard scary rumours
but, we still hope for grace
yes, we still hope for grace

Post Brexit

By Nasrin Parvaz

A few days after the EU referendum, Raha greeted her neighbour as always but instead of the usual reply she heard a whisper.

‘Go home.’

‘What did you say Mary?’

‘You heard me right. I said go home.’

Raha was so shocked she said nothing. But she went home thinking if Mary was going to treat her like this, what would strangers do? When she got home, her husband Paul said, ‘What’s the matter love?’

‘We should go and live in Iran, people love you there. Didn’t you feel that when we were there?’

‘I did, but we were only visiting. Going to live there is another thing?’

‘Remember what you promised me on our wedding day?’

‘Look, you’re upset.’

‘I want to go home. Will you come with me, or not?’

‘I’ll come with you anywhere, but aren’t we at home here?’

‘You are. I’m not.’

‘Tell me what happened.’

‘Just now Mary told me to go home.’

‘And?’

‘I don’t want to work and pay tax in a country that doesn’t want me. It’s such a cheek. This country has sucked the world dry for centuries and now accuses us of being the problem.’

‘I told you to vote to remain!’

‘You know I never vote. What’s the point of choosing one set of capitalists over the other set?’

‘Usually I agree with you, but the referendum was different. That’s why I said we should vote this time. Anyway, next time I see Mary I’ll point out to her that many immigrants are just fleeing the bombings being carried out by western governments including Britain.’

‘Well, she might also ask you why on earth you married an immigrant.’

A few days after this, Raha’s brother, Aram was waiting for her and Paul in Tehran airport. ‘We were all surprised with the situation being what it is, that you decided to come over. How long are you planning to stay?’

‘What situation? What are you talking about?’

‘Didn’t Mother tell you? She must have feared you’d cancel your visit if you knew.’

‘Tell me what?’

Aram took out a leaflet and handed it to her.

‘I can’t believe this. It’s the same thing here.’ Raha said to Paul as she read the leaflet’s headline, ‘We do not want Afghans and other foreigners in our town.’ Paul shook his head, ‘Welcome to the new world order.’

The Red Messenger

By Amarjit Chandan

Father used to tell me pointing towards the wall
There I hid the paper *Lal Dhandora** the Red Messenger
 with my poems in it
They are all gone by now
Pulped by the sun and rains

He hated burning the word printed on paper
Fearing the police

They never came
Father went into exile
Rains came and the wall collapsed

I inherited the wall still erect in my mind
In it the fears the secrets and dreams are buried safe
No sun no rainwater can damage
 the words printed on the paper

* An underground organ of the Punjab *kirtis* –workers– party in the 1930s.

Translated from the original in Punjabi by Amarjit Chandan

from *The Parrot, The Horse & The Man* (Arc, 2017)

BETWEEN CLASSES, RACES AND BORDERS

by Omar García-Obregón

In the natural separations
That were invented by the gods,
Arbitrary, bloodless utopians,
Creators of some kind of federalism
That usurped the universal dream,
The word arrived generously,
To unite without convincing, for disagreeing
From the depths of the disheartening,
Forged through race and class struggles
In trans-border cooperation
As in a Europe united through disunity
Broken by the Bosphorus and the Urals.

Sovereign discontinuity
Lays the siege of fire open to us pyralises
Who die beyond borders
Set by the boarding of a pirate
Who leads a snoozing ship.

Home no longer exists in my Transnistria;
Peace was broken in Kosovo, in Bosnia.

There is no longer a hiding place in Kashmir,
A linchpin between Ethiopia and Eritrea,
An undue contact in Darfur
That resounds with the drums of Niger,
A fire against the partiality
That sets its traces with discord
To raise walls, walls, walls,
Endless walls in the Sahara,
The desert stillness of the sands
That separate Algeria from Morocco.

The world shows solidarity if from afar
It is not taxed for the mosaic
That sets its borders like Columbus
Ready to enrich himself if they do not come,
If they ransack life step by step
Till they purify their wealth
So that they may enter the kingdom of heaven.

What happens when they display their miseries
And appear at the world's doors
Violating hydrotopography
To state that we are Amerindians, Blacks,
United to whites, zambos, mulattoes
Who sully borders.

In fourteen hundred and ninety-four
The Church distributed states
And creed separated regions
With the caprice of the meridians.

There is the moral obligation to recall
In the face of vanity's bonfire.

Nationalism and colonization,
Two faces of one coin,
Recall the Easter Rebellion,
While the world turns on an axis
That uselessly repeats itself without stopping
At the borders' end.

We have to forge passports
And transgress fear through barbed wire
That others insist on raising.
The crossing requires plundering
the surfaces of life itself,
accumulating all the money we have,
though our efforts may not be compensated
when what awaits you is another workhouse
and a certain compromise of freedom.

Here hope that breaks bread
in realities does not go unscathed.
Dreams no longer fill the Host
When the sea is the border, with no destination known,
Imaginary icon of the life
Of a migrant expelled by paths
That stitch together the painful interface
Of a wound sealed after a crossing.

* Original poems (in Spanish) by Omar García-Obregón, from *Fronteras: ¿el azar infinito?*
Translations into English by Parvati Nair (*Borders: An Infinite Game of Dice?*)

Elephant & Castle

By Leo Boix

It wasn't the *Infanta de Castilla*
nor Castile's long gone elephant
but a shopping centre arcade
where *latinos* dined at La Bodeguita.

They've been congregating
in the main yellow concourse
at the small *al paso* cafeterías
where they've been talking

of how the leftist mayor
approved the final plans
by developers Delancey
to demolish the run down centre.

A pesar de prometer lo contrario!
el hijo'puta! el descara'o!
And all for a few quid...
el cabrón lo pagará bien caro!

They'll tear down the salmon
pink pachyderm carrying the white
castle turret, as he kingly rises
on top of such expensive land.

The grandiose bronze mastodon
especially cast for the big market
in 1965, copied from one at a pub
now bulldozed. But he goes on

so majestic on a tall pedestal
atop Los Colorados, Tienda Latina
and the *arepa* and *tamales* shop.
He surveys his dwindling empire.

O, Western Democracy!

by Alemu Tabeje

I praise you,

who takes us to Gleneagles
in a warm coach,
so we can stage our protest
against the butcher of Ethiopia.

You drop us by an empty field
two miles from the hotel,
so even though the Butcher cannot hear,
we are free to hurl our slogans
into the wind:

“Political plurality!” we shout

“Human Rights!” we cry

The sun is low and it is rather cold.
Policemen stamp their boots.
Some crows hear what we say
and look surprised, they undertake

to carry messages into your conference
where every beak laps up
the sweetness of your words,
jabbing at your shortbread promises.

So in the dark I praise you,

for your glistening motorways
of free expression,
your empty fields and willing crows,
for the dry biscuits you feed to monster

An Interview with Kholoud Charaf

June 2019, Krakow, Poland
By David Clark

I arrive at the Villa Decius, a splendid Renaissance palace adjoining a public park. The villa is a cultural centre, hosting a number of artists in residence, cultural events and conferences, promoting pluralism and tolerance in public life.



Kholoud Charaf in a café in the centre of Krakow's Old Town. (Photo by David Clark)

As well as being an accomplished poet, Kholoud Charaf is an artist, running art workshop for local residents. I was curious to find out how she managed to flee civil war and chaos in Syria and arrive at such an oasis of peace and tranquillity.

Charaf is a Druze, from a village near As-Sweida, in Southwestern Syria, near the Jordanian border. She published her first book of poems, *The Remains of a Butterfly*, in 2016 and went on to write a book about her village, *Return to the Mountains, A Journal in the Shadow of War*, published in 2019, about her happy childhood, growing up in the village. She describes the plants, the soil, the smell of coffee, the pear tree she could see from her bedroom window, everyday life and customs in the village. Returning years later as an adult, when much had changed, she reflects on the sense of loss and desolation, when even the pear tree was no longer there, not even its shadow. The book won the prestigious Ibn Battuta prize and has been translated into five languages.

Being a Druze in Syria is not easy, as they are not recognised as Muslims, though arising out of Islam in the 10th century and borrowing elements from Biblical sources, with their own distinctive customs and practices. Druze communities can be found in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Israel, and, in each case, contributed to shaping the nation in which they reside. Yet, their situation can be precarious, as demonstrated in a vicious attack by ISIS in 2018 on As-Sweida, in which over 200 Druze were killed and 16 were kidnapped. Charaf was an eyewitness of that horrific event and wrote a book documenting the war atrocities taking place in southern Syria at the time.

Charaf studied to be a technician at the medical institute and worked at first as a technician, but then was transferred to work as a medical orderly and nurse in a prison. This was really a tough time for her, coinciding with divorce and separation from her son, as the father was given custody over the child, as required by law. That domestic trauma was greatly compounded by the events she was forced to

witness at the prison and later on her return to her home area, resulting in Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder, which still gives her sleepless nights.

Somehow, though, Charaf climbed out of the deep depression that had taken hold of her; she had previously studied Arabic Literature and held a short-term scholarship in Lebanon, researching poetry in Syria since 2011. This had encouraged her to continue writing and embark on her novel about her home-village. Winning the book prize gave her much needed confidence to look around and explore where her writing might take her next. She contacted PEN and ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network); through these contacts, she applied for a residency at the Villa Decius and was offered a two-year residency, something quite unprecedented. In just over a year in Krakow she had made new friends, learnt to speak both English and Polish (no mean feat in such a short time) and had a book of her poems published in a bilingual English and Polish edition.

Charaf says that writing and painting have enabled her to survive as a human being. She felt helpless in the context of war, but being a writer and an artist gave her another possibility for healing herself and, in the process, also helping others. She can now write without fearing censorship, documenting the changes she is undergoing, discovering a new person within herself. But art is also a way of giving back to others. She runs children's workshops in Krakow, at the Museum of Contemporary Art. The aim is to teach children words in Arabic by first drawing a picture representing the word, such as a house, a sun, a flower, then teaching them the Arabic word for it, whilst the children then teach her the Polish word for it.

Charaf hopes that such a method might help to overcome the fear of the other. Charaf is soon to take up a three-weeks artist's residence in Latvia, but meanwhile has just submitted a new book to an Arabic publishing house in Italy, a book that she has written whilst staying at the Villa Decius. She also finds time to write a regular column for a Norwegian magazine.

Reversed Sky

By Kholoud Charaf

Reviewed by David Clark

A bilingual collection of poems published in English and Polish By Kholoud Charaf

Kholoud Charaf's poems weave in and out, meander, through a landscape that is at times beautiful and nostalgic, often wryly and sadly observing human cruelty, war-

torn cities, barriers to cross. In the process, she also seeks to convey her own inner world, her longings, hopes and fears, her sleepless nights.

Her nostalgia and poetic vision come across in her poem *Reversed Sky*,

“My mother washed me with her milk
And dressed me in a necklace that reached my virgin breasts
Leaving till noontime the expanses of my dark skin
Bare feet
Touch the crumbs of shyness flowing down my eyes
Two doves
Fly to the temples sculpted in rocks
By the tears of beseeching women....”

A short extract from the poem, but I find it wonderfully evocative. On the other hand, she can also be hard hitting and critical of a world that sees human suffering, but fails to act upon it. In her poem, *Photo*, she writes:

“We take pictures to keep suffering awake so it stays away from us
And the world turns away from it
We take pictures with a vintage Panasonic
How children go hungry
So the world’s appetite is fed...
Ton upon ton of us have died
One child drowns
And suddenly the world sees
It is a bit bothered
And nobly saves a few
And we forget that we were created human...”

One of my favourite poems in the collection is about Krakow, entitled *Krakow*.

“Let your feet dance where they want
There is always enough space for being
Cities are the eyes of life
A cherished past ornaments on walls
Here you are: a city of light filled with raw sweetness
City of churches and trees and spirit
The birds chant
And the coloured flowers doze
I know so many secrets
You don’t know
Come: you are my unsoiled memory
I am polluted by worries

But I am your innocent mirror
Just teach me how to fall asleep...”

Like Kholoud Charaf, I am enchanted by Krakow, a city where I feel free to dance in its squares and streets, where spirits are revived, where Kholoud has found renewed energy, despite the heavy burden that still weighs on her shoulders, the nightmares, and the longing for a better world.

Azarinejad and Bear

By Mimi Khalvati

Azarinejad put aside his turban
and his blue robe and squatted in the circle.
He turned to one child, then another: ‘Children,
what did Bear want to do?’ Was it a riddle?

One boy sat thinking, two boys picked their fingers.
One small girl smiled a big red smile while three
girls in hijab tried to smother their whispers.
They all knew the answer. They’d heard the story.

Azarinejad had opened the boot
of his old Peugeot, taken out the books
and read them *Bear Has a Story to Tell*.

So why not put their hands up? Why act mute?
Why be so bashful, sneaking little looks?
Wasn’t Bear’s story theirs to tell as well?

Note: the poem refers to *Bear Has a Story to Tell*, Philip C. Stead, and draws on an article captioned ‘Iran’s travelling cleric who reads to children’ by Saeed Kamali Dehghan and on a photograph in *The Guardian*, 29 August 2018.

Mother Tongue Review

By Catherine Davidson

On July 25, I went to see *Tales of the Mother Tongue*, a free performance at the Mosaic Rooms, near Earl's Court. It was the hottest day of the year – reaching a peak of 102 in the closed London streets, and as I approached on bicycle, I saw a many people waiting outside in the shade of the courtyard to be let into the



performance. Inside, we were led by a hooded figure playing a haunting flute, through an air-conditioned hallway into a dark space and asked to sit in silence for the work to begin.

Artist Estabrak Al-Ansari has invented a unique artform in order to express what turned out to be a journey into loss, yearning and connection. A large, clear plastic sheet separated the audience from the artist; projectors sent light and images from both sides. Senses already alert from the change in air, the music and the darkness, we watched as the artist began to paint the screen from the other side in swirls of viscous white that quickly began to catch a series of fragmented images – a goat, faces, water, desert, children, mothers – each one evoking an emotion without a coherent narrative. A series of soundscapes followed one after another – dripping water, wind, voices, song, a crackling fire.

The effect was to evoke a sense of longing and a need to connect. Soon the painted screen became its own landscape and the light moved toward us, while fantastic, mythical landscapes of shadows and shapes played across our faces and bodies.

Afterwards, the artist came out from the screen, covered in paint. The discussion that followed lasted almost as long as the event, as Estabrak told us is often the case with her work. She talked about how she found this form years before while trying to work on a piece about the loss of a family member which evolved into this larger cultural loss. She connected with the stories of the Amazigh female warriors who appear across Morocco in oral histories but who have left no trace. This loss of matrilineal heritage is universal and formed a moving backdrop to this piece. The performance evoked a sense of meaning without ever providing clarity, forcing us to forge our own connection, our own story.

Al-Ansari was a warm and articulate curator of her own work. She has been featured in venues around the world, including New York, Oman, Dubai and

Berlin as well as exhibiting here at the Royal Academy of Arts and TATE Britain. She has a loyal audience. The room was full, and one woman told us she had come all the way from Oregon, changing her plans so she could see this work.

It was moving that we could all be there together experiencing collectively a link to vanished women of the past via the art and expression of a powerful young woman artist. The impression she made stayed with me all the way through my twilight ride home.

A Letter to my Friends The Trees

By Meltem Arikan

Dear Trees,

I talk to you, I listen to you, but writing to you is a new experience for me. I know we don't need words to communicate as our communication is beyond words. But for this letter words are all I have to explain my feeling.



We human beings are not like you trees. You have no idea how hard it is to be human. We don't know about being in the moment. We don't always connect with nature easily. We don't accept reality like you do. We naturally resist in spite of ourselves. Natural is not natural for us. I'm sure it's hard for you to understand what I'm talking about.

*If I keep silent
if enough humans were silent
the easiness of unhearing
the comfort of unseeing
the simplicity of being numbed by TV
silence turns to complicity
waiting for hell to invade the earth*

We always need more and we always seek out comfort. Nothing is enough for us. We don't know how to stand still and be powerful as you do. We can fool ourselves easily into believing we are most important and have a supreme power...

*We continue to lose ourselves in the clouds of ignorance
our words of love for nature are just lies
our lies strangle reality...
day by day
we are destroying the earth
and brutal hearts rain down*

As human beings we destroy things and then try to protect what we just destroyed. We are a bit confused. It's not easy for you to understand what it's like living with the ego mind. How hard it is to be human. We don't know how to exist without the gaze of other human eyes upon us. You are so lucky you don't have to experience being criticized. You are happy to be yourselves in the same silence that makes us mental.

*When I unbear
when we unbear
we wait without action
and hope everything will be better
we lie to ourselves
deny or assume
we turn a blind eye
and the earth cries*

We are human so don't know how to listen to the wind like you. This is why we can't find our direction. We don't feel the elements in constant motion like you, so we don't understand the flow of nature. We don't know how to plant our feet in the earth like you, so can't find our balance with nature.

Ignorant people become more and more arrogant and they don't see how important nature, animals and you are for us. Ignorant people only see money and sadly, they have power.

*Money captivates everyone
when the power of money strangles all right to life
when the power of weapons strangles all meaning to life
only the apathy of people
means nothing touches them*

You trees know our story, but I remind you again. Five years ago Memet Ali, Pinar and I were living in Istanbul. Back then on 27th May we read on Twitter that the trees in Gezi Park, the only park in the area, were being destroyed to make way for a shopping mall.

Every day a lot of forest is cut down because of human eagerness. Nothing is enough for human beings. Consume, Consume, Consume.

We started tweeting to make people aware of what was going on, that the trees needed protection. Ironically, we never thought a couple of months later we would need protection too. Those who do not care about you trees don't care for humanity either.

A small group of around 50 people went to the park to keep watch over the trees and stop them from being uprooted in the middle of the night. When the workmen drove into the park during the night, ready to destroy the trees, the protesters asked if they had an official permit. They had no papers, so the workmen left the park. We followed everything on Twitter, retweeting the tweets and pictures that were coming out of the park. Looking at those pictures I was worried that, as with so many demonstrations, only a handful of people would turn up. And next day there were 200 people in the park and, because of the growing numbers, the riot police used pepper spray and tear gas to clear them. At noon, pictures from Gezi Park were being shared on Twitter again, but this time they showed riot police using tear gas against peaceful protestors. The attack had triggered more people to come to the park. We decided to join the protesters, to give our support to the trees and say "enough!" to the crazy number of shopping malls, which are poisoning our cities

In the Gezi Park event the Turkish prime minister represents all ignorant people. He reacted to us the same way they react to you. Instead of trying to understand what we were feeling, he told us he didn't care. Arrogant, ignorant, oppressive, persistent and irreconcilable as always.

We said, "We respect nature and defend the lives of trees. Actually, we just want to exist all together." Gezi Park and the trees are still in their home but we had to leave the country.

We came to Wales and here you became my friends, my teacher and part of my spirit. You reminded me of being a child in Turkey when I climbed to the top of your limbs, listened to the music of your leaves, ate cherries from your branches and I remember how I felt safe in your arms. So in my new, lovely Wales home I'm always connected with you.

*Maybe one day we will confront our arrogance
and understand we are not important
I wish we could admit how we are lonely
and destroy our ego mind which always limits us
it's time to leave everything aside and play tag with the wind
and connect with each other through the language of nature
this special language brings us all together
you trees carry our human memory
and witnessed our life over centuries*

*and to think some would rip you out of the ground for money
I know you can't use our words
so it is time we became the megaphone for your story*

*blessed be
meltem*



London Fields... **By Meltem Arıkan**

I was invited to the Extinction Rebellion protest in East London, to read my letter “A Letter to my Friends The Trees”. I felt excited but bitter because this triggered memories of Gezi Park. When I arrived at London Fields, walking around, every step I took led me to recall the Gezi Park Protests. I remembered how I was excited to be in Gezi... to see the joy and determination of the young protesters. People were treating the damaged trees, and planting saplings in the holes left by the diggers.

Six years later I was walking past the tents in London Fields. It was the first time I was joining another protest to protect nature, far from my country of birth. It was really difficult to be in that moment. I was on a seesaw: one moment in London Fields another in Gezi park.

In Gezi, just like in London Fields, women, men, strangers to one another, straight, gay, transsexual, young, old, and little kids with their parents came together for the sake of the trees. Regardless of their differences they shared their feelings with one another. Prejudice gave way to the attempt to understand each other; music and dance took over from frustration.

Perhaps, in Turkey, for the first time, in that park, no one was “the other” anymore. As the writer of a novel entitled ‘Hope is a Curse’, it was wonderful for me to feel hope for the first time in years. But then everything turned and became like a horror film in Turkey.

I met with lovely Lorna in London Fields. She knows Turkey very well. Her warm welcome triggered my emotions even more. I tried to stop my tears as I talked to her. I was blocked.

The question “is hope a curse?” started repeating itself in my mind. I looked around and pushed myself to see the people there. I pushed myself to feel hope again. Hope to find new ways to protect nature, hope to exchange and share information, hope that people can come together to lay claim to public spaces, leaving the barriers of race, religion, sexual choices, language, ethnic roots and ideologies behind.

After feeling the atmosphere there, I only felt pain. My memory and reality came together... I tried to be rational and I said to myself, “I hope one day we will all chant, dance and protest all around the world without fear of being jailed, tortured and exiled...”

Kairos

By Alireza Abiz

Translated from Persian by Alireza Abiz

Hey you! Son of your father! The wandering poet!
Know and beware that the Moon is in Scorpio
And it's the hour of Saturn and the darkest omen
Seal your lips, seal your eyes, seal your heart
The sun rises from the well of the west like a blood-filled vat
And a white swan flies off the north into the sky
And people fall on the ground like autumn leaves

Look at Mars twisting, it gets redder and redder
Remember that Hell was created at this hour
And we have been promised that the flood will arrive
And there will be war; desolation decreed

So, you! Son of your father! The exiled poet!
Tell them not to sew new clothes
And not to sweep the house and yard
And not to charm or be charmed
As the world has been shot from a catapult like a rolling ball
And we are hanging on the edges of the earth

Inside Tottenham Court Road station
The ragged man punches piano keys

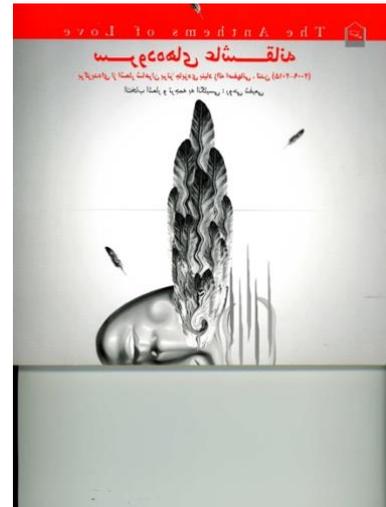
The Anthems of Love

A Review By Shirin Razavian

Translated by Rouhi Shafii

The Anthems of Love is a translated anthology of selected poems by thirteen young Iranian poets, translated by London-based Iranian writer Rouhi Shafii and published in 2017 by Jaleh Esfahani Foundation.

Rouhi is a writer, translator and social scientist who published her autobiography “Scent of Saffron” in 2006 and has since published a historical novel “Pomegranate Hearts” and has translated 2 poetry selections from Persian to English.



The Anthems of Love is handpicked from poetry submissions (between 2009 and 2015) of the winners of the Jaleh Esfahani Cultural Foundation poetry competition that takes place every year for Persian speaking poets from all over the world. The book consists of some 80 pages of poetry in original language (Farsi) complete with English translation of the poem on the subsequent page.

The title may suggest the poems to be predominantly about love but a quick read reveals much more variety in subjects that seem to have inspired these poems, which can be seen perhaps as Anthems of Life.

Amongst the original poems, there are a few in the form of Post-Modernist Ghazal which is a new genre of poetry currently rife amongst young Iranian poets. This form is written with rhyme and meter which resembles traditional styles of poetry (of the likes of Hafez and Rumi) but addresses modern subjects of today’s life as well as utilizing words that relate to new technology/culture and everything that affects the poets in their modern life.

The main characteristic of this style is using words in the frame of Ghazal that would not have been the obvious choice for a traditional frame.

An excerpt of this poem by Pouya Sareh is an example of this style:

Hearts of Shrimps

Anyway, what can I write
of the wrong perception of love,
only to tell, that those who foray
here and there
are a bunch of puppeteers
Pulling our strings.

The hyenas have simple behaviour
but there is no limit
to the greed of the leeches.

As some of these poets are exiled or have left their country behind by choice, another widespread subject amongst Iranian diaspora poets is “missing home” and struggling with the feeling of guilt for leaving their beloved homeland behind.

This poem by Fatemeh Shams reveals this:

A poem for Iran

Slowly, roughly, inside my chest
the memory of you dies down.
And my heart which is not immortal
sinks in desperation.
Every night, slowly, roughly
amid chronic coughs
in bed with feverish hallucinations
a shadow on the ceiling or the wall
amid wakefulness, amid sleep
I see you
holding on to me
not letting go!

Rouhi Shafii has done amazingly well in keeping the translations as expressive and heart-felt as the originals.

The poems shed light on the emotional intricacies of young artists living in Iran. Leafing through the poems an emerging pattern reveals a great deal about the emotional turmoil and the struggles of young artists with their own mortality referring tie and tie again to subjects such as death and transience.

In this poem by Amir Hossein Nikzad, we read:

Death is an excuse
Say it
No spirit left in you, no wish to live.
Tell your eyes to see,
whatever they want to see.

And in this poem by Omid Ghandomi:

Kill it so it stands after death
To have answers to all your questions
How can a man sleep at night
when there's a star at dawn
and his hanging post?

Most poems convey depth and delicacy of feelings that have been subject to many trials and tribulations of life. This is not a matter of art for the sake of art but in each and every poem, there is an urgency to convey a message that would have otherwise crushed the story-teller's soul under its sheer weight and gravity.

Throughout the book, Rouhi Shafii has remained resolutely and tenaciously faithful to the original poems. She has used crystal clear language in her translations whilst maintaining the artistic characteristics of the poems.

Love is also the common thread that holds all of the poems together in this poetic rosary of whispers and prayers. However, even the love poems are tainted with day to day traumas and stresses:

“In the cafe” by Armita Afsahi

So much that she doesn't remember
That she has swallowed the moon
Instead of tranquillizers.
sitting in the cafe
drinking tea
and smoking cigarettes
Burning the love of one-off lovers
in spiral of smoke
familiar bodies
Sing a song alongside
the ivies in the garden
Alas! Dead trees
grow from their mouths.

I certainly enjoyed reading the original and translated poems in this book but my search for happiness in this collection has remained somewhat futile.

*To buy the book please contact: Jaleh Esfahani Cultural foundation on telegram or through the foundation Facebook page

The Ardent Witness

Danielle Maisano

A Review By Catherine Davidson

I first met Consuelo Rivera at an Exiled Lit Cafe I hosted featuring writers in exile from Latin America. Consuelo read her beautiful poems and then talked a bit about a press she had recently started in Wales. She was naming it after her grandmother, Victorina.



That was in 2016. Since then, Victorina Press has become an award-winning publisher with the motto, “Bibliodiversity in Beautiful.” Their first book, *My Beautiful Imperial*, by Rhiannon Lewis, won a Walter Scott Academy recommendation; they’ve also published a memoir and novel by Nasrin Parvaz, a member of Exiled Writers Ink whose work is included here.

Ardent Witness by Danielle Maisano was published by Victorina in 2019 and was an International Book Award finalist in fiction. It’s a gripping story of a young woman’s odyssey through the modern aid industry. Drawing on her own experiences in the US Peace Corps in Togo, Maisano explores the tensions that arise when a young writer from Detroit volunteers to work as a health educator in a remote village for two years, coming up against the limits of her mission during a crisis that tests her to the core.

Lily goes to Africa to educate others and like many, to find herself. She is committed and good at the work she does, but when her brightest and most promising student falls pregnant, Lily struggles to help. Surrounded by a community of aid workers who are trying not to succumb to cynicism, Lily loses her way before she finds it again.

Set during the Occupy era, the young people in *Ardent Witness* find there is no escape from a faltering international order at home or abroad. The novel encompasses a constellation of characters who struggle with a similar dilemma: how to find meaning in an unjust and unequal system that is failing the next generation, wherever they are. *Ardent Witness* digs into one young woman’s story as a way to examine some deep and troubling questions of our time. It’s a coming of age story for a post-global world.

I look forward to future publications from Victorina telling stories that need to be told.

Nicosia Beyond Barriers

Voices from A Divided City

A Review By Esther Lipton

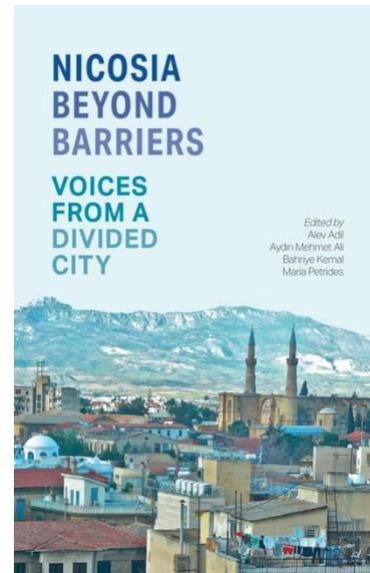
Edited by Alev Adil, Aydin Mehmet Ali, Bahriye Kemal and Maria Petrides. Published by Saqi Books

This anthology was inspired by the activities of the Literary Agency Cyprus, a women-led literary and arts movement which was founded in Nicosia by Aydin Mehmet Ali, a writer who has long been involved with Exiled Writers Ink.

The introduction is comprehensive, scholarly and adds greatly to our appreciation of the anthology which brings together the poetry, prose, short stories and plays of forty-nine writers from various backgrounds. Those backgrounds include Greek, Turkish, Cypriot as well as writers from New Zealand, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The well-presented biographies of the writers are interesting in that, in some cases, a deeper insight to their work may be gained. The short glossary covers six languages including Armenian and Arabic. The need for such a glossary is explained. By changing the names of people, places and the official language, various ruling regimes have, over many years thereby assumed ownership of Cyprus and its inhabitants.

These diverse voices, from all sides of the divide, show their passion and feelings for Nicosia, a city with a legacy of conquest and conflict. We are invited to visit the Venetian ramparts, British Colonial Parks, Ottoman baths, a 1930's bookshop, mosques and churches and to share memories and impressions and stories. Whilst conquest changes the architecture of a city it also changes people. This anthology celebrates difference. It goes beyond the physical barriers and borders. There are also the barriers of language, religion and ethnicity. Politics and conquest change people's views. Suspicion and conflict turn friends and neighbours into enemies.

The history and the impact of the creation of the green line (not a politically negotiated division but an arbitrary military imposition) and no-man's land, is dealt with by several writers. The border crossing and the 2016 changes to time zones, both of which encouraged further divisions, are also common themes. The green line divided the country physically and emotionally resulting in exile within one's own country. The approach of similar topics being in diverse genres means that more light is cast upon the City, its history and its people. That some of the writers



are first generation exiles, or from the diaspora or have lived and worked or just visited Cyprus adds to that light.

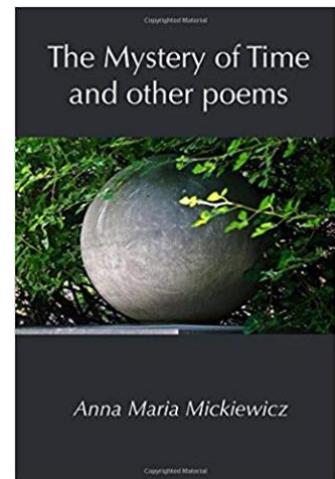
The lively debate between contributors from different backgrounds at the Saqi-EWI book launch in July 2019, (attended by the Cypriot Ambassador) discussed the role of the Greek and Turkish diaspora in alleviating the divide on the Island. This anthology illustrates a common united expression of love for Nicosia and gives hope to the future dismantling of that divide.

The Mystery of Time and other poems

Anna Maria Mickiewicz

A Review by David Clark

Anna Maria Mickiewicz writes both in Polish and in English. She received her Master degree in 1984 in Lublin, where she was involved in Solidarity and co-edited the civil rights magazine *Wywrotowiec* (The Rebel). Her debut volume of poems, *Dziewanna*, was published in 1985.



On leaving Poland, she first settled in California, before coming to London, working as a literary and cultural correspondent for the Polish press. She is a member of The Union of Polish Writers Abroad and edits their annual literary magazine, *Pamiętnik Literacki*.

A selection of her short stories, *Breadcrumbs from the Round Table*, was published in 2000. Her poems have appeared in *Chopin with Cherries: A Tribute in Verse* (2010), *Beautiful people. Poets of My Emigration* (2012), *Through A Child's Eyes: Poems from World War Two* (2013) and *Contemporary Writers of Poland* (2013).

Anna Mickiewicz was awarded the title of Author of the Year 2013, by the American literary portal, City of Writers, and in 2016 she received the prestigious Gloria Artis award from the Polish Ministry of Culture, for services to arts and culture.

Her book, *London Manuscript* (2014), beautifully encapsulates her writing style, short poems that evoke a particular place and time, closely observed fleeting moments and nature, combining to convey something of the inner world, as if glimpsed through a mirror.

Her latest book, *The Mystery of Time and Other Poems* (2019), carries on in the same vein, bringing into sharper focus the interplay between time and place.

What struck me about her latest collection of poems is the ease with which the author, in exile, has settled into her new surroundings, completely at home in Britain, whether it be London, Cornwall, Manchester or the countryside. Yet, there is much more to this.

She is also completely at ease with the English language, which just seems to flow from her pen, and none more so than when evoking the wonders of nature. Yet, there is also a certain wistfulness about it:

“The Camellias

Deep in thought, streets of camellias
Drowse

They wake up redolent with a smell of remembrance
Open their flowers, quickly stealing the sun’s rays...”

Sometimes, absent friends and people, are evoked, simply by what is not stated. As in **Cottage and an old tree**:

“Houses once built
Are twisted with age
The windows are silent “

Perhaps her most emblematic and heart-felt poem in this collection is **Chopin in Manchester**

“ He did not like the smog
He did not like the damp English weather
Or overcrowded Manchester

Standing by the lake in Prestwich
I can feel his longing
Far away from home...

Today
His statue is silent in Manchester
A frail figure
Is it longing for music or for the homeland? “

Indeed, art is the refuge of the exiled writer, artist or musician, as many of our readers can attest.

But not everything is so gloomy in Mickiewicz' wonderful collection. There are moments of cheer delight, as well as gentle humour, as town-dwellers flee the summer heat in California, the morning routine of a London commuter, or indeed carefree days spent in France.

“where everything climbed high
Words, ambitions, hopes, joys
An overgrown beach....

Later, we will repay debts to carefree nights.”

The Tyrant

By Jennifer Langer

So many of the writers in the Exiled Writers Ink network were forced to leave their countries of origin as they were ruled by tyrants whose sole aim was to spread terror and fear over an entire country. In exile some writers have expressed their strong feelings by creating literary work of resistance.

What is the connection between tyrants, the Persian poet Hafez (1315-1390) and the German poet Goethe (1749-1832)? One of the themes of the twelve books of Goethe's *Divan* is 'The Tyrant'. He was inspired to write the *West-Eastern Divan* (1819) upon reading the first German translation of the divan by the fourteenth century poet Hafez. Goethe responded emotionally to Hafez's poetry to create a poetic connection between west and east at a time when the Orient was seen as alien, as a threat to the West.

I am at a Shubbak Festival of Contemporary Arab Culture event. In a tiny bookshop off the Kings Road we hear the exiled poet Mourid Barghouti's response to Goethe's poem 'The Winter and Timur' which is a poem of resistance against Timur under whom Hafez composed his poetry when Persia's Shiraz and Esfahan had been conquered by Timur. The protagonist threatens Timur:

'Yes, by God! from Death's cold clutches
Nought, O greybeard, shall protect thee,
Not the hearth's broad coalfire's ardour,
Not December's brightest flame.'

Barghouti's poem 'The Obedience of Water' appears in *A New Divan* (Gingko, 2019) which takes the form of a lyrical dialogue between east and west in which twenty-four poets were involved – twelve from the east and twelve from the west.

Each pair of poets responded to one of the themes of the twelve books of Goethe's original *Divan*.

In 'Obedience of Water' Barghouti's focus is on the tyrant rather than the victims, yet he declares that he has lived amongst tyrants all his life and been forced into exile by them. He tells us that he was deported from Cairo because of his poems of resistance which he retrospectively defined as propaganda and therefore bad poetry. Apparently in the Arab world, poets hold a platform of importance as the people's expectation is for the poet to be their voice and therefore poetry often descends into propaganda. This struggle of the tension between popular demands and the desire for emancipation has shaped all Middle Eastern poets.

Deploying satire as a form of resistance, in 'The Obedience of Water' the poetic persona ridicules the figure of the tyrant by focusing on his weak and paranoid inner soul and his constant need to gaze at himself in the mirror reflecting his fragility and vulnerability which however, are concealed by the power of his tyranny leading to the population having become accustomed to feeling afraid. In the poem the tyrant resembles an ordinary person and although the temptation is to demonise tyrants turning them into satyrs, the poet stresses that this one looks perfectly normal lacking hooves and a horn although he does have a snub nose. The last stanza is permeated by the imagery of water. The tyrant's preference is for the people to behave like water, to stagnate and be as nothing but in the end the tyrant drowns in the self-same water suggesting that the people have risen up and taken revenge on him.

'The Tyrant' was translated from Arabic with the use of an intermediary, by the T.S. Eliot prize-winning poet George Szirtes who is seated beside Barghouti in the bookshop. Surprisingly they have shared a common space which is Budapest where Szirtes was brought up and where Barghouti was exiled. They animatedly discuss the area where he lived and Barghouti fondly remembers his Budapest literary encounters. Yet another shared area is tyranny and Szirtes informs us how Hungarian poets wrote under this scourge. The poet Gyula Ilyés who lived at a time of trumped up charges and state murders was unable to publish work criticising the government and so wrote for his desk drawer. A telling poem by him is 'One Sentence about Tyranny' (1980) which makes the point that tyranny pervades every aspect of life.

I had observed just one partnership between east and west but the *New Divan* includes the literary outcome of many in the form of translation which creates a conversation between languages and cultures such as that between Reza Mohammadi, exiled from Afghanistan, and Nick Laird and between Fatemeh Shams, exiled from Iran, and Dick Davis. It all began with Hafez!

Towards an Open Land

In the face of increasing hostility against Muslims and Jews, the two communities drew strength and solidarity from one another in four creative writing workshops which were held at SOAS in July 2019. Facilitated by Ariel Kahn and Shamim Azad, the short course enabled the participants to articulate their experiences, drawing on aspects of their cultural backgrounds - meaningful objects, food and festivals - to create work that resisted stereotypes and celebrated difference and diversity. Finally we confronted the issue of hatred and vilification in our yearning for understanding and co-existence. After these London workshops, Exiled Writers Ink plans to take the project on the road in England to draw in local communities to interactively expand the conversation.



Halva

By Stephen Duncan

You held my hand
as we shopped together,
the deli with sawdust on the floor
barrels of sauerkraut,
shelves with jars of preserve

and their dark glossy mystery
winking down with their delights.
A conversation
hangs high above me

where the marble counters lie

until the offer of a gherkin,
a treat, descended from a tall jar,
the pleasure of its sweet
and sharp vinegar burst
after today's grey school dinner.

Treats from your other land,
I gazed up at boxes of Halva.
Would we have enough money?
Is today special?
I gripped your hand very hard.

I wished that box into your bag,
- sticky on my fingers,
sticky on my tongue,
a heaven into my belly
those squares of sesame
soaked in honey.

I Remember those Days

By Lipi Halder

I remember those days

When childhood was great

Mother used to make kheer

Every morning with sugar and milk.

Sweets are tasty though

Later they spoil tongue and body

sugar kills

But the sweets that mother made

Seemed heavenly.

I've tasted thousands of dishes since

But not the ones mother used to cook.

They were part of a golden life

When I used to live and eat with mother, father, grandfather, uncles and siblings together

We had little of everything but our life was so tasty and joyful

Now I'm living with only two,

We have plenty of everything but without that heartfelt joy and yahoo...!

Festival

By Anba Jawi

They claim back their street.

No cars, no hoots,
no traffic warden, no trace of bullets.

Music invites me to spin, I oblige,
Surrounded by hundreds of dancing pumpkins

Is it new for Beirut?
It's new for me
New for the blood donation team
And flocks of happy Filipinos
Holding potato crisp kebabs.
Irresistible falafel aroma too

A nine year old girl with painted face
says Hello

Festival of Freedom

By Justin Hoffman

I am happy, it's Pesach the Festival of Freedom and life feels good and joyful. I don't worry about the troubles of life and my family today. There is a beautiful, warm, spiritual atmosphere and we seek answers to the questions of freedom like so many of our people have for many and many generations. This old flat is cozy and modest. I feel safe here.

We sing for the love of it and for our freedom and tradition. My little cousin is here, and he is happy and feels in 'der heym'. Listening to Hebrew and English and singing without worrying if he is in tune.

Life is not easy, yet today, tonight we celebrate freedom and the mystery of life while eating delicious home-cooked heymish food. This is our foundation, these are our roots. And you can sing, pray, eat or sleep

Not Made of Wood Alone

Hasan Kahya

It's not just any old box

I could get rid of easily.

For it's house-shaped,
and full of memories.

It has a brown wooden roof,
full of star and cross-shaped
little holes. Each carved
to make sure the light got in.

Daughter of a Spanish artist

and a London-based mother,
she was a woodworker with
the most delicate hands,

and fingers. And warm blue
eyes that reminded me of
my own inner sea –
my Mediterranean.

Drawing round my hand

By Barbara Saunders

An intimate space between fingers
What is it that keeps distant fears
offending? Now our hands appear
small detours made bumps over-lap-
ping finger tips green life-force red
– what holds us back? Slippery the
steps tentatively explore step across
ox-bows tranquil, no! Approaching
rapids flick lines flick slow-motion
curve through air what to tell you
to tell ourselves? Open our fingers
our hands will declare your praise for
a line arcs falls finds space to land in

Mestizo: Reflections on an Exiled Writers Poetry Workshop

By Mark Collins

We mixed and folded
ourselves into a blend of
open cultures, Hoping to
cure and clarify What joins
us. Paring others

Down to common elements;
Poets exiled from our
candour, Needing, blanching
at the peeled Back virtue of
the encounter.

Be careful with the words you
use. Check-in the nuance and
the bite. One man's steak
tartare for sure Will pique a
vegan's appetite.

Festive food our partial patois,
We share scraps of liberations.
Her Carnaval de Oruro stirs
My Pesach source of our
salvation.

Steeped in chargrilled corn or
pressed In bitter sweet charoet,
Joints in common, blent together,
We salt, we dry and smoke our
mindset.

But I feel something of a
fraud. Fourth generation

immigrant, Exiled from my
native Yorkshire. Poacher,
gamer, debutant.

I am distinctly *mestizo*. Checked, we
commune in cross-hatched scores. Except
that word '*mestizo*' seethes With stench of
hot conquistadores.

And as I write, my Inbox
pops With offers,
proving ancestry; A
DNA test to confirm
The melange of my
recipe.

To show we are all indeed mingled
Sundries, varieties. We came From
everywhere, ground, then sieved;
Miscellaneous, but still the same.

Contributors -

Alireza Abiz Iranian poet, literary critic and translator. His book, *Censorship of Literature in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Politics and Culture Since 1979*, was published in 2019 by Tauris. He has published six collections of poetry in Persian and has translated leading English language poets into Persian.

May Al-Issa Iraqi poet, writer, translator, financial analyst and fine artist combines poetry and painting. She writes in both Arabic and English. *And she Whispered* is her latest Arabic poetry collection. She has an MA in Translation and Linguistics and MSc in International Finance.

Amirah Al Wassif Freelance writer, poet and novelist. Her works have been published by various cultural magazines around the world. She has published two books in English, A poetry collection, *For Those Who Don't Know Chocolate* and a children's book *The Cocoa Boy and Other Stories*. Her works have been translated into Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, and Kurdish

Meltem Arikan is a Turkish author and playwright. She has written 9 novels, 1 book of research and 5 plays. She has received several awards and was short-listed for the Freedom of Expression Award in 2014 by Index on Censorship. Her articles have been published on various web sites in different countries including, *News Junkie Post* and *Index on Censorship*.

Leo Boix is a Latinx bilingual poet, translator and journalist born in Argentina who lives and works in the UK. Boix has published two poetry collections in Spanish and has been included in many anthologies, such as *Ten: Poets of the New Generation* (Bloodaxe), and *Islands Are But Mountains: Contemporary Poetry from Great Britain* (Platypus Press).

Amarjit Chandan is from Punjab Published 8 collections of poetry and 5 books of essays in Punjabi. His poems have appeared in anthologies and magazines world-wide. Edited and translated into Punjabi about 30 anthologies of Indian and world poetry and fiction by, among others, Brecht, Neruda, Ritsos. His poems have been anthologised and broadcast..

David Clark grew up in England, Italy, and Austria, studied anthropology in Canada and East Africa and taught tourism and heritage management. His poems have been published in *Contemporary writers of Poland, Flying Between Words*, edited by Danuta Blaszak and Anna Maria Mickiewicz (2015) and in *Second Generation Voices*.

Mark Collins great grandparents were exiled from Russia / Poland in the 1880s. Now, as a diaspora Jew, integrated and anglicised, he is exiled merely from his native Yorkshire, separated somewhat from his creativity by his career as a lawyer - now returning happily to poetry and finding common cause with fellow exiles.

Ilhan Sami Comak was arrested in 1994 when he was a student at the geography department of Science and Letters Faculty of Istanbul University. Sentenced for life in 2000 based on the fabricated statements prepared by the police and without any concrete evidence for the alleged crime. Further appeals have failed.. He remains a poet in prison with seven collections of poetry published.

Catherine Temma Davidson is a writer, teacher with dual UK/US citizenship. In 2018, she published *The Orchard* with Gemma Press and has authored one other novel and two poetry

pamphlets. She teaches Creative Writing at Regent's University and is a member of the board of Exiled Writers Ink.

Steve Duncan Poet and sculptor. He has received an Arts Council Writers Award and prizes including The Bridport, Cardiff, Arvon. Edited his mother's poetry collection, the late Beata Duncan, with *Berlin Blues* (Green Bottle Press), *Breaking Glass* (Writesideleft) and the *Berlin Blues Cabaret*.

Omar García-Obregón Cuban born, British-American academic, award-winning poet and human rights activist of Spanish descent. Professor of Hispanic Studies and Comparative Poetics at Queen Mary University of London. His new poetry collection is *Fronteras: ¿el azar infinito?* (Leiden: Bokeh, October 2018) *Borders: An Infinite Game of Dice?* Omar wants to bring attention to Chagos via the arts.

Lipi Halder is a Bangladeshi poet living in UK. She has published three books of poetry.

Hasan Kahya is a Cyprus born poet and translator who has been living in London since 1972. His translations of 49 poems from Fikret Demirag were published as a bilingual book in 2015. (English title: *In a Silence that is God's Music*). He is the co-author of a bilingual poetry book entitled *Two Rivers* (2018) with Cypriot poet Tamer Öncül.

Justin Romain Hoffman, a freelance interpreter of Russian and French with a strong connection to his Yiddish and Russian-speaking ancestral roots.

Anba Jawi is a contributor to the first TLC Free Reads Anthology (2019) and her short stories and fiction reviews appeared in *Alaalem* an Iraqi newspaper. Anba was one of the pioneering women geologists in Iraq and holds a PhD from University College London. She worked in the refugee sector for over twenty years.

Mimi Khalvati has published eight collections with Carcanet Press, including *The Meanest Flower*, shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize, and *Child: New and Selected Poems 1991-2011*, a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation. A new collection of sonnets, *Afterwardness*, is due in October 2019. She is a founder of the Poetry School and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Jennifer Langer is founding director of Exiled Writers Ink and editor of four anthologies of exiled literature (Five Leaves). Her poetry has appeared in various cultural publications. She holds a PhD from SOAS in the literature of exile and is a SOAS Research Associate.

Esther Lipton's poetry and short stories have been published in several national and international anthologies and on the internet. She co-edited *Exiled Ink* magazine and is a reviewer and translator. She runs a Creative Writing group for the University of the Third Age.

Nasrin Parvaz became a civil rights activist when the Islamic regime took power in Iran. She was arrested, tortured and spent eight years in prison (1982-90). Her novel *The Secret Letters from X to A*, is published by Victorina Press. In 2019, her memoir *One Woman's Struggle in Iran: A prison memoir* won an Award-Winner in the Women's Issues category of the 2019 International Book Awards

Shirin Razavian is a Tehran-born British poet who has appeared in *Poetry London*, *Index on Censorship*, *Exiled Ink Magazine*, *Agenda* and *Persian Book Review* among others. She has published 5

Farsi and English poetry collections in the UK, the latest being *Which Shade of Blue* featuring original works and translations of her work by Robert Chandler.

Barbara Saunders is a granddaughter of Russian Jewish immigrants. Her poems are in the anthologies: *Mischief & Magic* (Ben Uri), *Writing on Glass* (HLF Sutton Archives) and a fund raising anthology for refugees, *Over Land Over Sea* (Five Leaves). She is an English teacher.

Alemu Tabeje Ethiopian exiled journalist, teacher, poet, community activist and website campaigner based in London. His poems have appeared in *Forever Spoken* and *No Serenity Here*, and other online and print literary magazines including *Modern Poetry In Translation* and *The Missing Slate*. Co-administers a website named after one of the Ethiopian literary giants, Tsegaye Gebre Medhin Lucha (a.k.a. Debteraw).