

Exiled Ink

magazine



Poetry of Protest – Exiled Writers and Forgotten Conflicts –
Oppressed Writers – Exiled in Britain – Book Reviews

Issue 6 – 2023

This issue of Exiled Ink e-mag is the product of collaboration and cooperation and the collective efforts of the editorial committee. We would not exist if not for terrible conflicts and injustice around the world, and yet the work we do together often brings real joy. Shaping narratives collectively gives a sense of solidarity and meaning-making.

This issue starts with a section that examines writers' relationships to the land that shaped their stories. What does it mean to be "From This Place" when the land is the site of violence, erasure, or loss (as in Tamara Wilson's commemorative poems on the Armenian Genocide and essay on Antakya) or is violated itself, as in Maria Eugenia-Calderara's "Pinares"?

Two sections looking at the writing about, from and to ongoing conflicts in The Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen follow. These works have been contextualised by Mark Silberstein, gathering voices that persist despite the worst that people can do to each other. Writers in exile can sometimes only witness from afar what is happening; this issue contains two poems from Iranian women writers responding to the ongoing violence in that country. Exile can also provide a crossroads, as happens in the encounter between two writers from Bosnia, Aleksandar Hemon and Darija Stojnic.

Ruth Ingram reports on a recent gathering of writers honouring Holocaust Memorial Day. This is followed by some work that looks at Britain through the eyes of new arrivals. EWI is an arts and activism organisation, and we highlight some of those we support who cannot speak for themselves. The review section gives a sense of the very rich range of publications by writers in the EWI community.

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Exiled Writers Ink, founded in 2000, brings together established and developing writers from repressive regimes and war-torn situations and it equally embraces migrants and exiles. Providing a safe, welcoming space for writers to be heard, Exiled Writers Ink develops and promotes the creative literary expression of refugees, migrants and exiles, increases their representation in the mainstream literary world, develops cross cultural dialogue and advocates human rights and social justice through literature and literary activism.

exiled writers ink
— voices in a strange land

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Poetry of Protest: The Land

From this Place

Denisse Vargas-Bolaños

From this place
where I rejoice of my woman-being
I open old locks
for a voice to be born

From this place
no fences stop my roots
a mirror vanishes
new branches blossom

From this place
which I reached without roars or compass
I find steps
not as anchors but full moons

From this place
which I reached by pushing avalanches
I give the sound back to the name I had to hush

From this place
my legs dance in infinite cycles
creating insurgent tides

From this place
in which history has hidden me under the rug
I spread my flying carpet

From this place
where clothes are mixed with guilts
I dress myself as desire

From this place
my voice reaches the zenith
a reverberation
that cannot be silenced anymore.

Denisse Vargas -Bolaños is a Bolivian poet and writer. She is a member of the feminist literary collective “Las Juanas” and of SLAP (Spanish and Latin American Poets and Writers). Her poems and short stories have been published in various anthologies, literary magazines and fanzines.

Pinares

María Eugenia Bravo-Calderara

Translated by Denisse Vargas-Bolaños

In my distant, young and naïve
country,
they planted, planted and
planted,
pines, pines and more pines
groves.

They brought green trees,
from the north of the
continent.
Maximum performance,
infallible recipe to get rich
in the short term,
to multiply banknotes,
with the child paper of those
trees
and thus grow, by leaps and
bounds,
thick bank accounts.

They planted, planted and
planted
pines, pines, and more pine
groves.

Meanwhile, those trees brought from far away
contaminated the air and water
with their strange seed.
The water disappeared inside
these thirsty pines. >>

➤ The soil was left dry and infertile
without the minerals it used to
contain.

They planted, planted and
planted
pines, pines, and more pine
groves.

To make room for the trees
brought from the north
the criminals cut down ancient
forests of araucarias.
They blocked the spaces that
belonged
to the larch, a giant that touching
the clouds, rises in the
southern jungle.

They also cut the way to the oak
with thick, aged trunks.
They left without their space
and place
for the coihue, the lenga beech,
the tepa,
queule, raulí, lingue,
the lleuque, mañío, the notro-
fire tree and the ulmo of secret
balsamic
flowers and penetrating perfume.

Once their natural home was
taken away, the pudúes also
left,
followed in their exodus by
foxes, wiñas, moles,
coipos, vizcachas, yacas,
rabbits and little monkeys of the
mount.

In the foreign pine forest,
the silent copihues,
no longer hung lighting the day
like wonderful lamps.
Nor did the trichahue parrots,
the partridges, the loicas, the
pigeons
return to these plantations.

But criminals did not stop
they planted, planted and
planted
pines, pines, and more pine
groves.

For the rulers of the small
southern country,
the forest uprooted
from the Mapuche territory,
the beloved southern forest
deforested,

the displaced fauna and flora
have been the least of their
worries.

People who have become ill
from the poisoned water
have been the least of their
worries.

Only those damn things
matter,
disgusting and obnoxious
pine groves that make quick
money
only for a select few. ■

Maria Eugenia Bravo-Calderara is a poet, writer, and former political prisoner of the Chilean dictatorship. She came to the UK as an exile in 1975. Her writings have been published in English and in all major European languages including Finnish, Arabic and Tamil. She has published two books of poetry, *Prayer in the National Stadium* and *Poems from Exile*. She is a member of Las Juanas, a writer's workshop for Hispano-American women and with them has published two bilingual anthologies: *Wonder-Makers. Navigators of Thames: Poetry* and *Wonder-Makers. Navigators of Thames: Narrative*. Recently, some of her poems have become part of a permanent exhibition at the museum in honour of the victims of the dictatorship in Chile.

Under the Sand of the Atacama

Xaviera Ringeling

oh child of the light that unfurls
I visit the grave that you have in me

and I beg you empress of silence
help me write about the dead

tenderly swallow of the blue
help me say what must be said

because they still pulse
under the sand of the Atacama

between the salt precipices of the Pacífico
my sister they still call

those bones beloved

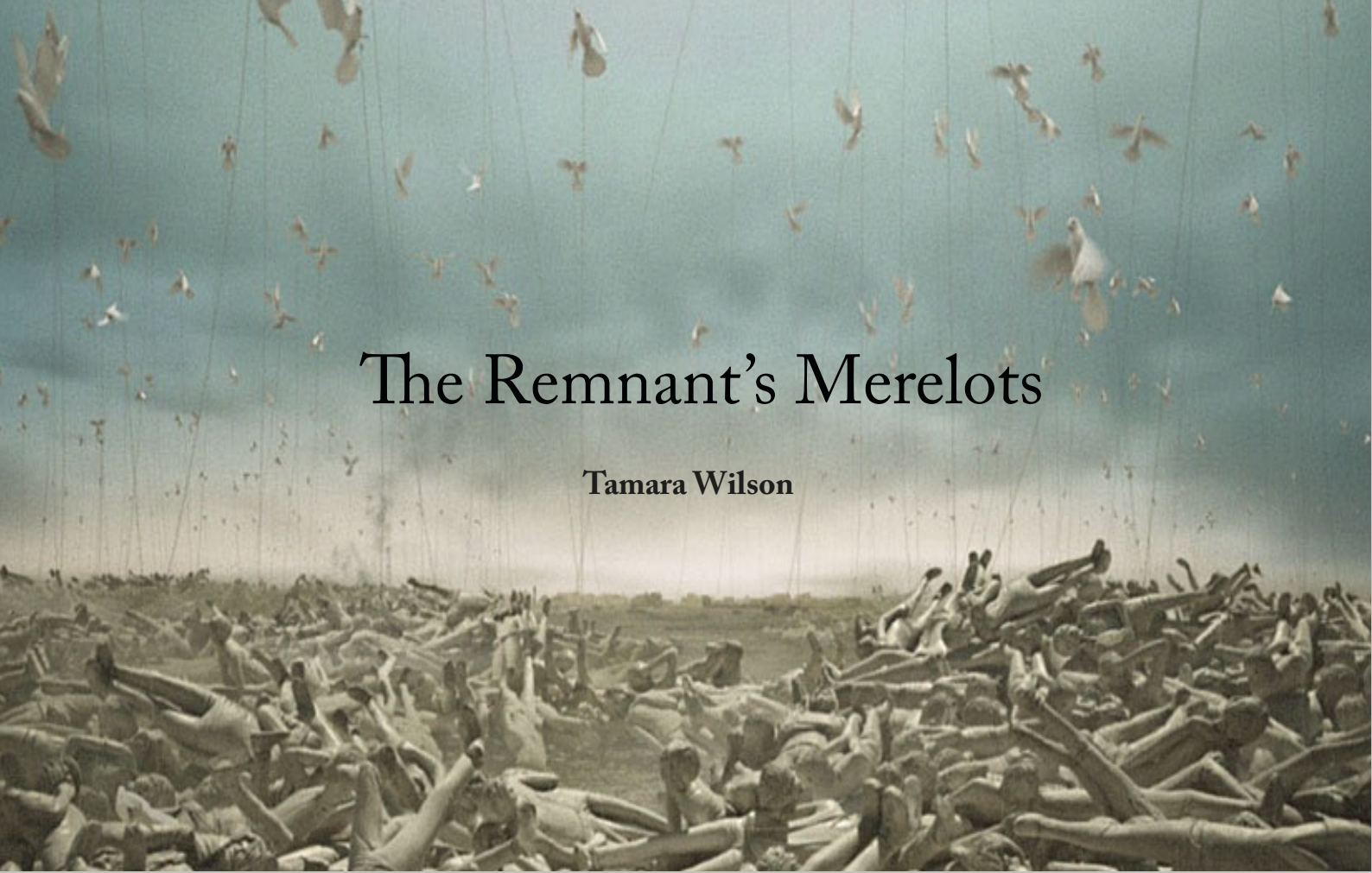
because witness walls still
whisper

because the trace of terror
is indelible

Note:

This poem first appeared in "Winter Word" Greenwich Poetry Pamphlet 2021.

Xaviera Ringeling is a Chilean bilingual poet residing in London since 2012. Her poetry in Spanish was awarded the 2019 New Voices prize by the feminist publishing house Torremozas in Spain. Her first poetry book, *Alba*, was published in October 2019 by El Ojo de la Cultura, in the UK. Her poetry in English has been published in the Greenwich Poetry Workshop Pamphlet: *The Tide Turns* and in the online magazine *Perro Negro*.

The image is a full-page background photograph. It depicts a vast, open field where hundreds of people are lying on their backs, their arms and legs splayed out. They appear to be dead or unconscious. Above them, the sky is filled with dozens of birds, possibly doves, in flight. The overall tone is somber and evocative, suggesting a scene of mass death or a memorial service.

The Remnant's Merelots

Tamara Wilson

Sometimes, it is the irreverent grace of a khatchkar; at others, the seal of Divine Essence on a desolate site: the holy breath of God. This is how the natives of your long-lost land appear before you with the first rays of the sun. This is when the hymns you hear begin to sing to you in the silenced tongue of the heart. Each note, each word whispers: you are nothing more than an unredeemed carcass. Garod won't leave you alone soon you realise and head to the local graveyard: to leave flowers on the graves of strangers, the namesakes of your loved ones. To feel you belong; to feel you once had a family, a home; to give your body a soul to anchor. But Garod is a merciless sadist, Garod is a callous sod, and he haunts you relentlessly in the voices of the longed.

To Mama

The Monday after Easter
is the day of the dead.
A day to unearth, a day to greet
all your past selves, your hidden pains.
One face at a time they will appear
while you hold your hushed, one-man vigil
Most faces are as nameless as you now
most places frozen and still.

NOTES:

Garod: An intensely deep, profound longing in Western Armenian.

Khatchkar: A carved stone memorial stele with a central cross decorated with traditional Armenian motifs.

Merelots: A commemorative day observed following each of the five major feasts of Armenian Apostolic Church.

In loving memory of our graveless ancestors and in honour of all remnants for whom survival was that dark interstitial space between self-erasure and amputation: from heritage, from home.
(Armenian Genocide: 1894-1909-1915~)

Beyond Death and Resurrection: A Wing and a Prayer for Antakya

Tamara Wilson

Some words are labyrinths you find yourself in, unable to resist the pull of their intriguing crevices and openings; consider the word *memory*. Others come with a burning sensation, urging you to place your left hand on your chest for reassurance; that you made it through, that you are now on the other side: think of the word *trauma*. Then there are those that are monuments in their own right; they draw you in with urgency and demand your witness with an imperative: contemplate the word *survival*. Perhaps because I am the descendant of survivor grandparents; or perhaps because I still feel the reverberations of the trauma that was supposed to have been survived by now, words leave different shadows on my semantic landscape.

There is a place which lays at the intersection of these three words for me these days, it is called Antakya: the ancient town where tales of ancient Greek mythology blended with Jewish Talmudic tradition, and seminal moments of Christian theology merged with Nusayrian Islam as well as Alevism. Beyond all this, though, Antakya holds a special place in my heart as it homes some of my earliest and happiest memories as a child; my first trip to a church, first engagement with different languages, first encounter with the legendary Dafne and perhaps, the first worry that I might turn into something immobile if too naughty. All these memories were juxtaposed against the bleakness of February 6th when Antakya became the earthquake struck open-air museum of devastation in southernmost point of an ancient fault line.

In the days following the earthquake, Antakya was left not only beyond the country's ideologically informed population's consciousness, but also beyond the reach of independent and international rescue teams. As victims waited desperately for an intervention of sorts, old images of the town began to circulate on social media highlighting the absurdity of the claim the town had been a Turkic land for at least seven millennia. Both the cultural ambivalence on Antakya's multi-ethnic and religious composition

and the discriminatory practices of the state can be traced back to the genocidal policies and practices of the essentialist ideology that has been dominant in this tragically beautiful country since 1894.

In countries where the past is sanitised of its plurality in favour of creating a singularly monolithic national identity and thereby a revisionist historiography, obliterations and manipulations such as these, even in the face of a natural disaster, remind us how accurate Felman and Laub's findings are. In their seminal work *Testimony: A Crisis of Truth*, they note: 'historical trauma presents us with a history whose repercussions are not only simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still evolving.' So how do we respond to obliteration, to erasure even at a time like this?

Since Theodor Adorno's famous and often misquoted dictum, that is: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric', representation of collective traumas in literature is approached in tandem with issues of ethics. Despite the implicit emphasis Adorno places on the barbarity of the human condition that makes Holocaust possible, differing interpretations of his maxim continue to generate debates. Underlining the barbarity Adorno indicates, another writer, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, points out that 'no symbolic universe grounded in humanistic beliefs could confront the Holocaust without the risk of being shaken to its foundations'.

Within the specific context of Antakya earthquake, the issue of ethics might come across as ingenuine, especially when the human suffering caused by the regime continues to re-victimise survivors. Yet being cognisant of cultural sensibilities might help us to establish a discourse of compassion. To this end, literary theorist and cultural scholar Gabriele Schwab invites us to take on a crucial role. Schwabian ethics binds us all as a global community by positioning literature as a transitional space contributing to cultural knowledge and poetry as ➤➤

➤ an opening to the unconscious. In so doing, it enables us to attend to each other's wounds rather than the ethnic or religious adjectives that precede our humanity.

So, until we reach that space of compassion, may we pause for a moment to reflect on the losses of earthquake victims who lost not only their homes and loved ones, but also are confronted with the total erasure of a city and of a past to remind them of happier times. ■

*Since its establishment by Antigonus I in 307/306 BC, Antigonía- as it was then known- had been a home to Macedonian and Athenian Greeks. Under the changing dominion of various kingdoms and empires from Seleucid to Roman Empires and Cilicia to Ottoman, the city became a diverse cultural hub. Following its annexation by Turkey in 1938, Antakya became a constituent of its Hatay province, homing the only remaining Armenian village, Vakıfli.

Image: *Symphony*

An installation by Finland-based Iraqi artist, Adel Abidin

Dr Tamara Wilson is a poet, human rights activist and research fellow at the University of Roehampton, London. Alongside the exploration of heritage and memory in hybrid literary/non-literary forms, she is interested in the representation of survival legacies and suppressed identities in categorisation- resistant forms.

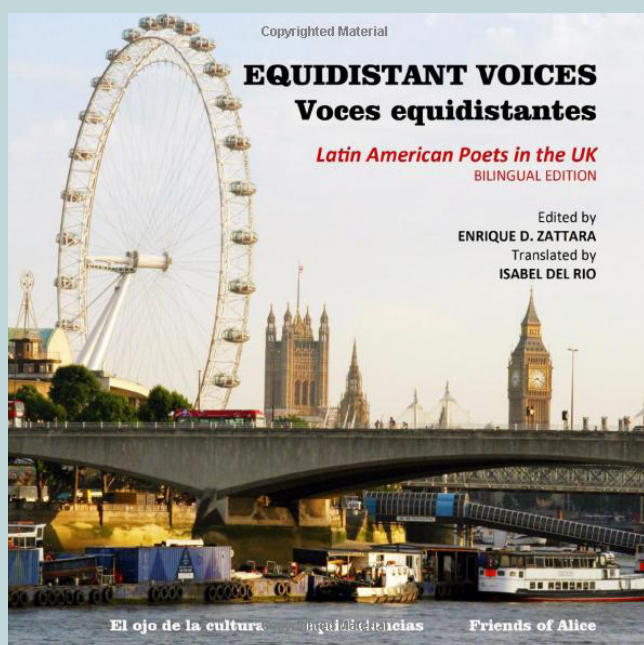
RESISTANCE



Voices of Exiled Writers

A poetry & prose anthology celebrating 20 years of writing by members of the Exiled Writers Ink organisation, Palewell Press, December 2020. Copies can be ordered from <https://palewellpress.co.uk/Books-Human%20Rights.html#Resistance> and Amazon, Foyles and Waterstones websites.

Binding	Paperback
Extent	154 pages
Price	£9.99
ISBN	978-1-911587-46-0



Equidistant Voices: Latin American poets in the UK

Bilingual Edition

There are many Latin American poets currently living and writing in the United Kingdom. They may find that their work often remains undiscovered as a result of moving away from their original literary context and because of the challenges with trying to integrate into a different cultural and linguistic setting. The aim of this bilingual anthology is to make these poets known to English-speaking readers both in the original and in translation, and to give them the necessary exposure. The book includes an extensive introductory study by Enrique D. Zattara and a translation into English by Isabel del Rio.

Binding	Paperback
Extent	287 pages
Price	£15.00
ISBN	979-8379253455

Exiled Writers from Forgotten Conflicts

Mark A. Silberstein

The on-going conflicts and immense suffering of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen have been largely forgotten but it is imperative that these hidden conflicts are not buried. Exiled writers from these countries will not be silenced.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Many writers began to leave the DRC when President Mobutu was in power because Zaire, as it was then, became a country of terror and brutality. They are currently dispersed in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and the USA, although Brussels is a major centre for revitalised central African culture. Most exiled DRC authors write in French because assimilationist attitudes and directives caused the emergence of a detribalised literature.

Pius Ngandu Nkashama, born in 1946, is a major poet, essayist, novelist and playwright who has worked as a literature professor in various countries. Born in 1944 in the Congo, Clementine Faik-Nzuzi later taught at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. She was one of the first African woman poets writing in French and has also published short stories. In addition, she is a linguist and anthropologist who includes oral literature in her research. Resolved to write to remember and preserve her identity, Lola Demoulin, exiled in Brussels, has written four novels while Amba Bongo, who is exiled in London, has written the memoir *Une Femme en Exil*.

Generally, however, Congolese writers in exile are male. Men traditionally had the right to education while girls stayed at home and so were slower to pick up literacy and a level of proficiency in French, the colonial language that would enable them to write. Male exiled writers include Mabiala


Molu, Muepa Muamba, Diangitukwa Fweley, Kama Sywor Kamanda, Tshibanda Wamuela Bujitu Pie and Charles Djungu Simba K. Younger exiled writers are In Koli Jean Bofane, a novelist who has settled in Brussels, Fiston Mwanza Mujila, poet and novelist who lives in Austria and JJ Bola who is a poet and novelist living in Britain.

The two Congo Wars from 1996-2003 officially ended after a peace deal was signed in 2002 and a transitional government set up in 2003. However, figures from the International Rescue Committee show that an estimated 5.4 million deaths occurred between 1998 and 2007 due to ongoing conflict. World Vision states, "Nationally, 2.1 million people were newly displaced in 2017 and 2018, making the DRC the African country with the highest number of internally displaced people — 4.5 million. About 13 million people lack adequate food."

So, what are the roots of the conflict in DRC? After achieving independence from Belgium in 1960, the country was ruled by the democratically elected Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba who was assassinated after being in power for one year. Lumumba's assassination was a coup supported by the Belgian authorities, the CIA, Britain and a Colonel in the Congolese army, Mobutu Sese Seko. Mobutu came to power in 1965 becoming president, ruling as a kleptocrat and changing the name of the >>

➤ country to Zaire. In 1997 Mobutu's long reign was overthrown by Laurent Kabila who changed the name of the country back to the DRC. Kabila was assassinated in 2001 and thereafter, his son, Joseph, became president for two terms. Kabila resigned after the 2018 election when Felix Tshisekedi was elected president in the first peaceful transfer of power.

The DRC's expansive mineral wealth that could have lifted millions out of poverty has in fact been the cause of this long-term conflict with some European and Asian companies and even some African countries buying minerals that are funding armed groups and fuelling the hostilities. ■



Book on Eventbrite:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/celebrating-the-small-press-tickets-646509115167>

My Land of O

Muepu Muamba

Translated by Denise Ganderton

No

Not only a trigger at the ready on the gun Africa my undulating country I come from the land of fruity water-laden like a pleasant orchard and in my heart surges dream upon dream endlessly the hope of regaining my forfeited country.

Zaire was once the realm of singing trees and shimmering dreamy waters my land of O like a twin fairyland crescent of tenderness the laughter burst forth corollas of flowers like a bohemian seduction of pleasure

but

my destitute likuta land is enthralled by misery how can I tell you of the enchanting metamorphoses of my ancient proud land when tears and mourning constantly cast deadly shadows on to its azure bed

this

landscape of sweetness one day I may speak of the divine bewitchment of munkamba and of kivu's proud gaze on my watery land of reflecting rivers softly caressing my watery land an infinity of joyful rivers and smooth streams

the

springs of airborne melodies are not exhausted yet so I cannot really belong elsewhere I who so long have lived elsewhere my land of O.

Muepu Muamba is a poet and writer born in 1946. Following his writings often critical of the Mobuto dictatorship, in the 1980s he was forced to leave the Congo to take refuge in Germany.

A Day after Peace

Robert Kabemba Mangidi

Not a long deal
The war starts again
Children crying
Parents killed
Soldiers deployed
The beginning of a massacre
A day after peace
War for minerals
People paying the price
Innocents paid the price
Bombs exploded

Human rights violation
The Congolese holocaust

Congolese in poverty
The world turns a blind eye
Listen to the cry of my people

Robert Kabemba Mangidi is a Manchester-based poet and political activist born in Kinshasa. He has performed his poetry widely. He is a graduate of Lubumbashi, Wits, Bolton and Manchester Metropolitan Universities.



Jonathan Vatunga Makuka

Refugee

JJ Bola

imagine how it feels to be chased out of home. to have your grip ripped. loosened from your fingertips
something you so dearly held on to. like a lover's hand that slips when pulled away you are always reaching.
my father would speak of home. reaching. speaking of familiar faces. girl next door
who would eventually grow up to be my mother. the fruit seller at the market. the lonely man at the top
of the road who nobody spoke to. and our house at the bottom of the street
lit up by a single flickering lamp
where beyond was only darkness. there
they would sit and tell stories
of monsters that lurked and came only at night to catch the children who sat and listened to stories of
monsters that lurked.
this is how they lived. each memory buried.
an artefact left to be discovered by archaeologists. the last words on a dying
family member's lips. this was sacred.
not even monsters could taint it.
but there were monsters that came during the day. monsters that tore families apart
with their giant hands. and fingers that slept on triggers. the sound of gunshots ripping through the sky
became familiar like the tapping of rain fall on a window sill.
monster that would kill and hide behind speeches, suits and ties. monsters that would chase families
away forcing them to leave everything behind.

i remember when we first stepped off the plane. everything was foreign. unfamiliar. uninviting. even the
air in my lungs left me short of breath.
we came here to find refuge. they called us refugees so we hid ourselves in their language until we sound-
ed just like them. changed the way we dressed to look just like them.
made this our home until we lived just like them and began to speak of familiar faces. girl next door who
would grow up to be a
mother. the fruit seller at the market.
the lonely man at the top of the road
who nobody spoke to. and our house at the bottom of the street lit up by a single flickering lamp to keep
away the darkness.

there we would sit and watch police that lurked and came only at night to arrest the youths who sat and
watched police that lurked and came only at night. this is how we lived.

i remember one day i heard them say to me
they come here to take our jobs
they need to go back to where they came from
not knowing that i was one of the ones who came. i told them that a refugee is simply
someone who is trying to make a home.
so next time when you go home, tuck your children in and kiss your families goodnight be glad that the
monsters
never came for you.
in their suits and ties. ➤➤

➤ never came for you.
in the newspapers with the media lies.
never came for you.
that you are not despised.
and know that deep inside the hearts of each and every one of us
we are all always reaching for a place that we can call *home*. ■

JJ Bola is a Kinshasa-born, British poet, writer and educator, based in London. He has written three collections of poetry as well as two novels, *No Place to Call Home* and *The Selfless Act Of Breathing*, and a non-fiction book *Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined*.

The River in the Belly

Fiston Mwanza Mujila

Solitude 41

I'm not the first to leave the continent
my exile won't be the exile of a race
even if I die today in Minsk
or in early afternoon in Vladivostok
no city will fall quiet, no nation will mourn
I see only my mother crumple—her eyes tear up
a few friends get knots in their stomachs
the Congo River will pursue its nightly course
in Uele and Bas-Zaïre
the copper factories will hum in Katanga
the grown-up and child soldiers aching for sex
drunk on blood and head will shepherd their
flocks between Buta and Isiro
and the freight trains will depart from Musumba to Ngandajika
passing through Ilebo, Kasangulu, Lwambo, Lodja and Kamituga

Fiston Mwanza Mujila is a poet, writer and educator who was born in Lubumbashi. In 2007 he left the Congo and subsequently lived in Belgium, Germany and France. He now lives in Austria where he teaches African literature.

Solitude 60

*(for all the Congolese killed in Kin-la-Jungle
and thrown into the river)*

is it my fault if the river
spits out at Brazza
the bodies thrown in at night
at Kin
in the hope of leaving no trace . . .

their favourite pastime
killing and dumping
upside down
corpse upon corpse
into the arms of the river

God only knows
how many of our own
the river has eaten
then aborted
at Brazza and the Îles-de-Mbamu
since the coming of the sham

one day
to give a reckoning
the river will have to
learn to speak a new tongue
to spell the names of all the corpses
from Anita Amundala to Floribert Chebeya
without forgetting Fidèle Basana

its complicit silence
makes me sick . . .
it's as if I had
the *mbanzu* between my legs ■

Peace in Congo

Jean'Py

Peace is a right; and like every right, it is learned and cultivated in order to bear fruit. The question I ask myself is whether we, in the DRC, have learned to make peace, to love it and to keep it? No. My country is full of 'peacekeepers' from the UN, but all they have brought us is war.

What is peace for you, a friend asked me? For me, peace is what all our brothers and sisters in the East of my country seek day and night. That's all the men and women who live there are fighting for... Peace. But we shouldn't have to fight, for peace. Peace is a dream for some, a goal for others. For children, it is the key to realising their dreams; the only way for them to reach the peak of their ambitions. It is to live in serenity, without the fear of dying, of losing one's parents, of not knowing if today, one will survive...

The DRC is a vast country of 26 provinces, blessed with all the natural world's beauty and riches. The DRC is the mixture, the summation of all that, of all these peoples, of all these cultures, of all this love. But the DRC is also home to a motherlode of precious minerals, that give the world its smartphones and electric cars. And those minerals are bought with the blood of my people. So, we cannot speak of the DRC, without Beni, without Butembo, without Bunangana, Masisi, these places occupied by an enemy army to gain control of the minerals. We mustn't forget Kishishe, where more than three hundred people were massacred, without mention by the international community. And it goes on day by day. And who are these people, what is this brutal force that is violating our children's rights and robbing them of their childhood every day?

It is the RDF, the army of Rwanda. That friendly, safe country where the British Government plans to send asylum seekers. This country's soldiers have been killing our grandparents, our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters through a terrorist movement in the Eastern DRC called M23, stealing those minerals to feed the world's hunger for smartphones, tablets and electric cars. But Rwanda is not alone. On its own, Rwanda is a tiny place that the DRC could easily swallow. But behind the Rwandan invaders are the British, the French, and all the others who need what Rwanda

is plundering. And as a result, actual hunger is the daily companion of our children. Our brothers and sisters do not go to school, do not eat properly, do not live in a healthy environment, though they should, according to the same UN, have the right to do so - as well as the right to be happy, to dream and to move forward.

Meanwhile my compatriots and I are wondering: how is the DRC, under attack for more than 26 years by Rwanda, different from Ukraine, which is now under attack from Russia? Why are there two standards, two rules? Why does the world provide arms to Ukraine while imposing sanctions on Russia, and yet does nothing, stands by with arms folded, while the DRC lives through the same ordeal? It is only these young girls and boys of today, it is all these persecuted children in the East who can save the country. Otherwise, like Ukraine, it may disappear. All they want is one thing: the attention and the commitment of the international community to guarantee peace to the Congolese and condemn the aggressor which is Rwanda.

All the children want is to play in the sun, to sleep peacefully curled up with parents, brothers and sisters, to run to school in safety. Not to stand, shoeless and hungry, by the road, with nobody to look after them and nowhere to feel safe.

Those children - our children - want peace.

Jean'Py is a pastor from DRC, and a member of both Write to Life and Survivors Speak OUT groups at Freedom from Torture. He has been a refugee in this country for more than ten years, and is deeply concerned about what is happening in his country.

Here, There And Everywhere

Joy

In Africa there is War
Every second, every minute, every hour
Everywhere there is blood
Everywhere bodies
Like animals in a butcher's window
Ici et là
No food
No medication
No water to drink
Everywhere the noise of gunshots and shelling
Everywhere the language of weapons
Here we live in opulence, but there they live in misery
We see, point your light, it's your Kingdom that is given to us
But beyond the anguish and fear,
Beyond our enemies and division,
Only the strongest prevails while the cries of the poor are lost in chaos
Ici et là
In Ukraine there is war
On our televisions only talk of Ukraine
Collections of money
Collections of clothes
Of medication
Ici et là
Everywhere men are fighting
Everywhere the pointlessness of war
Human life has no value
Blood flows
No Peace
Ici et là
Yes, they are dying like chickens there too
We know they are dying there
Are the people dying in Ukraine not of the same blood as the people of Africa?
Oh my country!
Ici et là

Joy is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She has been a member of Write to Life since 2015. She is a member of Freedom from Torture's choir.



Lest We Forget, The Conflict in Yemen

A number of writers have fled from Yemen such as Mansur Rajih and Ali Al-Muqri.

Mansur Rajih is a renowned exiled poet and political activist who fled to Norway after having been imprisoned for fifteen years in Yemen on a false murder charge. During his imprisonment, his poems were smuggled out and printed in newspapers all over the Arab world. He was finally freed in 1998. Mansur slowly rebuilt his professional career as a poet and his activities as a pro-democracy and human rights activist. Bilingual (Arabic/Norwegian) collections of his poetry are continuously published.

Ali Al-Muqri is a novelist born in 1966 who has lived in France since 2015 after fleeing the war in Yemen. He has published more than ten books with *Hurma* winning the French prize for Arabic literature and in 2022 France made him a knight of the French Order of Arts and Letters. Yet Al-Muqri has said that he still experiences the hardships of alienation far from his homeland, missing every detail of his life in Yemen. The migrant writers include Ahmed Zain, Marwan Al-Ghafuri, Ali Muhammad Zaid and Habib Abd al-Rab Soruri who is a distinguished novelist and writer living in France.

Some of the poets we feature – Hamdan Dammag, Amina Atiq and Amerah Saleh - live in Sheffield, Liverpool and Birmingham where there are established Yemeni communities. Their poems relate to suffering Yemen in diverse ways.

The civil war in Yemen has been raging for eight fierce years, yet the conflict has become known in international media as the “forgotten war” with Yemen being eclipsed as news cycles change their focus.

But the Yemenis do not have the option of forgetting their plight with the country having one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world today. Since 2015 More than 4.3 million Yemenis have been displaced. UNICEF states that in Yemen there are around 23.4 million people in need of assistance, including almost 13 million children.

The cause of the conflict is a proxy war being fought between the Iran backed Houthi rebels and a multi-national coalition led by Saudi Arabia. Yet the spark that ignited the civil war goes back to the Arab Spring in 2011. Demonstrators called on the 33-year reigning President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign and eventually his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi became president. In 2014, amidst two weeks of anti-government protests, Hadi dissolved his cabinet overturning a controversial rise in fuel prices and with the resignation of Hadi as president, the Houthis took control of the capital Sanaa, and the Yemeni government.

Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia where he pleaded for intervention to support him and to topple the Houthis. A Saudi-led coalition of Arab states including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates initiated Operation Decisive Storm. The coalition was also backed by the US. To add to the mix of chaos and bloodshed in the country is the presence of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Before the civil war both the Yemeni Armed forces and the Houthis were independently fighting against Muslim extremists in the country.

He Grew Old

Hamdan Dammag

He grew old
In a stolen teardrop of time
He grew old
And the Camphor tree in front
Of his house
Grew old.

And the butterflies
Which coloured his dreams
And the beating of his heart
Which accompanied his sadness
And the letters
Which lit up the galaxies for him
Grew old.
The silence of defeats
The groans of ruins
All his cuts and victories
The fractures his hands had repaired
Grew old.

The secrets the mawwals wove in songs
The memories
The eyes which had been full
Of stars
And the unblemished hand whose palm
Had watered the stones of drought
They all grew old.

His words surrendered to the creatures
And to dust
His splendid thought got rotten
His lungs could no longer draw breath,
to paint playgrounds for the orphans
His ears no longer hear
The whisper of the creeks
Or the dancing of the lonely grass
On the hilltops.
The roof of his days cracked open
His walls gave in to floods
His lightning shrouded him
And then
Grew old.

Hamdan Dammag is an exiled Yemeni prize-winning novelist, poet, and researcher with several publications and diverse research and writing interests. He received his PhD in computer science from the University of Reading in 2005, and since then he has worked as an academic, journalist, translator, human rights activist, and political analyst. He is currently vice-chair of the Liverpool Arab Art Festival (UK) and vice-president of the Yemeni Centre for Studies and Research (Yemen).

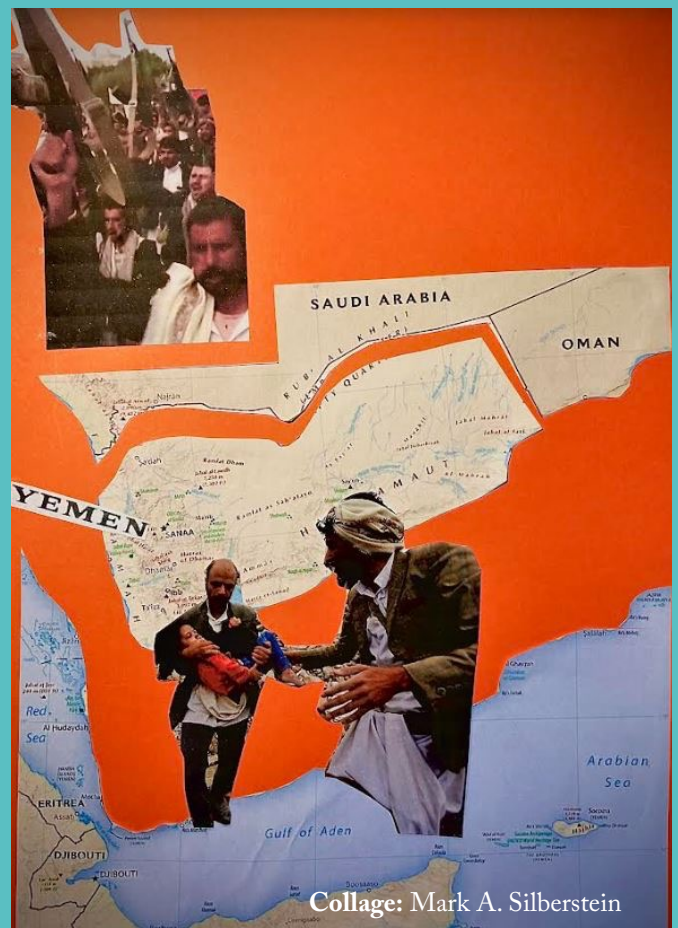
The Half of The Ship That Has Not Yet Sunk

Hamdan Dammag

On the half of the ship that had not yet sunk
I passed by the corpses of those who did not know they were dead
There was a poet smiling for the cameras at a boring book signing party,
A husband dreaming of the death of his brunette mistress,
A soldier lost his helmet somewhere in the long corridors,
And a lady in her cabin dreaming of a wider window.

I passed by a drunk Captain, shambling along with joy.
There was lightning penetrating the sorrow of the walls,
Some children sleeping on the edge of a black hole,
And a violinist not knowing where he was.

I passed by the corpses of the suicide genes,
Creatures I have not seen before,
A pile of meaningless withered flowers,
And some politicians
Fighting over a territorial map of waves...
The waves that were swallowing the ship's half...
The half that has not yet sunk.



Collage: Mark A. Silberstein

Post-War

Amina Atiq

I emptied this ship escaping Ramathan family dinners
bilingual laughter and salvaged loudspeaker conversations
on a £5 talk-talk phone card. I hear my distant cousin shouting my name
the dial tone has spoken, hurry before the credit ends...

I climbed the back window and hid the Yemeni sailors from the scratching
floorboards, listening from behind the boiler rooms and Thatcher's blind
promises to reward our descendants' British citizenships

they drowned with the warships and never saw the daylight of Liverpool's port

First published on BBC Sounds

Amina Atiq is a Yemeni poet, performance artist, creative practitioner and award-winning community activist who lives in Liverpool.

Kiss Between Borders

Amina Atiq

Arabic Translation by Shifa Askari

Commissioned by Mena Arts for film animation

The shepherd's wild sheep found my Ethiopian soul
and I traded a kiss with a Yemeni farmer
the West claimed that this devil's drink is delicious.
Our love hijacked
and the East had buried itself.
But I still reminisce about our first dance under the coffee tree
Would you forget
that I live between your walls?
Lightly-roasted, sprinkled with cardamom spices.
In family feuds, bitter or sweet

I am your wealth.
Handpicking Persian saffron leaves
in marriage bonds and wedding bells I am poor
and I rest in Turkish foam.
But my mother's port has fallen.
This sea is political
and the farmer's child cradles the battle of raging men
who gulp me up in despair.
intoxicating their lungs and mapping their diaspora journeys
on the chessboard.
I never left you
You left home.

Live Transmission

Mogib Hassan

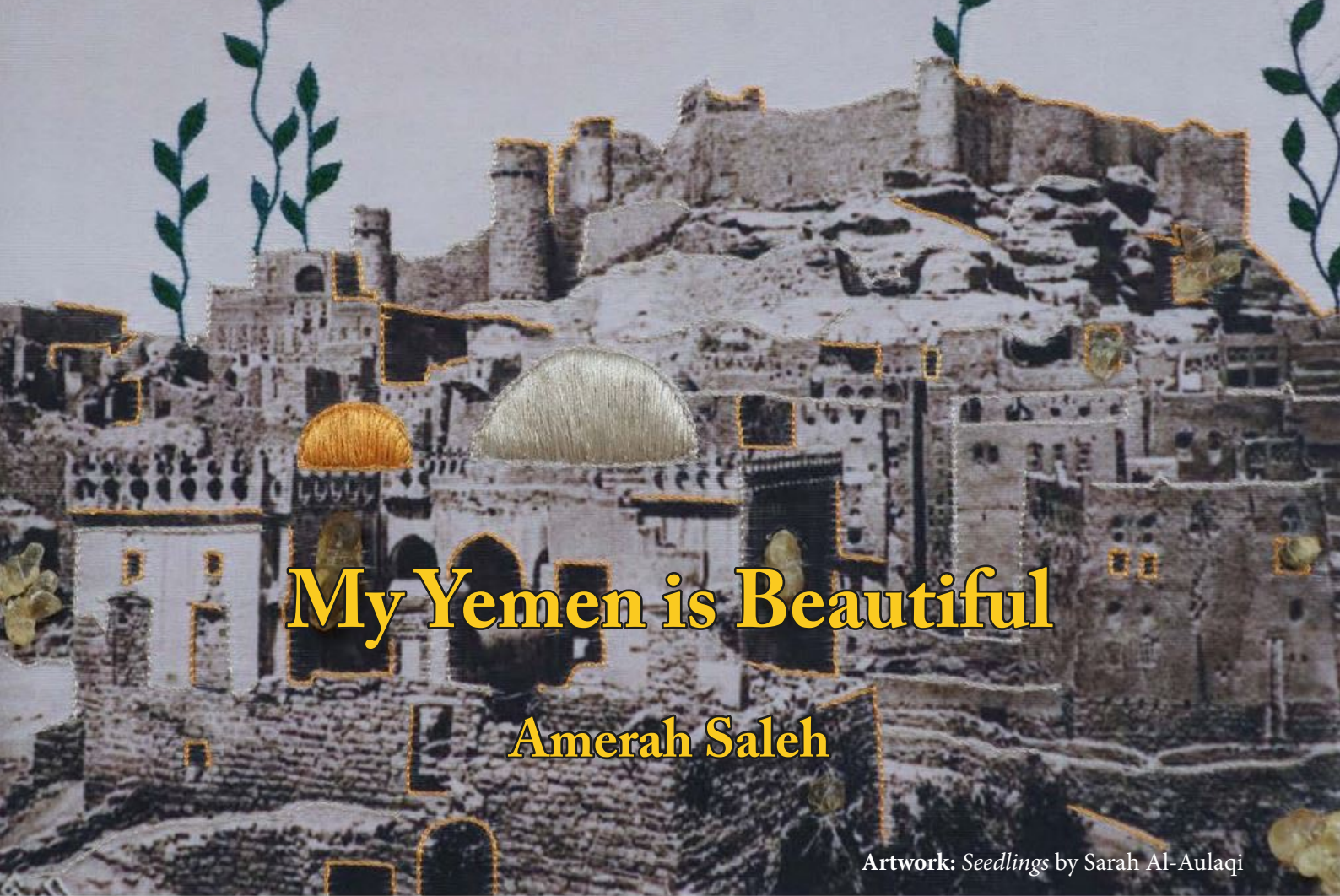
I sat down to watch television:
the speech of Mr President
a live transmission.

I saw troops in their tanks
planes hovering in the sky to protect the great one
a cavalcade of limousines, decorated with flowers
a downpour of arrows bringing kisses
warm greetings from the obsequious crowd
sent across the wind.

Cries of fear carve through the air

"we sacrifice ourselves for you
protector of this land"
"you were born to be revered
son of the great one
and you remain the greatest."

Mogib Hassan was born in Yemen in 1974 and is now a citizen of the Netherlands. He has been published both in Dutch and English in a variety of journals, magazines and anthologies. He was attacked and detained in 2011 in Yemen at the height of the Arab Spring.



My Yemen is Beautiful

Amerah Saleh

Artwork: *Seedlings* by Sarah Al-Aulaqi

My Yemen is beautiful, even in its limitations.
In its limited water supplies
In its limited electricity
In its limited fuel.

My Yemen is still so beautiful when families would light candles on rooftops to forget the
government cut their electricity supplies out of a need for control
Because controlling civilians is part of protection
Because killing civilians is just part of the process

I am told how much Yemen is dangerous, but all I know of is kids on streets with flies on
a stick, seeing who's caught the most on this burning day

All I know of rooftops that sit alongside the mountain where the athaan shakes buildings
but none of them fall

All I know of granddads at 5am going to get fresh khubs from the mikhbaza
I don't know of the dangerous Yemen you talk to me about,
This Yemen you are showing me isn't what my mother longs
for I don't know where you got this Yemen from but

this Yemen isn't mine.
Because let me tell you
My Yemen is beautiful even when

My family can't afford anything, so they split bread between 9 of them hoping

sons come home with another slice soon. And if they don't? They say Ala Allah, God
brings what we need, not what we want'
It is still beautiful even when

My 13-year-old cousin got married in her home. And when I asked her what
about the war, she told me bombs and fireworks all sound the same, so she tells the
kids it's part of the fireworks.
It is still beautiful even when

My auntie tells us that doctors have raised their prices and now no one
can actually afford to go. I realise how protected I am here.

It is still beautiful even when

My mum sends ketchup, dairy milks and Tabasco sauce into the suitcases as
if it's cocaine to her family in Yemen, arriving a little under 8 months later.

Biladi malee hita laman

Umi wa khalati yaglisoo yitkalamoo laman al faj, ashan ma yidroo mita al itisal

al thani baygee
This is less about money
now, more about land
Less about people
now, more about
country Less about
death,
and more about genocide.

I have cried, into my right arm sleeve on buses at 10pm when I received news that
soldiers are dressing as schoolboys to get their next target.
There are buildings that have crumbled just as they have been built.
My mother finds it hard to tell stories of Yemen without Duas falling out her mouth
Without her eyes looking up to God as if this was her cry for help
My mother breaks my heart every time she talks about Yemen
I watch her look outside English windows Duas trailing behind her, eyes up to God in

silence
She says
"Yemen was rebuilding itself from sand.

No more control.
No more
empire. We
were free."

That it had taken this long to start investing in palm trees on beaches.
My mum likes to put images of Yemen on TV every
day, she prays with it in the background,
like prayers or God could end a massacre.
She kneels on the ground with the mountains as her view.
My legs pace up and down waiting for her to finish

- I wonder what she's asking God today,
at the same time I'm trying not to question it.

Her cheeks are oceans,
her eyes are chasms.

I sit watching her watch the mountains...

I whisper ma, you left the war but did the war ever leave you?

My Yemen is home.

Even when I am sat on Birmingham buses

Trailing the smell of rich oud perfume with bakhoor stained clothes on a little bit of

basal mixed in it

Some people smell like home

Like the souks in Aden, the skylines of my spine

My feet dipped in sand, I can feel the stories of war crawl up from my feet to the tip of my

head

The smell of samak on Fridays for ghada after salat al gum

The fish here smells rotten

It doesn't rain often at home

At home when it rains people enjoy it

Like beautiful weddings

Beautiful funerals

Beautiful pregnancies

End of war

My Yemen is beautiful, despite its limitations. ■

Amerah Saleh is a spoken word artist born and bred from Birmingham. Her Muslim Yemeni roots give her space to get lost and found on multiple occasions between identity. She is the Co-Founder of Verve Poetry Press. Amerah has performed all around Europe and released her first collection *I Am Not From Here* in 2018. Her work touches on identity, womanhood, religion and the obscure idea of belonging only to one place.





Grandmothers who Left

Gila Green

Artwork: *Stratification* by Sarah Al-Aulaqi

The Yemenites were very religious, like all those who left.
In the synagogue we sat on straw mats.
Grandmothers brought spices for *havdalah* and for Yom Kippur afternoons, like all those who left.
Grandmothers sold aromatic *hilbe* and *schug* and *saluf*; that gave you an appetite.
Grandmothers said: “My *menucha*, rest, will only be in *Gan Eden*, the Garden of Eden.”
The grandmothers were holy people.
They came to greet the Messiah, like all those who left.

Canadian writer **Gila Green** is the daughter of an Ashkenazi-Canadian mother and Yemenite-Israeli father. She lived in South Africa before she settled in Israel.



Horrors of Air Strikes by Hakim Halakel

Poetry of Protest: Iran

Daughters of the Sun

Afsaneh Gitiforouz

women, taking off their scarves, burning them
wearing their hair loose
heading to fight the villains bare-handed
calling them to the battlefield

they knew death was approaching
but were not afraid.

women, cutting their hair to protest
but not cutting their hopes
and they were not afraid
women, defining honour anew
not by being killed
curled down behind closed doors

No! this time
holding up their heads raising their arms
in the streets
battling the honourless
they were not afraid.

women making freedom flags like *Kaveh** did
from the waves of their own hair
so they could say they were not ashamed
of being women hiding away
No, they were not afraid.

hush hush freedom would no longer do
no more longing for the wind to caress their hair

no more being humiliated beaten killed
for saying they existed
no longer forced to be muted
as if dead alive

No! these women
revealed their being loudly
and were not afraid.

Daring women whose skulls *Zahhak*** smashed first
but announced death was by heart attack
so others would not resist
No! these brave women
became icons of courage
and were not afraid.

women rising up
'*Woman, Life, Freedom*' on their lips
they are our daughters
Daughters of the Sun.

* Ahangar Kaveh is a mythical figure in Iranian mythology who leads a popular uprising against a ruthless foreign ruler, Zahhak.

** Zahhak is an evil figure in Persian mythology. Two black snakes grow from Zahhak's shoulders. In order to prevent them from killing him, he feeds their hunger by supplying them with a stew made from two human brains every day.

Afsaneh Gitiforouz is a British Iranian poet and novelist. She has performed her poetry at various venues and has published poems in *Radical Roots*. She was the lead poet in the Barbican 'Age of Many Posts' event in 2022. She also collaborates with Kemi's House in promoting poetry among younger poets. She is a lead organiser of Persian poetry event, the Thursdays, and a committee member of Exiled Writers Ink.

In memory of Mohsen Shekari

Rouhi Shafii

In this cold, dark night,
Voices mingle with the images
with the speed of sound
traveling from home,
reaching to cloud my memory.
The howling of a grieving mother,
Was it before or after?
Filled the streets
and over spilled into town
and travelled through the waves
and the wires,
across the globe,
and reached my bewildered soul.
Was it before, or after she heard
that her young boy has been slaughtered,
When her heart ripped apart,
And her cries reached the pale moon?

I closed the window, switched off the radio, threw the
paper out.
Not to know and feel her pain.
Unbearable, piercing pain of losing a young boy
To nothingness.

Will he be the last, I wonder?
Who was the first?
What was the name of number one thousand eight
hundred young boy
On the rows facing the firing squad?
What was the name of the first prisoner
On the first line of the firing squad?
I know the names of the last ones.
The one whose mother's screams reached the moon,
And the stars hid from sight,
And shame covered the Milky Way.
I keep it as a secret in my memory.
I wash it in the tears of all mothers
Who lost their soul in grief,
In pain and in waiting to see the day,
all hanged men be hanged one by one
Or all in one.
The stains never wash.
The pain never lessens.
Those murdered never return
Even if we send the hang man to be hanged.
And that my friends is the saddest part of our tragedy.

Rouhi Shafii is a sociologist, writer, translator of Persian poetry into English and a developing poet. She has published eight books in Persian and English and numerous articles. A collection of poetry in English and her memoirs in Farsi are forthcoming. Rouhi is chair of Exiled Writers Ink and involved in the Campaign to Stop Honour Killings in Iran and Amnesty International.

An Encounter between Two Exiled Bosnians: Novelist Aleksandar Hemon and Darija Stojnic

Darija Stojnic

I had the privilege of attending the London Review of Books Bookshop event featuring Aleksandar Hemon, the renowned American-Bosnian author, essayist, critic, and screenwriter, who has received numerous awards. It was a special night for me, not only due to his fame, but also because he hails from Sarajevo, just like myself.

Our encounter at the bookstore was the first, and most probably, the only time we will ever meet. Despite this, there was a sense of familiarity and closeness in the air, as if we had known each other for a lifetime. This connection was partially formed through my exposure to the author's works, but there was something more, a tangible reality. I attribute this to the author's personal story, which bears striking similarities to my own. Although he has been given a platform to share his tale with the world, my story remains untold. Nevertheless, through reading his books, I feel as though I am reliving my own.



Bosnia to build the railways and my ex-husband's grandparents, Flora and Albert Romano, spoke Ladino (1) at home as their roots were from Spain. So, in a way I recognised them in his new book.

In *The World And All That It Holds* Hemon writes about the Bosnian Jewish population and how its migration made Sarajevo so unique. At the centre of his novel is the character Rafael Pinto, a student in Sarajevo who is a Viennese Sephardic Jew and also homosexual. Hemon brings to life the dramatic events in Sarajevo in 1914, when the Archduke and his wife were assassinated, igniting the start of World War I and forever changing Pinto's life. Through Hemon's vivid writing, we see the assassination unfold as the "short young man" Gavrilo Princip, described as having "unkempt hair, a thin, strained moustache above his lip, and sickly eyes," pulls out a pistol and fires the fateful shot. Despite Pinto's hopes for a better future, the events of that day take his life in a different direction. Pinto enlists in the Austro-Hungarian army to fight the Russians and finds love with a fellow Bosnian soldier and Muslim, Osman. Their romantic journey is a thrilling adventure as they dodge danger, outsmart spies, and embark on a journey to Shanghai. Driven by his love for >>



The writing is not just a figment of imagination, brought to life by the author's descriptive powers and the reader's own imagination. Rather, it is a true representation of life, my life. In fact, my great-grandfather Max Scharnberg came from Bavaria to

➤ Osman, Pinto perseveres through it all.

Last year while attending the theatrical performance of Hemon's 'The Book of my Lives' at the Kamerni Teatar 55 (2) in Sarajevo, I experienced a range of emotions as I laughed and cried about my life too. His family managed to escape the 1992 war and join him, whereas my mother did not survive. Despite the sadness I feel for the loss of my mother, I am happy for him and his family. My father also managed to escape and came to London, so I too had a family.

Despite the difference in our ages, with the author being a decade younger, our experiences were shaped by the cultural and historical context of Sarajevo. We lived in the same 'framework' of the city and had a shared love of books, movies, theatre, concerts, skiing on Jahorina (3), racing cars down Trebevic, (4) cheering "Zeljo" (5) and sitting at "Parkusa" (6) engaging in lively discussion while drinking and laughing. We shared Sarajevo's unique sense of humour, freedom and togetherness.

The war in 1992 ruined our lives, and divided us. While Hemon ended up in America, I escaped to Britain. It took Hemon eight years to return to Sarajevo for the first time, and it took me just as long. My Yugoslav red passport was declared invalid and cut, much like our country, which was cut into pieces. After being forced into exile, our former identities from Sarajevo were no longer recognisable. Focusing

on survival, we took any respectable job that was available. Despite the challenges, we never lost hope and despite our good careers, we have not returned to Sarajevo to live there. At present, we reside in Chicago and London, yet both make regular trips back to Sarajevo to reconnect with our roots and regain a sense of completeness. Only Sarajevo can make us feel whole again. This pattern of travel will likely continue for the duration of our lives.

But listening to him and his stories in London when I experienced a feeling of wholeness which I normally cannot attain in London, he brought Sarajevo back to me that night. ■

NOTES:

- (1) Jewish-Spanish Language still spoken in Jewish communities
- (2) Chamber Theatre
- (3) Nearby ski resort
- (4) Mountain overlooking the city
- (5) Local football club
- (6) Popular cafe

Darija Stojnic was born in Sarajevo Bosnia. She trained as a lawyer and worked for Radio Television Sarajevo until 1992 when the war in Sarajevo started. In 1993 she emigrated to Great Britain and since then has lived and worked in London where she retrained as a counsellor/psychotherapist. She joined EWJ as a short story writer in its early days.

Free Creative Writing Workshops for members of Exiled Writers Ink

If you're a refugee, migrant or asylum-seeking writer and are interested in exploring your own poetry and prose, Exiled Writers Ink offers the following classes:

A Weekly Cooperative Support Poetry Group

Each week we read a poem from a notable poet around the world. We dig into the craft, ethos, theme, context and insight the poem offers. Each person in the class will be asked to share, taking turns in presenting one poet. Poets will be encouraged to write a weekly poem in response, and there will be a chance to share one new poem a month for group feedback.

Wednesdays 6.30 to 7.30 pm by Zoom
Organiser: Omer Aksoy

Prose Writing (Monthly)

This is a group designed for writers who are currently working on a novel/novella, memoir or other long-form prose projects. Each month writers will be selected in advance to present an excerpt from their current project for a critique and constructive feedback on their work. Depending on the readings, we hope to be able to explore different aspects and techniques as they arise and to offer continued and more in-depth support throughout the evolution of longer-term writing projects.

Last Tuesday of each month, 6.30 to 8.30 pm
Tutor: Danielle Maisano

Poetry Against Mass Atrocities

Poets Compare Notes on Jewish, Uyghur, and Other Genocides

Ruth Ingram

The ‘Flames of Remembrance’ event organised by Exiled Writers Ink, to mark not only the Jewish Holocaust, but other mass atrocities around the world, featured Uyghur writer and poet Aziz Isa Elkun, Iranian exiled poet Alireza Abiz and two Jewish poets Jennifer Langer, founding director of Exiled Writers Ink, and Viv Fogel, both children of Holocaust survivor refugees.

The devastation caused to the Jewish community as the effects of the genocidal crimes reverberated, prompted Theodor Adorno, the eminent German philosopher, to say, “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” However, Fogel disagrees with Adorno. She is convinced that although poetry might not change politics, “it could heal, bring hope, touch our souls and help us to be better people.”

The constant search for the elusive past is a common theme in exiled writers’ work. Barriers of silence surrounding relatives whose lot was never mentioned, promoted Langer’s search for her lost relatives after her parents’ death. She was desperate for answers but in her poem “History Pursues Me”, all she found were “a few faded footprints and shadows dancing on walls.” “Their names on lists of victims, reports concluding no further trace of him or her.” At times she thought the search had ended, but “memory swaggers like a peacock. History pursues me hungrily, refuses to lie down like a slumbering dog. Sticks to me limpet tight.” She writes

that she has “done her all to unwrap the past,” but knows “it is as elusive as quicksilver.” “Shall I leave you now? Can I mislay you somewhere? Blown as I am ever further into the present. Let me savour the freedom of the moment. Can I rise above the past for a while?” She asked.



Aziz Isa Elkun, barely thirty years old when he was exiled to London from East Turkestan, now the beleaguered Xinjiang ‘autonomous region’ of North West China, first learned about the Holocaust through reading Anne Frank’s diary when he came to England. Ignorant of Jewish history growing up in China, he is heartbroken that his people too are forced to commemorate the Memorial Day with an even heavier heart against the backdrop of their own genocide in his homeland. Trapped outside the borders of his nation, forbidden to return, his poetry is consumed with the sadness of longing, of missing, of anger and grief. He writes to “discharge the agony that stays in his soul.” Poetry gives words to feelings so deep they linger imperceptibly but surface when the autumn leaves turn, when he searches Google Earth for his father’s grave only to find it has become a car park, when he tends his rose garden to keep the fragrance of his homeland alive and when he marks ➤➤

➤ the passage of time by wondering whether he is destined to die with suffering imprinted on his heart.

Alireza Abiz wonders that ordinary, not extraordinary people have been the instruments of barbaric atrocities around the world. Keeping the memory of Holocaust alive was vital, he thought, not simply to prevent future events, but to be conscious that we are all capable of terrible things. He writes to remember. To remember a stream of “kindly” interrogators who have been his family’s constant companion and still pursue his sister who as he writes is being cross-questioned in his home town today. He does not expect healing to come but his poetry replaces the diary he used to write before captors used his early youthful entries to batter him with their questions for months on end.



“For a long time now a black cat has been sitting outside on my verandah,
with his eyes shining,” he writes.
“Looking at me through the darkness.”
“It’s been a long time since I was a sparrow,
Since I was a dog, even since I was a backyard hen.”
“But still this black cat is sitting on the verandah,
Outside my room, with his eyes shining,
Looking at me through the darkness.”

Viv Vogel wrote her first Holocaust poem twenty years ago. Despite never having witnessed Auschwitz, its effects she says never left her. “It was always there.” The slightest thing could trigger a thought or memory that would catapult her into the terror she had inherited from her family growing up. Once the mere act of holding a wasp’s nest hurtled her back in time to the camp huts.

“The bunkers are now
A contrast to the hum and shove, cram and shift,
Huddling close for warmth.
A tear, a crust a whispered hope.
Ash dust coats our shoes, no trees, no birdsong here.
Corridors echo silently, row on row.
Boned feet, stone cold floor.
Names that were list upon list. And here was, and here, and here, were scoring the days etched on brick or wood,
Like growth marks by the nursery door.
What are they now? Whispers, crusts haunted skull eyes that follow you
Wings that perished.”

Wherever she goes, Viv is followed by the secondary memories. “When I see dense forests, barbed wire, rail tracks, something in me remembers.



The stench of it slips between the lines
Urges me to transcribe
Urges me to make sense of it.
But I can’t. I was not there.
Striped pyjamas.
A soft leather valise
A postcard from the Stoke Potteries.
Funnels of dark smoke unfurling.
A lost child’s shoe by the canal
The absence of birdsong
A field of stones
And silence.
Many will roll their eyes.
‘Move on.’ ➤➤

So I do not write about the Holocaust
I was not there. I was not there."

Aziz consumed with longing for the land to which he knows he will never return and a mother whose latter years will be spent alone, separated from her only child, spends his days burning with the injustice and pain of a system that has closed the door forever to the land he loves. He asks himself whether he should allow his heart to blaze unbridled.

"While my emotions are still living through the seasons,
While my love and hate are in full battle,
While my laughter and tears have become inseparable,
Should I allow my suffering heart to become aflame?
When autumn leaves floated on the water,
I could see the reflection of my trembling body.
There are many unanswered questions about life.
Will Elkun die one day with this suffering?" he asks.
With the passing of years, he sometimes allows himself a few morsels of optimism.

A visit to Sardinia in 2016 where "pastries and noodles" reminded him of home and "the figs of Artush [an area in Southern Xinjiang famous for the fruit] grow here throughout the seasons," he felt hope rising again for the future.

"Hopes are rising on the Mediterranean Sea
They arouse great desire in the heart of a desert boy,
Gusts of wind kiss my chin without asking consent,
They drag me to the sea to swim with the sun.
...Elkun seeks a moment of comfort here,
Even though his life belongs to the Tarim!" ■

Note: The Tarim is the longest river in the Uyghur homeland running 1,321 kilometres along the Northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert before turning East.

This abridged article first appeared in *Bitter Winter*, a magazine on religious freedom and human rights around the world with special focus on China.

<https://bitterwinter.org/poets-compare-jewish-uyghur-and-other-genocides/>

Aziz Isa Elkun is a Uyghur poet, writer and academic who was persecuted by the Chinese authorities due to his student political activism. He has published poems, stories and research articles in Uyghur and English with his first book being *Journey from the Danube River to the Orkhon Valley*. His major editing and poetry translation work *Uyghur Poems* is forthcoming from Penguin Random House in September 2023.

New Year, how can I salute you today?

Aziz Isa Elkun

31 December 2017, London

Year!

Once more you have passed
I have no desire for a new one
Because you brought with you
unbearable oppression for my people
Countless friends have disappeared
The humiliation of the Uyghurs reached its peak
All the lovers of freedom thrown into jail
No tears fall from our nation's eyes without blood
But the world pretends to be blind ...
They sell their humanity for profit
If this is what you offer me as a gift
How can I salute you today, New Year?

Year!

You thief of life since ancient times!
That's why our great poet Lutun answered you without fear
The enemy's sword could not kill us all
But the Uyghurs were hardened
Became heroes on the battlefield
Without being defeated!

Year!

I am like a moth burning myself on the fire
But I will not accept my weakness
If this is what you offer me as a gift
How can I say farewell to you
How can I salute you today, New Year?

Year!

Our past has become a monument for us
The agony of our souls burning like a hell
The great caravan has set out on its journey
Though its destination is a road with no return
World, listen to us!
The earth has become too narrow for the stateless Uyghurs
And my people have scattered to the seven continents

Innocent lives begging for humanity
While being a Uyghur has become a crime
If this is what you offer me as a gift
How can I salute you today, New Year?

Year!

In our unjust land, our fists are clenched with rage
No patience left, we are ready to sacrifice for our independence
Life is on the edge, with no meaning left in it for us
The Uyghur problem is still not cured, though it has lasted a century

But the year has taught us tough lessons
And we are now dedicated to the struggle
Let's stop our tears and start to act
If this is what you offer me as a gift
I will salute the New Year with joy!

Exiled in Britain:

Two Stories and Two Poems

Blue

Paloma Zozaya-Gorostiza

She said no, she couldn't make it, "Money's a bit tight, it is quite impossible"; she left it at that.

Why would I want to go out in a world of wielding knives and machetes in the Underground? The world's unravelling. Every single day, from Monday through to Sunday a kid dying, flower wreaths proliferating on blood-soaked city pavements, and mothers crying; why should I go out? Cars mounting pavements and ramming crowds; a world where no one looks into another's eye, but only over the shoulder. She entrenched herself in her back garden amongst roses and ferns, robins and starlings. *This little kitten has used up eight of its lives*, she took to saying.

However, that evening, Azul finished washing the iron pan, the final chore or so she hoped, the last thing to do in that never-ending list of to-do things –the taken for granted little things that must be tucked around the 'big things', all the stuff to keep chaos at bay, stop dust from taking over, toenails from becoming twisted claws.

She dried the pot with a fresh dishcloth out of the fresh dish cloths drawer; put it away in the cupboard next to the collection of iron pots. Azul could not help it, the obsession over the little things, it gave her some sense of security, of being in control. Her hands

would grip until they ached. At times she would interrupt her reading of Borges or Mrs Dalloway to fix an upturned curtain hem or enter an item in a shopping list; since she came back that's how life was, she could not help it, felt disaster always hanging over her head, close by, lying in wait to catch her out when she least expected. But that evening it all came tumbling upon her through some unexpected crack, one chore too many and the one that broke the camel's back. Azul went online and bought herself a ticket to Marseille, then sent a message: 'Arriving next Friday'.

He responded with little doggies holding flowers, with kittens jumping, with a profusion of throbbing hearts and in her chest, out of the blue, an iridescent Fairy Liquid bubble swelled. A long-lost memory of the days before she became invisible.

Paloma Zozaya-Gorostiza is a novelist poet and performance artist who was born in Mexico City. She studied Stage Management at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and has produced and performed in a variety of multimedia shows using texts from the great Latin American poets. Her poetry has been included in various anthologies. Her first novel, *Redencion* was published in Spanish, in 2019 and in English under the title *Harutu Woman* in 2021, both by Victorina Press.

Oracle

Anba Jawi

So, this was London!

The city I visited hundreds of times in my day dreams. Where was my Year Seven classmate, the paper cone gazer? The same classmate who looked into my eyes, moved her four fingers under the cone paper front, back, left, right reading my future:

"You will live in London and have two girls!"

The four protruded paper cones surely had many capital cities on it; such was my luck, I suppose.

I landed in London sixteen years later. The cone paper forecaster missed a small but major detail. She did not inform me about my arrival, the landing ➤➤

➤ and most importantly the reason for my travel. I escaped. I had to leave but not by choice. Just to be safe, my family shipped me and breathed a great sigh of relief.

Walking alone around Camden market, my mind raced to grasp the various forms of entertainment on offer: Top of the Pops, Blankety Blank, Terry Wogan and Robin Day's Question Time. So many programmes!

As for the Milk Snatcher, she should wear a Chanel suit to be true to herself. I was troubled by her tacky blue-coloured suits; she was Prime Minister and therefore wealthy like prime ministers back home. They constantly stole public money. She should visit countries in the Middle East and see for herself. And as for that hand bag, well it should be thrown in the bin. Her distasteful shade of blue was exactly same colour as the one worn by a peasant singer who appeared on Baghdad TV: A singer who could not sing and pretended he was brilliant. How on earth did the English population vote for her? Did they have no style?

I clutched the Evening Standard newspaper, after ensuring I had bought it at noon to catch any suitable "room to let" before it evaporated through the fog of the city. I looked through the price list and found an affordable one in N16. Moving from N19 to N16 did not seem significant. I took a few coins from my purse into my hands, strolled to the nearest available red telephone box and dialled the number for the N16 room.

"Aloo," I said.

"Good evening, young lady," he answered.

I moved back towards the heavy metal framed glass wall of the small red box. How did he realise I was young? The voice perhaps? He continued, "are you phoning regarding the room?"

"Yes sir. Can I come and see it?"

"By all means, yes do, I will give you the address, do you have pen and paper?"

I was struggling to understand his accent, his Rs were non-existent and it was as

though he swallowed some letters. It occurred to me, why don't Londoners speak English?

"I will give you the address: it's 71 Stoke Newington Church Street, N16."

"What?"

"S for Sierra, T for Tango, O for Oscar, K for Kilo, E for Echo ..."

He showered me with words, rapidly and without mercy.

"Mister, mister please," the coins ran out and the phone line cut off.

I was bemused; why did this man live in a street which forced you to catch your breath after uttering it? Why didn't he live on Baker Street or Bond Street or Oval Street where I live or even Gower Street, the precise place where I was standing using the red telephone box?

Do affordable places deliberately have lengthy names to add value to them? How odd.

I pulled the heavy red door of the telephone box and exited humming the tune from the film "My Fair Lady".

Oh why can't the English

Why can't the English

Learn to speak? ■

Anba Jawi MBE was born in Baghdad and studied Geology at the University of Baghdad and then gained her PhD from UCL London. She worked in the refugee sector for more than 20 years. She writes and publishes in Arabic and English. A chapter from her novel *The Silver Engraver* was included in the TLC Free Reads Anthology (2019) and two chapters were produced in a chapbook published by Exiled Writers Ink (2021). She also worked as a translator and editor of the recently published *The Utopians of Tahrir Square* (Palewell Press) an anthology of protest and witness poetry from Iraq.

Navigation

M Sánchez

Mother had come back from a holiday in the UK, wearing a wedding ring.

She announced: *Nos vamos*/We're moving. Packing all we could in our Seat 600

we set out for the ferry: Madrid- Bilbao -

Southampton. I spoke very little English.

After we landed, I grabbed the map and sat beside mother to stop her driving on the right

in front of lorries that flashed their headlights warning us to read the signs of the new country.

9pm: While He Drinks and Watches TV

M Sánchez

She holds her breath, praying for
the baby on her hip to be quiet
as she slides open the bedroom door
to the back garden, lifts the latch
of the gate, still praying for the baby
to be quiet, bare feet crunching

across gravel, then over a fallen fence
into next door's path and crossing
the road, shelters in the shadows of
a friend's doorway, knocks, waits.

Marina Sanchez: Indigenous Mexican/ Spanish and British award-winning poet and translator, widely published in literary journals and international anthologies.



Oppressed Writers

An important part of the work of Exiled Writers Ink is an awareness of writers' plights. Our literary activism, sometimes in partnership with Amnesty International, enables the voices of unjustly persecuted writers to be heard. Endangered in their countries because of their resistance to being silenced about oppression and the abuse of human rights, the writers we feature want the world to understand their desperate situation.

Banned Iranian Theatre Director

Theatre in Iran has been subject to strict censorship since the 1979 Islamic Revolution but playwrights and directors became adept at presenting their topics symbolically and metaphysically in scripts and on the stage. Recently, however, the Iranian government has cracked down far more harshly on theatre companies and productions.

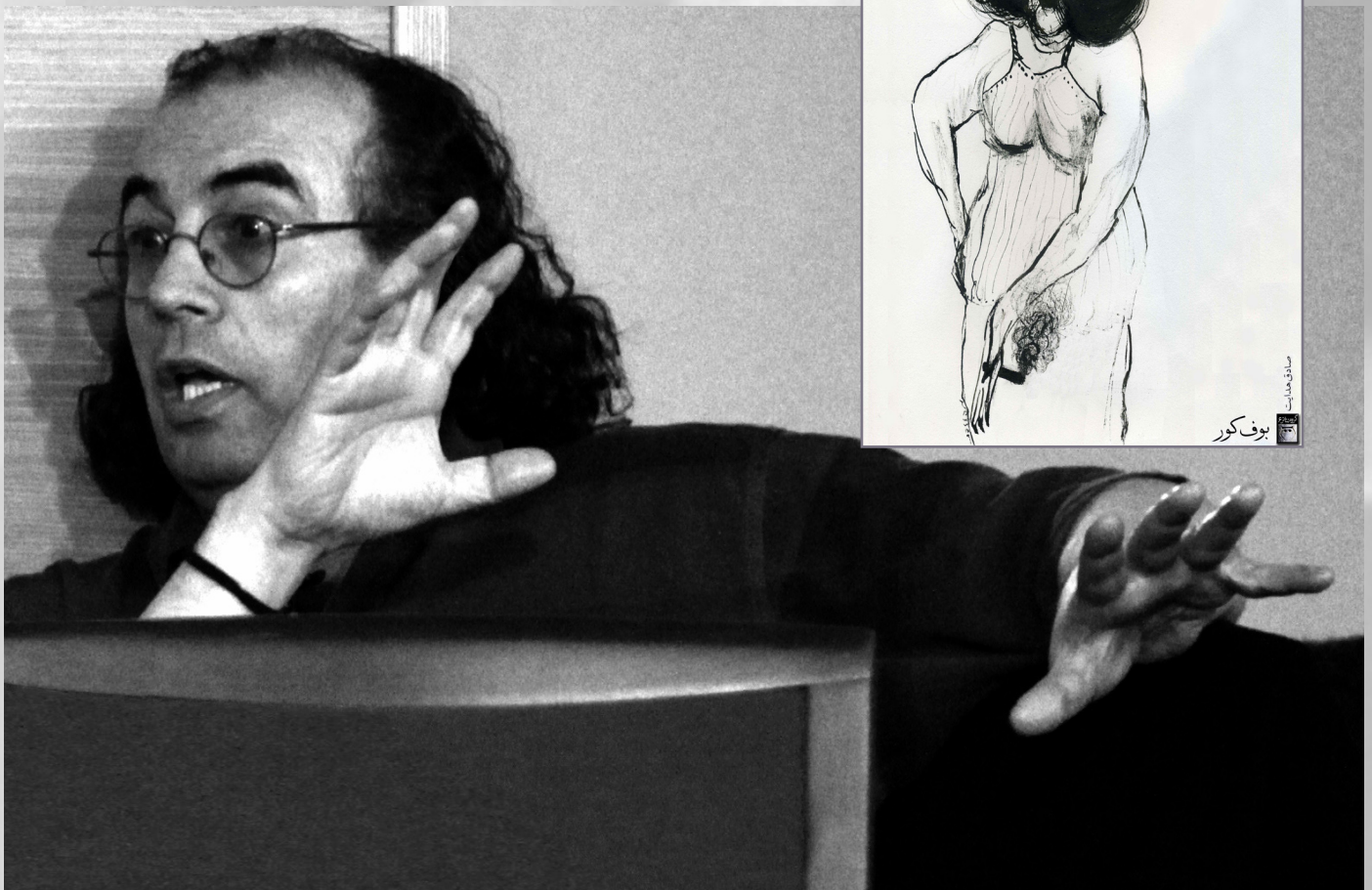
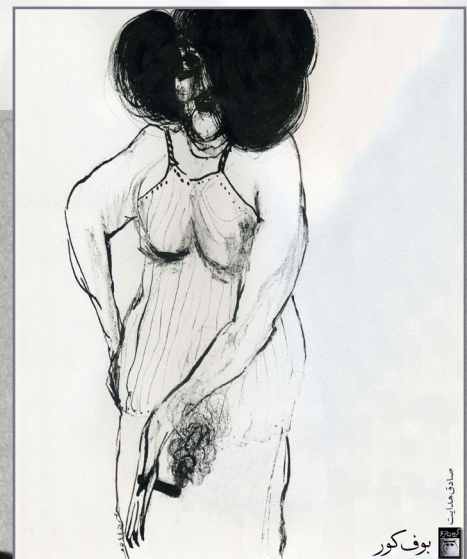
Nasser Mehr is an Iranian theatre director who has long been accustomed to work-ing within the constraints of censorship, finding his own subtle way of presenting ideas. Now the situation is dire as the Iranian authorities have totally forbidden him from producing plays as well as from acting and teaching drama. In particular *Owl*, which Mehr adapted from Sadegh Hedayat's novel *The Blind Owl* and which is the last play he produced, has been banned. In fact, Hedayat's work was cen-sored or banned completely, both before and after the revolution in Iran, yet *The Blind Owl* has maintained its place in people's hearts.

After working in theatre in France for seven years and in Germany for fifteen years, Nasser Mehr returned to Iran and founded Theatre Group 6. "Room No. 6" was the first play he staged after his return,

which was an adaptation of the story of the same name by Anton Chekhov. He then staged several plays by Heiner Müller such as "Mauser", "Heracles Five" and "Hamlet the Car".

In response to the current desperate situation, 'Theatre 6' Group, together with artists and students of theatre studies and the people of Iran, demands freedom and democratic rights for all. Their petition to the Director General of The Interna-tional Theatre Institute, UNESCO, contains crucial demands such as the immedi-ate release of all political prisoners including artists and creatives held in Iranian prisons, the abolition of the death penalty, the upholding of freedom of expression and the ending of censorship, removing the teaching ban on teachers/lecturers and the right to work of all artists, the ceasing of the monopoly of "religious theatre" or "ideological groups" represented as "national theatre of Iran" and the end to the discriminatory promotion of all theatre productions in Iran.

Cover of *The Blind Owl*





Photos: Hadi Panahi



Photos: Hadi Panahi

An Endangered Turkish Writer

Exiled Writers Ink received this letter from an exiled Turkish author and journalist earlier this year.

My name is K.G. I am a Turkish journalist and author of five published books on topics such as evolution theory, children's circumcision, history, and politics. I was the founder and editor-in-chief of a local news website in Turkey where my journalism was in opposition to the Turkish-nationalist and political Islamic government.

In January 2020, I shared a 300-year-old poem on my personal Facebook profile which someone then reported to the police. The poem written by Ottoman Poet Sünbülzade Vehbi Efendi is entitled "Rücu" which is old Turkish and can be translated into English as "giving up at the last moment." (Pretending to say something bad and then changing the word at the last minute.) The poem was seen as "insulting" Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and I was sentenced to two years in prison: www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-journalist-kaan-goktas-sentenced-to-prison-for-insulting-erdogan-over-300-year-old-poem-news-59422

In September 2022, I was the subject of another investigation where the prosecutor forcibly seized my smartphone and examined my WhatsApp conversations with my wife, friends, family and my news sources. This led to the police raiding my home in the early hours of the morning where they proceeded to arrest me and seized my computers and disks. They "found" email conversations and social media posts on my computer which they used as evidence against me to charge me with supporting a legal political party the HDP (People's Democratic Party), a party with left-wing political views. In these investigations, the government is seeking to punish me with one to five years in prison for each social media post.

In October 2022, I fled to Montenegro leaving my family and children behind and am currently living in a hostel room. I have applied for asylum here but Montenegro's laws concerning refugees means that I am unable to work in the country legally. There is a large Turkish community in Montenegro but due to my traumatic experiences of being harassed by the Turkish authorities I am fearful to trust or contact anyone. So, I am now alone and unemployed.

I have sent out many emails to NGOs, foundations and associations in the hope of finding help or freelance work, but I have received very little feedback especially from the press alliances and press freedom organisations in Turkey who have been very passive with some even ignoring me. Unfortunately, it seems that the atmosphere of fear in Turkey has permeated into every institution.

Turkey is heading for a crucial election in the near future. Dictator Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has his work cut out for him because of the hyper-inflation and the high cost of living. But it is also very difficult to guarantee that the elections in Turkey will be transparent and impartial. My hope is that the dictator will be overthrown in this election and my homeland will return to democracy and freedom.

Letters

An Imprisoned Kurdish Poet

İlhan Sami Çomak is a multi-award-winning Kurdish poet from Turkey with international acclaim. As a citizen of a state which consistently scores amongst the top jailers of academics, artists, poets and writers defending human rights, Comak also holds the unenviable title of the longest serving political student. To date this is a twenty-eight-year sentence, the last eight of which are still being served in solitary confinement.

İlhan's first selected works in English have now been published by Smokestack Books (see our review). He wrote the letter below on his 50th birthday.

March 8th, 2023

Silivri, Heavy Security Prison, İstanbul

Dear friends,

Today I know for sure that, there is a certain limit to how we deal with pain. The scars of pain never go away completely. Instead, we reposition ourselves in a place that envisages living by creating an area of consensus that can carry the wounds inflicted on our soul. Also, against the light and volatile nature of joys, pain descends upon us like an authority that permanently dictates and monopolizes our lives; and this is the nature of pain.

Today is my birthday. I am not happy, I am far from joy and closer to pain than ever before. It is a great, insurmountable pain that cannot be passed over in silence, that shatters the soul and shakes the existence to its foundations; yet this unbearable pain reminds us of the honour of being human in solidarity.

In the earthquake that took place in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, the sky inside me collapsed along with the houses and buildings destroyed there, and I am not happy.

Dear friends, We were in front of the TV for days, watching the afterwards of that big disaster took thousands of people from us. If tears are to be accepted as a form of solidarity, I will definitely not fail in class. I know how to cry. I cried for those who died. The screams of those left behind and the despair of inability to do anything inflicted on my soul. Crying was good because it made us more human and I cried.

I had a hearing on February the 10th. The court application I made to officially add Sami, which I inherited from my deceased brother and which I have been already using in practice for years, would finally be officially added to my name before the court.

I had to get excited, I would finally take Sami's name legally, and we would be completely one with him. The judge informed me that my request was accepted. However, at that moment, I realized that I was not actually as happy as I should have been with this court order, which was supposed to meant to be a rebirth for me.

When the hearing was over, I left the room where I was connected to the court from the prison by zoom. I came to near the guard sitting at the table waiting to take me back to my cell. I was seeing him for the first time. He was quiet and thoughtful. He looked at me and asked with a genuine

interest "How are you, it looks like you're sorry, did you get a punishment?" I explained him the reason for the trial and told him that the reason for my sadness was the earthquake. At that moment, he directed his gaze to me more carefully. He was young, his age was probably about the same age as my detention.

He spoke, I listened. His words began to be accompanied by his tears. He had lost twelve of his relatives in the earthquake, many of whom were still under the rubble. All his pain, the deep pain of all his losses, leapt from that young person into my heart and eyes; I cried with him. I hugged him like I would hug a relative, in a very unusual way for a high-security prison. We consoled each other. He gave me a napkin to wipe my tears. At that moment, we did not exist as a prisoner and an official guard, but only as two people united by pain. We were stripped of all our other identities, we were human, we were only human.

Considering that we felt the same sad sense of unity and the urging need to connect with all people during the pandemic period, it should not be wrong to say that all major traumas are an opportunity to stop and question ourselves and make a fresh start for humanity.

Pain should be a warning to us about the importance of preserving our humanity for this world we use brutally. What matters is how we accept and what we do with these disasters and tragedies that happen to us. It would be magnificent if only we could remember the enduring beauty of being human and the empowerment of solidarity without going through such destructive tests. This is the only way to defeat evil.

Today is my birthday. I was born but living is a heavy burden.

However, despite all the difficulties, your presence in my life is very important and I am really happy that our paths somehow crossed. You, each of you and the generous solidarity you have shown to me lightens the burden of my life.

And I would like to thank you all for that.

İlhan Sami Çomak

Whispering Walls

by Choman Hardi

Afsana Press, 2023

Review: Catherine Davidson

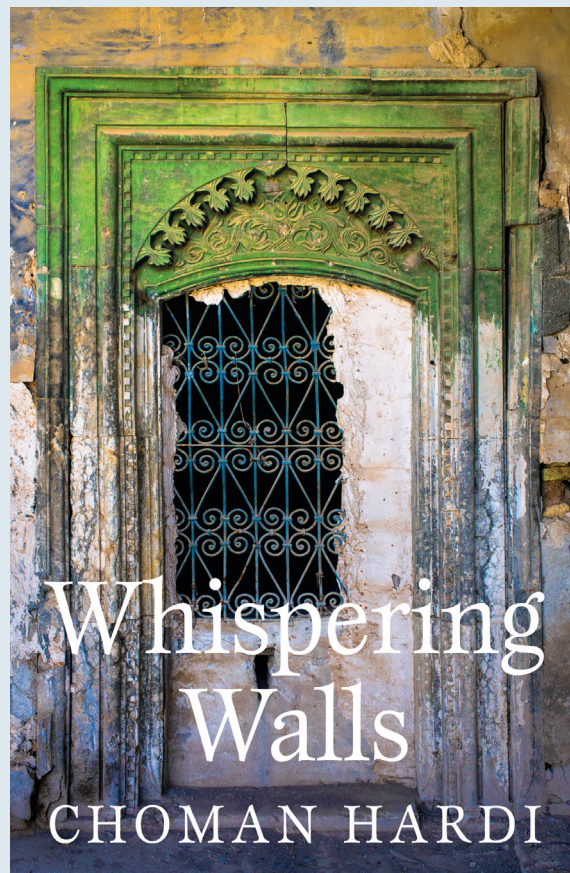
Choman Hardi was the first Chair of the Board of Exiled Writers Ink. She is an internationally renowned professor and an award-winning poet. *Whispering Walls* is her first novel, and it is sure to garner the same kind of critical acclaim and wide readership as her poetry.

Set in the weeks leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the main characters are two brothers and a sister who live under the shadow of personal and collective tragedy. Lana is a poet who left the conflicts in Kurdistan to make her life in London, where her brother Hiwa also lives. One brother, Gara, remains in the house in Slemani where they were all raised. Two siblings are missing, however, and the novel's narrative tension arises from the discovery of why they still haunt the living.

As the novel begins, Hiwa struggles to clear out his study to make room for his young daughter's nursery. While he sorts through the photographs and letters that link him to his past, a ghost hovers – that of his charismatic sister, Tara. The story travels between past and present, London and Kurdistan, as Tara's story unfolds. She comes to represent the tragedy of Kurdistan, as a patriarchal culture closes in on her and she finds no outlet for her abundant gifts.

The invasion gathers momentum, and the siblings debate the potential for disaster or liberation while grappling with their ghosts. How to escape the weight of the past while making way for a better future? Each character confronts the same question in their own unique way.

Hardi's writing here displays the same fresh imagery and sharp observations as her poetry. Her book has resonance for our contemporary moment, and should be lauded for its exemplary writing and complex moral vision.



The U.S. invasion of Iraq is looming. Three siblings – two in London, one in Slemani – recall their troubled past. Stories of war, displacement, and coming to terms with the tragedies of a Kurdish family, all told from their different perspectives.

Binding	Paperback
Format	198 x 129 mm
Extent	304 pages
Price	£10.99
ISBN	9781739982454

You can order this book at:

[Afsana Press...](https://www.afsana.com/)

Brother of the Bride

by Joseph Kaifala

Palewell Press, 2022

Review: Esther Lipton

There are three levels of appreciation of this short, but charming, story by the Sierra Leone writer and poet, Joseph Kaifala.

Firstly, it is an engaging and true account of his search for a wedding dress, which Joseph promised to buy in America for his older sister, Hawa, who lived in West Africa. At the time he was a student at Skidmore College, New York. His last-minute endeavours, despite the wintry setbacks, surprised store assistants, unstated financial outlay, and travel complications, are successful. His determination to keep his promise, helped by his college friend, Alicia Wells Day, is well rewarded.

Secondly, it is an autobiographical telling of his own family story. The family lost everything in the Sierra Leonean Civil war and became refugees. His father died in a refugee camp in Guinea and, as the eldest son, he became head of the family with attendant responsibilities, including giving permission for Hawa's marriage. His mother, a devout Catholic, has had a positive influence on his outlook on life. Cloaked, as was the biblical Joseph after whom he is named, in a Coat of Many Colours made by his mother for him and his brother, he felt handsome and loved. Yet as a witness to two bloody wars he did not fully understand, he became an angry teenager. Despite such difficult beginnings, his achievements both academic and as a human rights activist, are mentioned in a short, but impressive biography.

Thirdly, it is a serious book, in which his philosophical thoughts are clearly and succinctly expressed. They include his views on the contract of marriage and on polygamy and monogamy in a post-colonial society. He poses the question –

BROTHER OF THE BRIDE

shopping for my sister's wedding dress

JOSEPH KAIFALA



between a polygamist and a monogamous spouse with multiple concubines, who is better? He also shares his concern against child marriages and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation).

Brother of The Bride is an easy and enjoyable read, but with several layers and many interesting angles. The front cover shows two photos: one, Joseph Kaifala as the photographer and the other of his beautiful sister Hawa wearing the exquisite dress. After all the trouble to buy the dress, it would have been lovely to see it portrayed full-length!

Binding	Paperback
Extent	106 pages
Price	£9.99
ISBN	978-1911587668

You can order this book at:
[Palewell Press...](#)

Separated From The Sun

by İlhan Comak

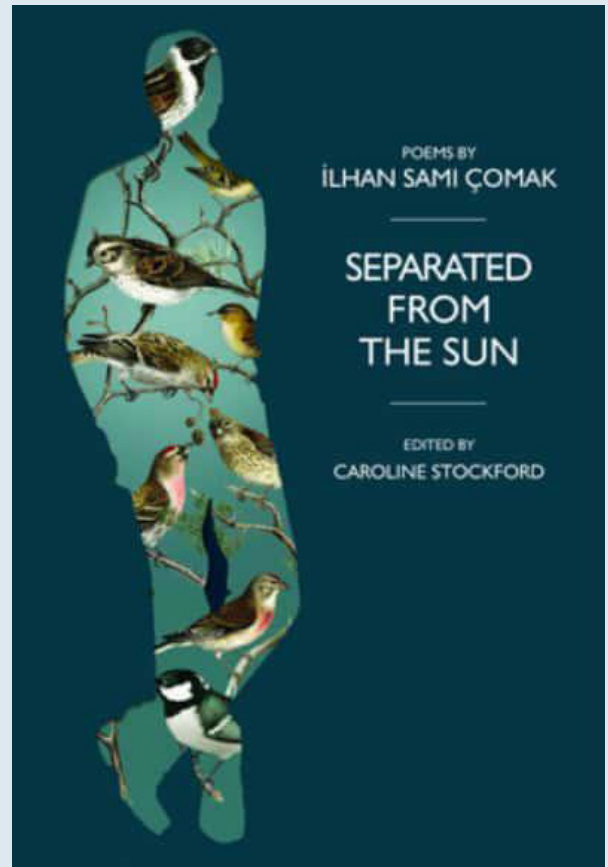
Smokestack, 2022

Review: Tamara Wilson

İlhan Sami Comak is a multi-award-winning Kurdish poet from Turkey with international acclaim. As a citizen of a state which consistently scores amongst the top jailers of academics, artists, poets, and writers defending human rights, Comak also happens to hold the unenviable title of the longest serving political student with (to date) a twenty-eight-year sentence - the last eight of which are still being served in solitary confinement.

Astonishingly, it is during the bleak barrenness of these eight years that he steps into the world of poetry, collecting various awards including Turkey's prestigious Metin Altıok and Sennur Sezer Award along with the Norwegian Authors' Union Freedom of Expression Prize. This is not only an outstanding personal achievement attained in the face of unimaginable cruelty and deprivation; this is a literary landmark that sets İlhan apart from his predecessors, the canons of Anatolian literature such as: Nazim Hikmet, Sabahattin Ali, and more recently, Asli Erdogan and Ahmet Altan. For while all these grand masters were political prisoners at one stage or another throughout their lives, they each had established literary reputations by the time of their imprisonment.

The poet's first poetry book in English, *Separated From The Sun* is brought to us via a fantastic constellation of translators* and with the editorial brilliance of Caroline Stockford. One of the most striking things about this collection is the palpable absence of melancholy pertinent to works compiled under the straining climes of a prison. On the contrary, the collection has the feel of an intimate album encapsulating cherished moments as if İlhan writes to correct the space between an enforced, fabricated now that is not his and a thoroughly lived, inhaled, absorbed then: not only owned but celebrated with all its vibrance and abrupt barbarity.



But I long for the forests: the geometry of green
I want the other side of light and dark;
other side of the cool morning.

He writes in one of his poems responding to John Casquerelli before taking us to measure freedom with him through 'a stretch of grass and a constant sky'; and juxtaposes the 'pomegranate smile' of a carefree childhood against the measured barrenness behind iron bars: not once giving up hope.

Life; separated from the sun.
There is no direction here.
But there is a way out.
Always a way out.

An empowering, elegant collection to love and to hold in the face of rising right-wing populism and related hate-crimes.

*Sevda Akyuz, Paula Darwish, Clifford Endres, Idil Karacadag, Canan Marasligil, Sakir Ozdogru, Caroline Stockford and Oyku Tekten.

You can order this book at:
[Smokestack Books...](#)

Poetry's Geographies: A Transatlantic Anthology of Translations

Edited by

Katherine M. Hedeon & Zoe Skoulding

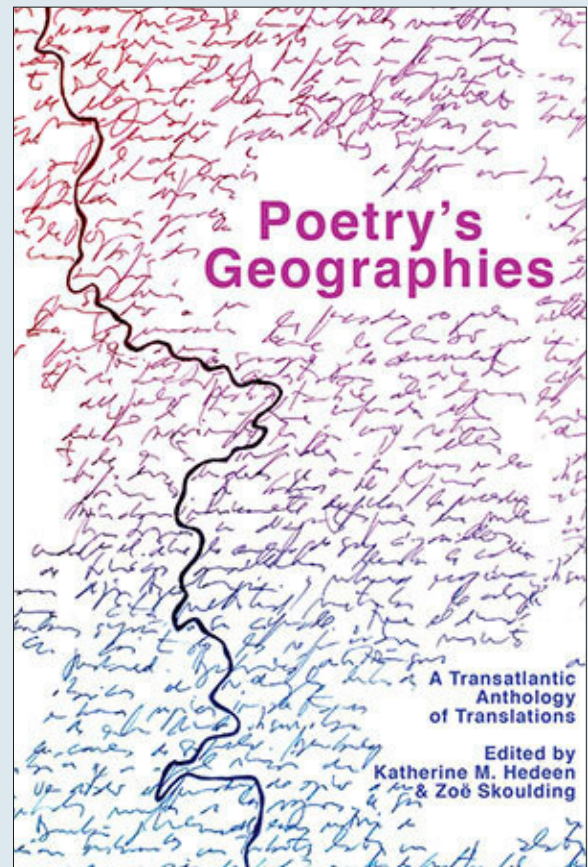
Shearsman, 2022

Review: Jennifer Langer

This book is unusual in that it is about the art of poetry translation, a significant area of interest to Exiled Writers Ink in its work with refugee and migrant poets.

The premise of the anthology was that the translators were from either side of the Atlantic Ocean and that these poet-translators from North America and the UK selected poets to translate into English – from Mexico, Korea, Galicia (Spain), Palestine, Russia, Sweden, Iran, Guatemala, Cuba, India and France. The translators include names familiar to me such as Sasha Dugdale, Stephen Watts and Ghazal Mosadeq. In fact, Dugdale is singled out for raising the profile of translation in the UK through her activities as a poet, translator and former editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*.

One translator concurs with Derrida's thinking that translation is like one language licking or caressing another, like a tongue or/of flame, a desiring proximity and distance (difference) in which they appear to touch without complete consummation. Another translator sees translation as a kind of sympathetic magic that creates transformation, yet I am well aware that deviation from the literal translation is resisted by some exiled poets. Each translator's essay is followed by their poetry translation with Dugdale's fragmentary form echoing the fragmentation of Maria Stepanova's poetry. The translator provides insights into the trajectory of her own thought processes and the way her body, memory and personal experiences



act to mediate and access Stepanova's sensibilities and inner self.

Stephen Watts, who has long translated Ziba Karbassi's poetry, stresses the importance of empathy and shared understanding deeply rooted in an originary language and explosions of language intrinsic to both in the creation of their poetry. For Watts, meeting face-to-face is central to the co-translation process so that the final poem is jointly owned by both poet and translator.

The diversity of translators' approaches in all their manifestations is inspiring and impressive and certainly deepens the art of translation.

Binding	Paperback
Extent	180 pages
Price	£14.95
ISBN	9781848618510

You can order this book at:

[Shearsman Books...](#)

I Will Not Fold These Maps

by Mona Kareem

Translated by Sara Elkamel

Poetry Translation Centre, London, 2023

Review: David Clark

Mona Kareem was born in Kuwait in 1987 and published her first poetry collection aged 14. She was born into a Bidoon family, part of an outcast ethnic minority in Kuwait. Bidoon civil rights were increasingly eroded, stripped of their citizenship, denied access to public education and regular employment. In 2011 Kareem obtained a postgraduate fellowship to study in the USA, but the Kuwaiti government then refused to allow her to return to Kuwait to visit her family, forcing her into permanent exile. She has been granted asylum in the USA and continues to write in Arabic.

Her poems have a dreamlike quality, part recognisable landscape and part fantasmagoric. In the first poem in this collection, *Perdition*, she writes ‘roses jump to their death from my bed’, as her mother tucks her ‘into the desert of life’. Here we have the juxtaposition of her mother cosily tucking her in bed, while roses commit suicide and an uncertain future awaits her.

What is striking and quite unique are the images Kareem conjures up. ‘A ship asphyxiates the ocean’s larynx’, ‘the night is strangled’, ‘a tear attempts martyrdom out of my eye’s abyss’.

Each poem is full of contrasts, each layer concealing another story, another possible outcome. Underlying it all are the poet’s aspirations and hopes, for herself and for humanity, as well as the obstacles and twists of fate that thwart our best intentions; all our futures remain uncertain; the poem is both witness and enigmatic oracle. This reinforces a sense of treading unknown territory



where nothing is quite what it seems.

Each poem is presented in the English translation and in the Arabic original. For those who cannot read the Arabic, it nonetheless provides the reader with the opportunity to see the poem beautifully displayed in Arabic.

Binding	Paperback
Extent	66 pages
Price	£9.00
ISBN	978-1739894832

You can order this book at:
[Poetry Translation Centre...](https://www.poetrytranslationcentre.org/)

Exiled Lit Cafe

Every first Monday of the month hear some fantastic exiled writers and musicians and there is an Open Mic session too.

June Cafe: Book launch

Thursday 8th June at 6 pm

Exiled Writers Ink is proud to host the London launch of

Welcome to Britain: An Anthology of Poems and Short Fiction

**Edited by Ambrose Musiyiwa and
published by Civic Leicester**

Address:

Camden Arts Centre – in the Drawing Studio
Arkwright Road (corner of Finchley Road)
London NW3 6DG
Opposite Finchley Road and Froggnal Over-
ground station. A few minutes walk from Finch-
ley Road tube station.

(£5 or £3 for EWI 2023 members)

Pay cash at the door or by Eventbrite:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/youre-invited-to-welcome-to-britain-launch-with-anthology-contributors-tickets-632005323937>

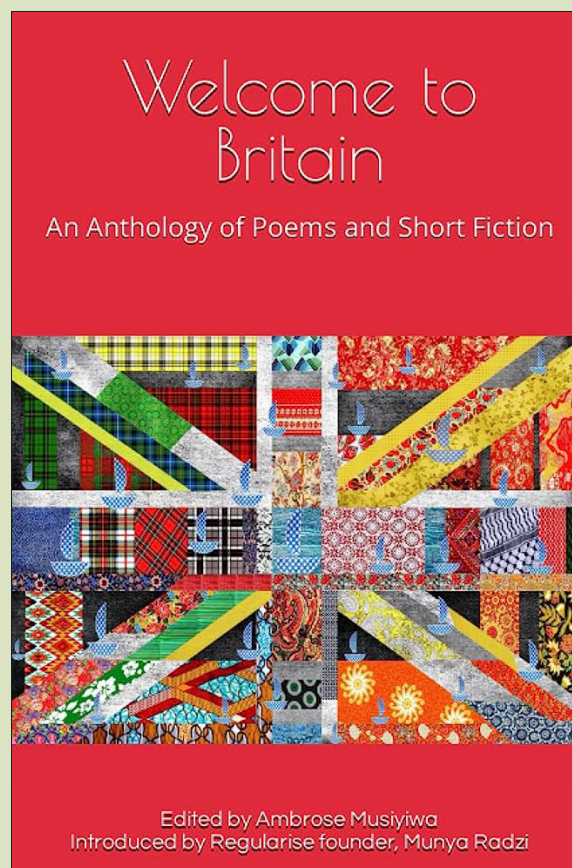
Exiled Writers Ink and Keats House present: 'Writing Hurts'

Special event for Refugee Week 2023

An evening of poetry and discussion with acclaimed poets
Dr Fouad M. Fouad, Dr Jennifer Langer and Ziba Karbassi
Thursday, 22nd June 2023

6:30 – 8:30 pm

Keats House, Keats Grove London NW3 2RR



Too often, the stories we are told about our history and our place in the world are incomplete, inaccurate, or even fabricated, perpetuating a cycle of prejudice, ignorance and injustice. At the heart of Welcome to Britain: An Anthology of Poems and Short Fiction is recognition that the myths and fictions Britain likes to tell about itself need to be contested and subverted.

Introduction by Ambrose Musiyiwa

Contributors:

Sandra Agard, Max Fishel, Marsha Glenn, Natasha Gordon-Polomski, Patricia Headlam, Ziba Karbassi, Yessica Klein, Esther Lipton, Jacob Lund, Walid Marmal, Andrew Staunton, Elizabeth Uter, Michael Walling, Judith Amanthis, Roger Griffith, Chryst Salt, George Symonds

Exiled Ink Magazine

Innovative magazine reflecting exciting, different voices in a new cultural environment. Literature, discussion, commentary. The magazine is unique in providing an insight into dislocation and cultures of exile, both through the voices of exiled writers and through their literary work.

Exiled Writers Ink has published 14 issues in print (available to order) and five other issues as e-magazine.

exiled writers ink
— voices in a strange land

Since its foundation in 2000, Exiled Writers Ink has worked on many projects designed to support the work of exiled writers, refugees, and migrants. Our work comprises creative writing workshops, training, live literature performance events, theatre, mentoring, translation, publications, symposia, poetry competitions, and roadshows.

Our theatre projects have included productions in partnership, performed in the UK and in Poland, Italy, and Bosnia.

Our Objectives

- To provide support to exiled writers, refugees, and migrants through publishing opportunities, other creative employment, performance experience, and access to workshops and editorial feedback from qualified tutors and professional writers
- To provide dislocated writers with a community of writers in the attempt to lessen the sense of isolation and trauma of exile and displacement.
- To increase the representation and visibility of refugee and migrant writers and their work in the mainstream literary world where their voices have been insufficiently heard.
- To provide a platform for those who have experienced life under repressive regimes and war-torn situations to speak out, act as witnesses and protest against and raise awareness of the abuse of human rights worldwide.
- To encourage cross-cultural dialogue and to bring conflicted groups together to explore individual narratives, culture, memory, fears, and experience through discussion, creative writing workshops, and performance events that provide insight into the complexity of identity and enable us to resist hostile narratives.
- To ensure that artists of refugee and migrant backgrounds receive fair payment and due credit for their creative work by external organizations.

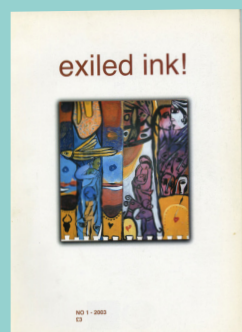
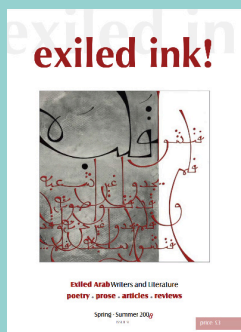
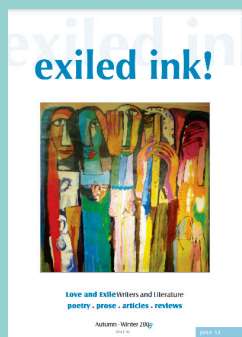
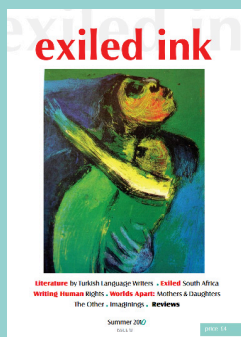
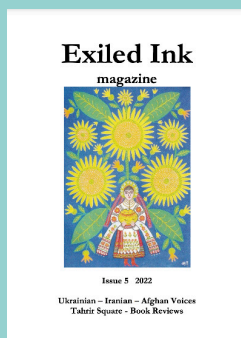
To become a member visit our website:

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You will be kept informed of all the activities of the organisation and may have an opportunity to participate in paid work.

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