

Exiled Ink

magazine



Home and Return

Issue 9 – 2026

This issue explores home as memory, longing, loss and identity. Across the poems and prose, home is not simply a place but something carried in language, the body and the imagination. For many of these writers, the homeland remains deeply internalised, even when it has been altered by war, oppression, exile or time. Home appears here as both refuge and rupture: a source of belonging, but also of grief.

The *Return* section deepens this theme by showing that going back is rarely simple. Return can bring recognition, but also estrangement, as writers confront changed landscapes, absent loved ones and the gap between memory and reality. These pieces suggest that exile often creates a layered, unsettled sense of belonging. For many, the adopted home in the UK offers safety and continuity, but does not fully replace the emotional pull of the first home.

Alongside these reflections, *The Poetics of Displacement and Resistance* and the review section show how literature bears witness to violence, migration and survival. Together, the works in this issue ask where home is, how it endures, and what writing can preserve when so much has been lost.

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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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© Cover art: **Iwewe neni** by **Samantha Rumbidzai Vazhure** ©**Iwewe neni**.

You and me. The painting explores togetherness beyond the physical, delving into emotional and spiritual partnership. It portrays the invisible thread binding two beings across space and circumstance.

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HOME

No farewell

Afsaneh Gitiforouz

In this house
where dust has made its home
rotting floorboards creak
rooms are trapped in long dull silence
spiderwebs veiling the kitchen stove
a bathtub embracing dried water stains

I speak of this abandoned home
that remembers
children racing across its floorboards
a couple making love in its rooms
a kitchen rich with the scent of baked bread
lace curtains recalling beauty in the tub

In this house
from within these walls
the family left in a rush
said no farewell to their home
leaving the house behind
waiting
and lonely.

Afsaneh Gitiforouz, is a British Iranian poet, novelist, and a committee member of Exiled Writers Ink. Her work has appeared in Sidhe Press anthologies *To Light the Trails* (2024), *To Lay Sun into a Forest* (2025) and *Radical Roots* (2024). The Barbican commissioned her in 2022 to lead the poetry session of 'Age of Many Posts'.

Mouse

Marina Sánchez

This is another house
we are passing through
where shadows and mother's
furtive tears hang on walls
that echo with my sister's
constant cough.

I inhale the scent
of lemon and vanilla
from the thick black plaits
of the Nahuatl woman
singing in mother's
hand-me-down dress.

Across the street, the elders
await their journey
of cypresses and marigolds
to *la Tierra de los Muertos*
and the cemetery that looms
behind their living room.

But on Sunday afternoons
there's a bullfight on TV
and childhood's mouse
scuttles in the darkness
playing with the blue haze
of father's Havana.

Nahuatl: both the largest Indigenous group in Mexico and their language.

La Tierra de Los Muertos: Spanish: literally the Land of the Dead or underworld.

Havana is a cigar.

Marina Sánchez, is a mix of Indigenous Mexican and Spanish. She is an award-winning poet and translator, widely published in literary journals and anthologies. She is one of four Latinx female writers featured in *Wasafiri* January 2026 issue showcasing British Latinx Writing & Art.

Portrait of Fatuma

Fatuma Ibrahim

Fatuma walks out of childhood
before she knows
what it means to lose a place forever.
The road takes her hand,
the night takes her breath,
but she carries her mother's voice
like a small light in her palm.

Behind her lies Somalia,
a country she still loves
in fragments of memory-
sunset on warm walls,
prayer drifting through morning air,
siblings laughing in dusty streets.
She folds these moments
like a photograph
that refuses to fade.

Ahead of her, Dadaab (DDB) rises-
a place made of dust and courage,
where tents hold stories
the world rarely hears.
Here she learns to grow
on unsteady ground,
to hope without certainty,
to rise without applause.

Two homes live in her eyes:
Somalia, the first heartbeat,
and Dadaab, the place that shaped
her strength and becoming.
When she imagines returning,
the thought trembles-
would the old streets know her name?
Would she still fit
inside the doorway of yesterday?

Yet at the centre of her story
stands Fatuma-
not defined by war,
not held by borders,
but carved from resilience
and the quiet fire
she carries in her chest.

Her home is not one place now.
It is layers of becoming:
childhood, courage, exile, growth.
And when she walks,
the world sees a woman-
but the truth is deeper:

Fatuma is a homeland in motion,
a map of heartbeats,
a shelter built from everything
she refused to let die.

Fatuma Ibrahim Osman, is a poet and humanitarian practitioner based in Kenya. Raised in Dadaab refugee camp, her work draws on community engagement and lived experience to explore identity, gender and social justice with clarity, depth and global relevance.



Artwork by **Payam Farrahi**, Iranian artist living in exile in the USA

Home: A Ghazal

After Agha Shahid Ali

Usha Kishore

When I go back home, I have no home to go to,
I am learning how to go back home with no home.

I bury the pain of loss in the haunting lines of Shahid,
Home is always a missed land – the lullabies of the sea.

I have conspired with the Gods, and made a pledge,
made a tryst with destiny to go home, without a home,

I have chanted oaths in Sanskrit, my father's tongue,
Greater than heaven is my motherland, my home ...

For those exiles, who live in some other land,
blessed is the land, when the monsoons return home.

When melancholy beats its wings, verse is born,
Will the monsoon cuckoo bring songs of home?

Tell me Shahid, you who hold temples to your eyes,
Do I say my twilight prayers to my sacred home?

The temples are here in my heart, but do I belong
here?
Do I belong anywhere? Tell me where is home?

I am free like the soaring gulls on this island,
But at night to rest my head, do I have a home?

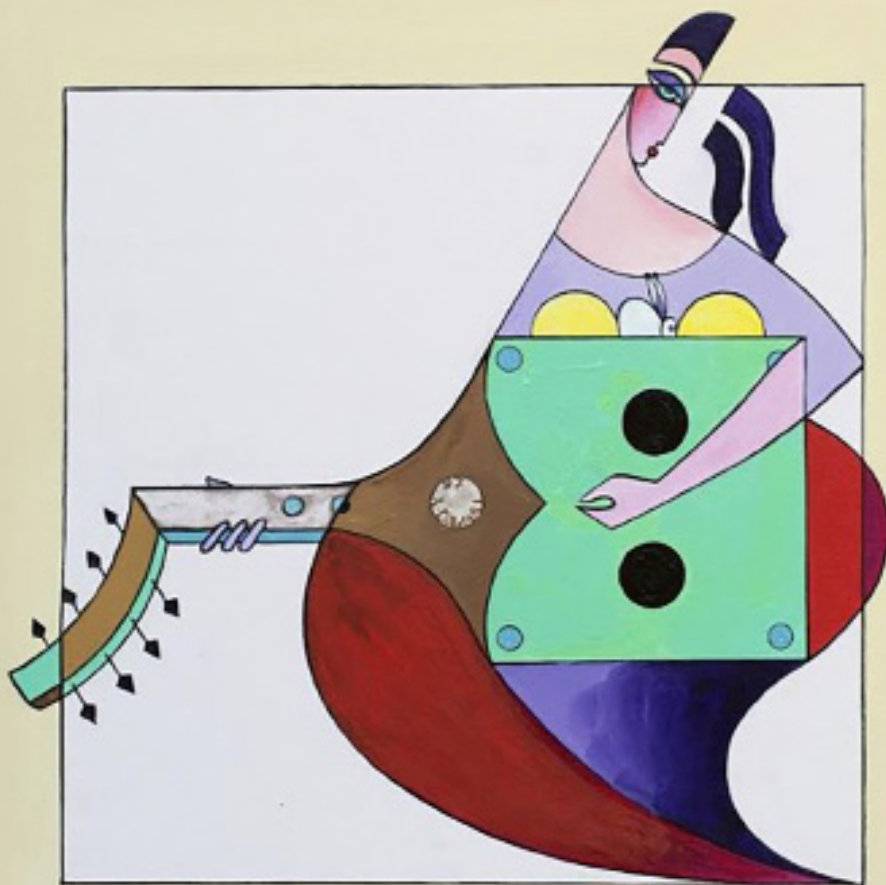
I offer prayers to the sky with the crescent moon,
Let the land I live in, be my forever home.

But who awaits you here? Who awaits you there,
Usha?

Your tears have taught you to go home, without a
home.

Line in italics is from Shahid's ghazal, 'Land'

Indian born **Usha Kishore** is a British poet and translator, resident on the Isle of Man. Usha is internationally published and has authored three collections of poetry (the latest being *Immigrant*, Eyewear 2018). Usha won the Exiled Writers Ink Poetry Competition in 2014. She completed her PhD in Postcolonial Poetry with Edinburgh Napier University, last year.



Artwork by **Arta Davari**, Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

The Prophecy

Halima Akram

Crying was your destiny
to become, in the end,
a single tear
slipping down your cheek forever,
to accept defeat
with quiet surrender.

Crying was your destiny,
you who ran through the alleys of your life
like a stranger.

It was a prophecy
foretold to me
by words I wrote years
before leaving Gaza
Gaza that hated me
and that I hated,
Gaza I fled from
hoping to tear it out of me,
or to tear myself out of it.
And I failed.
Back then,
despite the immense pain,

I did not truly know what crying was
how the blood in your veins
can turn into water,
into an endless drowning.

But now
I feel this destiny
and its weight,
its cruelty.

And, to my horror,
the prophecy
has come true
my prophecy.

Halima Akram is a Palestinian writer from Gaza currently living in Turkey. She fled Gaza due to the kind of violence and abuse that she faced from her family and the Palestinian authorities due to her non-conformist attitude towards authority, belief and the boundaries imposed on women.

My Moon

Tamanna Easor

O companion of dark and distant nights,
O ever near to the world and to every soul

What
do you carry upon your back?
The scent of my father's hands?
Or the fragrance of my beloved mother's embrace?

Ah...?
What do you hold in your fist?
A few little pieces of good news from home?
Tell me-
Has the homeland been freed?
Has the last tear fallen from an eye?

Has the flower of a smile painted lips?
Has a little child, with a full stomach,
begun to dream another dream?

Ah...?
What is hidden beneath your hem?
A long, long letter from my brother?

My moon,
O companion of exile and homelessness,
Open your satchel
What have you brought
from the other side of the earth,
from my land, my homeland? ➤

➤➤Oleaster blossom from Parwan's* gardens?
Or the morning breeze of Mazar? **
Or a trace of serenity from beloved Kabul's heart?

Ah... tell me!
What news have you carried?
Has the rebel, the Talib, the enemy fallen?
Has the homeland been set free?
Is there no more cry
rising from its people, its soil, its leaves?

Ah...?
What have you brought that you hide from me?
News of joy for each of my people?
Or
a keepsake from my little sister?

**Parwan* is one of the central provinces of Afghanistan

***Mazar* is Mazar Sharif

Tamanna Easor is a writer from Afghanistan whose stories have been published across Afghanistan, Iran, and Europe in Persian. She is a member of Paranda, a global network of women writers in Afghanistan and the diaspora. Tamanna's first short story in English 'Tongueless Speaker' was published in *Words Without Borders* in July 2025.

Morning After Mourning

Hasan Kahya

How very neat and simple
is the migratory life
of the tree swallow from the North,
who can just fly past
the checkpoints erected for us,
in North and South Americas.

But I'm well beyond the age
for physical Ithacas, *
can't even time-travel:
not with a heart
too divided to hear
the tick-tocks of passing hours.

My country, too, is divided
as is my bleeding heart,
and fifty-one years on
I still don't know
where I truly belong
my childhood says South, my youth North.

What I've learnt
throughout my dark voyage,
I've learnt from

my own one-eyed nightmares
thanks to a London analyst,
not to 'lettered men in Egypt'.

"How about some sea therapy
in your sacred Episkopi" **
said my therapist this morning,
as if he'd just found
the right-sized and shaped
pebble to skim

for a while at least,
before sinking in deep waters.

*Ithaca was, in Greek mythology, the island home of the hero Odysseus.

**A seaside village in southern Cyprus.

Hasan Kahya was born in Limassol, Cyprus. He has a Diploma in Psychoanalytic Psychology from Birkbeck College, and a DPSI from the Institute of Linguists. His poems have appeared in various periodicals and anthologies. His poetry pamphlet, *The Pale Map*, was published by EWI in 2021.

My Home

Rouhi Shafii

I am sitting on the terrace of my apartment
in Spanish Andalusia, sipping tea.
The Sierras can be seen from a distance.
The peak sits motionless, spreading its wings over the horizon.
The sky is deep blue, soon turning grey
as the autumn nears.
Then, I will be long gone back to London.
Something flickers in my mind.
Are these Sierras home to my imagination?
Is this the reason I love this spot so much?
Maybe I am looking at the mountain peaks of Damavand?
There, when I left home, they were covered in snow.
Here, the rocky Sierras of Andalusia are dry and grey.
Still.

And now after almost four decades away from the blue skies, the majestic sun, present from dawn to dusk, the peaks of mount Damavand, glittering in white all year around, the gardens of northern Tehran displaying roses of every colour, the bazaar in Shemiran Square filled with the aroma of spices, fresh fruit and vegetables, the hidden door leading to a shrine in the mosque nearby, where women visit, hoping the saint who has fled Arabia and sought refuge there would ease their burden of life; and I am writing this note to the wind.

I understand the image I have kept in my mind does not exist anymore in reality. Everything has changed and transformed into something else. High rises occupy the once quiet suburban of Shemiran, the gateway to a quiet day out, where people would picnic at the foot of the mountain, and where a brook originated from the reservoirs inside the Alborz mountain range, murmuring the pace of a lazy life.

Slowly, everything changed either out of necessity or out of our historical ignorance. A revolution emerged and disrupted, tore and destroyed the fabric of Iranian society and is still actively working to that end. It left its marks on the urban areas, and transformed personal relationships, the relations between Iranians and other nations, and our understanding of the world and politics. And at the centre of it us women! Oh, my! Believe me I couldn't even understand my own close family members anymore; those who live in the mayhem of life there.



Artwork by **Arta Davari**,
Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

The home I left was managed by a different order. It had codes of practice for everything. Nowadays, women dance on the streets in protest, in defiance, showing their insubordination to a regime which has put its weight and honour into the subordination of women. And I must say, it has failed and has fallen face down!

A new generation of women dominate the scene. Six years ago, a young woman, Vida Movahed, went to the street, stood on a platform and took off the scarf which weighed on her head and said no to Compulsory Hejab. Then followed the killing of Mahsa Amini for having improper Hejab and the birth of the biggest revolt. Thereafter, we heard the song "bar aye" which found world fame in the midst of the Woman-Life-Freedom movement. A young singer, Parastou Ahmadi, appearing in a video performed in an isolated caravanserai, took everyone by surprise. A female university student fed up with being harassed for her 'improper hejab' took off her clothes in front of astonished eyes. Time passed and the resilience of women changed men's behaviour towards them. They now attempt to look at us with respect.

Our child is braiding her hair in the sunshine,
And invites me to come out from the shade,
To the glare of light,
There is a rainbow on the far end of the horizon.
A lioness is sitting, waiting to roar hope,
The carcass of a turbaned mullah, ➤

➤ ➤ Dead before the sun rose,
and burnt his bones,
To make ashes to ashes,
Gone.
His turban opens wide
And catches fire
Ashes to ashes,
Gone.
Someone from among the crowd calls
Your name,
My name?
What was the last syllable?
Hope?
Desire?
My name jumped from the ashes
You are the girl at the edge of time.
Your name is spoken in a thousand languages,
Yours is the smile of hope
Where I left in despair,
My then tattered home,

You become a spark in the darkness,
And the smile of hope.
Mahsa, Nika, Sarina, Kian, Parisa
You make my home,
A home, worthy of its name
When I return, I will kiss your soil!
If.

Rouhi Shafii is a writer, translator and women's rights advocate. She has published more than ten books and numerous articles in both English and Persian. Her latest work was co-editing *Songs of Freedom* (Afsana Press, 2024), a selection of the work of ten Iranian and Afghan women poets in English.



Artwork by **Arta Davari**, Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

RETURN

No Roses on Father's Grave

Hussam Eddin Baramo

In the late 1980s, I left the country where I was born. Leaving “Assad's Syria,” as the regime called it, was a physical escape, but it took several decades for my imagination to survive and 36 years of exile until I was able to return to my homeland, like millions of Syrians, that I had despaired of ever seeing again.

My first day in Damascus had to start at the Hamidiya Market, in the heart of Old Damascus. We arrived at the Umayyad Mosque and prayed, separated by gender, in accordance with a new decision. The sermon reflected the change in political circumstances, but it did not change the linguistic structures and usual patterns in the preacher's Khutba. Upon exiting the Umayyad Mosque, pedestrians pass through neighbourhoods inhabited by Damascenes of various religions and sects. We passed by a Shiite school and mosque, churches of various Christian denominations, and finally arrived at the Jewish Quarter.

These religious, social, and archaeological strata surrounding the main Mosque in Damascus point to an important element in the urban fabric and society of the old city that managed to overcome the social engineering and abhorrent destruction that was the fate of other areas and cities.

Some of the houses in the Jewish Quarter were still abandoned. Some Syrian Jews came back from their exodus. Rabbi Yosef Hamra and his son Henry visited Damascus three months after the collapse of the Assad regime. They visited the destroyed Jobar Synagogue, which is considered one of the oldest in the world. Syrian businessman Ayman Asfari succeeded in converting one of the large properties into the headquarters of the highly effective and active Madaniya (civil) association. We arrived at the home of artist Edward Shahda. We took pictures of the house, which exuded tranquility. It reminded us of the home of his friend, photographer Mohammed Al-Rumi, in the Bastille district of Paris. He showed us a large painting called

the martyrs of opinion. Other artists also live in this quarter such as Mustafa Ali, Abdullah Murad, and Ghassan Na'na'.

Rose of Damascus!

In the nearby Qishla district, we passed charming cafes, art galleries, churches, and luxury hotels that draw inspiration from the city's heritage, such as the Nizam and Beit al-Wali hotels. We entered an antique shop and were surprised to see an old cabinet with the new-old Syrian flag on it. The salesman said that the flag was there because it was from the 1950s. It seemed like a beautiful metaphor for a return to a time that most Syrians long for. We passed through Qaimariya again and arrived at Bab Tuma as night fell, and we heard an Iraqi singer singing in one of the many restaurants in the area. The singer extolled wine and launched into a bold song with sexual and religious references. It was also a declaration of the new rulers' need to be tolerant of the traditions of the place, its inhabitants, and its tourists, in the hope that this need would turn into traditions and customs inspired by the gentleness of Levantine religiosity and its recognition of Syria's religious, sectarian, and national diversity.

We entered a perfume seller shop. He presented the unique blends he had created, and he showed us a very expensive compound made from Damascene rose oil. I jokingly asked him if Maher al-Assad (the notorious brother of the formal president) had contacted him to help him distil Captagon, the main narcotics produced by the former bloody “general.” He surprised me with a strange story. He said that Syrian television had broadcast an interview with him in which he talked about the scarcity of Damascene rose oil and how a millilitre of it was worth a gram of gold. The journalist who conducted the interview contacted him and said that his comments had caught the attention of the “first lady,” Asma ➤

➤ ➤ al-Akhras-al-Assad, and that she had instructed her aides to invest in a place in Jabal Barah, where the Damascene rose grows, to produce this precious oil.

This incident brought to my mind the story when Vogue magazine published a profile of Asma, calling her “the rose of the desert” and “Rose of Damascus,” which was adopted by Western media, before it became clear, with the subsequent years of brutality, that this rose was a key partner in the administration of the Syrian republic of terror and murder.

A tomb without a name!

I wanted to visit the grave of my father, who had died and whose funeral I had not attended. I met my cousin, Zuhair, who took me to the Al-Joura Cemetery behind the famous Al-Jazmatia Market, known for its sweets and food shops! I bought some roses to sprinkle on the grave. We tried to find the grave under the scorching sun, during which time we came across names of relatives, friends, and acquaintances: Baramo, Halabi, Hakawati, Al-Argha, Hatahet, Naqawa, Habannaka, and others. When I despaired, I distributed the bouquets among them. My cousin had an idea and took us to the house of another relative. He was very happy to see me and my son, and his conversation brought back some of the mysteries that surrounded my childhood. He said he had worked at my father's printing press in the Halbouni area. I visit the place later and find it closed, and its name changed

from Dar Al-Ulum (The Science House) to Al-Kawakib (the Stars).

We found the grave in a remote corner of the cemetery. My father's name was not engraved on the tombstone. He was accompanied by two half-brothers: Qasim and Salim al-Seyada. I had no more roses to place on the grave. We recited the Fatiha for his soul, and I promised myself that I would place another tombstone with his name on it.

In a poem of mine entitled *Mohammad Nama* (The Book of Mohammad), published in the Omani magazine *Nizwa*, I tried to describe the day my father died, saying:

"My father, Mohammed, fell asleep on the bus. Some tried to wake him from his light sleep, but the passengers' ability to resurrect the dead was impaired, and they were unable to wake him. And because he was my father, not Christ, he did not return after three days."

Hussam Eddin Baramo is a poet and journalist who was born in Syria and fled to Cyprus and then moved to London in 1994. His poetry collection in English is *Grave Seas* (Palewell, 2021). Hussam's previous publications include a poetry book *Poisoned Kohl* (2012) and short stories. He currently works as managing editor of *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper.



Painting: **Boutros Al-Maari**, a Damascene artist living in Germany

Dad, 15 Years Later

Rana Abdul Fatah

Burning August sun,
I observed quite a lot. I was a child of 9 or 10
I don't remember a lot of my childhood, dad.
But I remember that you did not farm and grow things
You painted the soil with all the love you had for the earth.
A bit nerdy with the planning and small details
I was fascinated.
You painted the entrance with all colours and types
of roses
I would run in like entering a paradise,
grass up to my waist.

you built a swimming pool in the middle
to the left peach, apricot, apple, orange trees

To the right, vines and grapes
and just next to them all types of veggies and a fish-
pond.
Further down, there were the olive trees, and my fa-
vourite runs were between
the wild flowers filling the orchard,
red and I could get lost in them.

you taught me how to make small tracks in the earth
to water the vegetables and trees.
the vines and olive trees.

It was my Eden,
Swimming and then lying on the side of the pool
To dry with my za'ater sandwich
Playing hide and seek with the sun with my eyes.

you taught me how to swim
You put me on your back
The sun was burning
You said: "move your arms and legs
Slowly."
Then you let me get into the water.

Dad, I am "home" after 15 years.
I don't feel much.
I avoided your room the first day.
The second day, I went in
Opened your wardrobe
tried to find something
A smell, something

There was nothing.
You are not here.

I asked them to drive me
To see you.
you were in the underground of a rectangular-shaped
grave
With a gravestone saying here is the resting place of
Abdullatif, 2020.
The rectangular built grave had dew plants all over it.
I picked up the rotten ones and sat there on the
ground.
I started crying because I cannot reach you.
And thought how cliché it is to talk to my dead dad,
What do I tell him?
It's 15 years,
will he be listening?
I continued to pick up the rotten dew plants.

Rana Abdul Fatah is an emerging poet and writer currently working on her second poetry collection. Rana lives in Istanbul and graduated from the University of Damascus and Istanbul University. She published her first poetry collection *Seasons in Damascus* in 2009 and her autobiographical book *Tiger and Clay: Syria Fragments* in 2017 in the UK.



Artwork by **Arta Davari**, Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

A Suitcase full of Separation

Anna Maria Mickiewicz

Oceans of maps and borders divide us
I returned home
With suitcase soaked worn
By years of waiting
Here and there
And here
Cobblestones
During the war military boots walked on them
And then my red high heels
Snagging on gaps and breaks
On the hill of childhood

London-Lublin, March 2025

Anna Maria Mickiewicz is an award-winning poet, editor, translator and publisher who is founder of Literary Waves Publishing. Her poetry has been published in many languages and her poetry book *The Origin of the Planet*, received the KM International Literature Prize 2024 (India). on women.

I Shall Return

Hafiza Ibrahim

Edited by Maysoon Nasser

Palestinian I am,
Displaced and stateless.
Palestinian I am, living in the diaspora,
From the time of the Nakba.
Palestinian I am,
My dreams fuelled by my right to return.

In the West
Palestine lives in my veins,
In my dusky skin, in my heartbeats,
It lives in my eyes, the colour of olive fields,
In my brown hair that interweaves like carob trees.
I see it in everything.

Palestine is a pendant close to my heart.
My inheritance, a keffiyeh around my neck.
My identity, an embroidered thobe that I wear with pride.
Palestine lives in my cells,
Its breath intersperses between the intervals of my life,
And through its bitter and sweet ups and downs.

When news of my country breaks,
I weep at settlements, checkpoints and apartheid.
I despair at the unending pain,
The massacres endured and the injustice served.

And I pray for healing and reconciliation all day.
But at times I might witness a small victory
A chink of light,
Then, I would sing with the birds and laugh like a child.

Other times when I feel dismayed,
I flee to my country in my dreams,
To my garden and my olive trees.
I imagine a long embrace,
The smell of my mother,
And the soil of my land.
And every day, I remind myself that I shall return.

I shall return, and a vast generation will accompany me.
Those whom I have nourished with morals and freedom,
And those who are impassioned about my existence,
My right to return, all who have faith in Humanity
And believe in better days to come.
And I tell you now as I tell myself every day,
That sooner or later
I shall return.

Hafiza Ibrahim is Palestinian poet originally from Akka City. She was born in Beirut and emigrated to the UK in the early 1990s. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Fakhre Al-Arab Magazine for poetry, criticism and literature in 2022. Published works include a poetry collection entitled, *Ini Aida (I shall Return)*, and a series of prose and poetry books in English.

I Visit my Home

Nareen Kaur

One day I borrowed wings from the imagination. I flew across the oceans and mountains to reach my home. I saw the door of my home standing there waiting for me. I bowed to the door and went inside. All the memories hugged me. I saw my siblings were playing, my mother was cooking in the kitchen and my father was watering the plants. The stories of my childhood live in the soul of my home. The sound of our laughter echoes through the walls. I went a little further and I bumped into the girl that was me. She told me time had passed, move on.

Suddenly everything went blurry. The home started to feel empty. There were no siblings, no mother, and no father. The tree had withered and the walls looked sad. My home asked me, "You have come, where is everyone else?" My eyes filled with tears and I replied, "Just as you were left alone, I too was left alone. I don't know where my loved ones are".

When we leave home, we wander around. I walked around my whole home, I touched and felt everything. I tied my soul with the threads of memories. I soothed my heart by hugging myself. Once again, I filled the bag of thoughts with the memories. Once again, I left my home and walked. Once again, I felt the pain of leaving the home. Leaving home is not easy at all. When we leave home empty the memories of home keep us empty inside for the rest of our lives. No one leaves their home happily; compulsions take them away from home.

We are living in a world, where we have to die every day to live. I flew back there with tears in my eyes. I thanked imagination by returning her wings. Then I hugged my children and said that wherever my children are with me, my home is.

I hid the bag of thoughts that I had brought with me, filled with memories, inside myself.

Nareen Kaur is an Afghan Sikh woman who relocated to London with her two children in September 2023 after tragically losing her husband in Afghanistan in 2022. Originally from Afghanistan, Nareen is now building a new life in London, carrying forward her heritage and embracing new opportunities for her family.



Painting: **Boutros Al-Maari**, a Damascene artist living in Germany

Two Homes and One Heart

Marsha Glenn

It had been too long since I was forbidden to visit my family and friends back home. It had been so long that I avoided going near the airport at all. I was shamefully envious of the frequent flyers who could reach various European cities within hours, without any stress or trouble passing through immigration control on both sides of the imaginary borders. When I had to listen to my friends' travel stories and scrolling through their bright and full-of-life photos, I used to feel hypocritical and broken inside. I felt I was better off focusing on how quickly I could adapt to living in this stoic frozen land that I made my new home in, and on minding my own business by covering my ears with AirPods and keeping my lips pressed as an alternative to smiling.

Finally, it was my turn. After living in exile for twelve years, for a moment, all the puzzle pieces from my present and past life seemed to be fitted in the right places. It was time to visit my birthplace and my father, so I could truly heal in this life.

I landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka, Bangladesh, at midnight. I was not yet allowed to reach my father, who was waiting for me outside the immigration control barrier. I had to complete the on-arrival visa process first, even though I was in my home country. At that point, I felt like I was dreaming of speaking in Bengali with airport staff,



Photo: Marsha Glenn

trying to find a pen to fill out the formalities and figuring out the correct fees to pay in a third currency. I almost wanted to leave my luggage on the conveyor belt. I only wanted to run and scream “abbu, abbu” like a little girl lost in a sleepy airport. Until I could spot my father without any barricade between us. I wanted to hug him so tight that I could hear his heart beating next to mine.

The reunion turned out more casual than I anticipated. The decade-long spell of estrangement did not linger over us anymore. It was an ordinary airport moment of a tearful daughter and tired father who were rushing to go home after a quick hug. However, it was more than enough for me. Once we were alone in our rented flat, at three in the morning, the first thing my dad asked me was how many European countries I had visited so far. It was an opening line for him to find a common interest to start a friendly conversation with me.

My trip to Bangladesh was labelled as an experience of absolute zero expectation. So, I was truly surprised to find out that many newly built flyovers ➤



Photo: Marsha Glenn

➤ ➤ and bridges were standing arrogantly and keeping the capital city, Dhaka, busier, dustier and more polluted than ever before. Then I heard people were whispering about the foreign construction companies' ownership of the infrastructure forever, and political corruption scandals that make the national interests questionable. I did not know what to expect from a developing country after the July Revolution 2024, a Student–People Uprising that removed the fascist regime and a fast-approaching national election under a caretaker government. Public opinion was still reluctant to trust that any promised adjustments in the administration and policy making process would have the intention to make their lives better. I spoke to women who work long hours only to make ends meet and earn under £50 a month. They remain grateful and smile, nonetheless.

It was still a megacity, home to thirty-six million people. It was my hometown that never runs empty of sensory overload public events, heavy and confusing traffic (lorries coming along the wrong side of roads during the busy hours) and blasting horns. I found street children openly using drugs, stray packs of dogs and their puppies fighting to survive in this cruel concrete jungle and stray injured cats howling in despair and pain.

I was lucky to escape the hustle and bustle of the metropolitan city to enjoy the mild winter in a remote nature area where trees still held on to their lush green, small wildlife were roaming around and where there were thriving lakes and ponds. I watched morning mist evaporating in the early hours from the fields barren of crops and walked on the sandy beach of Cox's Bazar, a seaside city on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. I ate fresh water fish and the seasonal cakes, sweetmeats and delicacies that I longed for and without any awkward remarks about eating meals with my bare hands.

I had an adventure with my father and his younger sister, an aunt who came to visit from Atlanta, the US, while travelling around. We, mostly my elderly father, managed to locate his childhood home from 1960, which was also my aunt's birthplace. I was astonished by how well my elderly father remembered a map that belonged to a little boy only. He imagined the old stadium, the government boys' school, and the government circuit house replacing the present-day wide highway around us. And then there we were outside of 'Ombika', the house, taking photos of a first-floor flat's net-covered and closed window. It was another

story of visiting home within my own story of visiting home.

In the end, I had to get on the plane, leaving my loved ones once again. Only to realise that it would feel like coming back home again as soon as I was in a taxi from Heathrow airport. The sun was shining through the drizzle and bare and slippery tree branches temporarily hosted moss-covered mess. All seemed familiar and a comforting sigh escaped, announcing that I was home!

It took me a life-long experience to accept that I am one with two homes. One is where I was born and my roots belong to, and the other is where I made my home.

Marsha Glenn is from Bangladesh where she worked as a journalist. She is a member of the Freedom from Torture creative writing group Write to Life. She has been published in *Welcome to Britain: An Anthology of Poems and Short Fiction*, (2023), *Exiled Ink* magazine and *The Guardian* online feature section. She has performed for various organisations and charities.



Artwork by **Arta Davari**, Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

When are you going home?

Tamara Wilson

Decades on the Daily Mail did not help
It is true--but neither did your glorifying Wittgenstein
As a guiding star, a prolific prophet.
Not that those myopic xenophobes could ever reason
Beyond their transactional, tabloid-scripted lexicon
Let alone in a language not their own.
No need for tail-chasing arguments
Ludwig's compass never fails; it's never wrong.

Hand to mouth, boots to the ground
Balls to chase, money to be made
With foaming rage, they chime, they chant.
Shallow, vapid, self-centred lives
Less culture than a pot of yoghurt combined
But under nationalism's magnifying glass
How gloriously they sparkle
What brilliant shadows they leave on the ground.

The cliché is lost on them
But its staleness is nauseating to your kind.
Xenophobes across the globe are one nation--
Your DNA taught you, making you memorise its every type
To help you navigate the aftermath, to help you recognise
The silently scheming, insidious ones who hide
Amongst the hate-filled, contemptuous crowds
Or those lining alongside the gender and/ race-washed ones.

You, on the other hand
As accomplished as you may be
Singularly or as the descendant of stonemasons
Who laced rocks for eternity,
Or as the sword-reject from the cradle of the faith,
Which bridged the gap between the divine and humanity-
You are out of place and alone, a species entirely of your own:
When are you going home?

Alone, without a shadow to echo your voice
You realise you will always be a schwa
In the alphabet of those with a tabloid-forged lexicon.
Yet this fated epiphany gives you
A magical place called *Hiraeth* for home,
Where citizens of conscience –exiled or heimatlos-
Find refuge in one another beyond all divides known.
This is the home you know you are a native of.
This is the house you belong.



Artwork by **Arta Davari**,
Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

Tamara Wilson is an award-winning poet, literary activist and academic whose essays, poems and translations have featured in national and international publications. As the granddaughter of Armenian and Pontic Greek survivors, she worked with diverse migrant and refugee groups both as an Esol lecturer and charity worker. She is EWI chair and EWI project leader for the London part of the National Refugee Archive Project.

The Poetics of Displacement and Resistance

Venezuela: The Poetics of Displacement

Piotr Kozak

*They cast you out, you slip away, you leave
Whatever you say feels clumsy, awkward —
never enough
there's no place for you anywhere
You're like a delicate Chinese vase of pain.¹*

For Venezuela's writers, poets and critics of the current government, these are certainly strange and uncertain times. How to make sense of it all? The country's president, Nicolás Maduro, was captured along with his wife Cilia Flores, during a controversial U.S. military operation at the beginning of January. This intervention immediately generated intense political debate and condemnation. It was strongly criticised by Antó-

1. Eleonora Requena, *Partir es Andar (To Depart is to Walk)*, Luba Ediciones, Buenos Aires (2023)



Artwork by **Arta Davari**,
Iranian artist living in exile in Germany

nio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General, who in an official statement expressed concern that the rule of international law had not been respected, a view shared, among others, by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. Speculation is rife about its true motives and the subsequent fallout: was the regime finally about to collapse? Would new leadership emerge, and free and democratic elections soon follow? And what of the estimated 7.9 million Venezuelans who have abandoned their country in desperation, mainly dispersed throughout the Americas, one of the largest displacement crises in modern history, might many now feel circumstances were favourable for their return?

For the Chile-based social communicator, journalist and poet Diosceline Camacaro Martínez, any hope of real change was fleeting. Maduro may be gone, but the regime remains firmly in place, now under the protective umbrella of an oil-hungry U.S. government, with orthodox hardliners side-lined by pragmatic opportunists ready to make deals with *los imperialistas yanqies*. The executive and legislative branches are now headed by (interim?) president Delcy Rodríguez, while her brother Jorge, a psychiatrist, writer and former Vice-President, has been President of the National Assembly since 2021, giving him sweeping influence over the country's legislature. "There's a lot of uncertainty," said Diosceline. "People still don't have access to basic rights like healthcare or food... but most of all, we've lost our humanity."

The displacement of such a large segment of the country's population has resulted in painful sacrifices for many Venezuelan families: grandparents who have only ever seen their grandchildren on a computer or smartphone screen; sons and daughters ➤

➤ ➤ living in distant countries without the economic means or conditions to return home to bury deceased parents; and many children left behind to be cared for by relatives or friends while their own parents work abroad. A whole society marked by separation and fragmentation, with no clear end in sight to the social, economic and political crisis engulfing the country. “And these are the stories many of us keep to ourselves,” remarked Diosceline, “because over the years we’ve spoken out about these things and then we’re accused of being traitors, that we abandoned the country because we don’t like ‘the left,’ although people did so simply because they wanted to live, to have a better life. But in the end, we’re a reminder that lives are disposable.”

To illustrate the everyday struggle to meet basic needs, she recounts how a friend and colleague, the distinguished essayist and poet Harry Almela, spent an entire day standing in a long queue under the hot sun just to purchase some chicken. A couple of days later, he suffered a massive heart attack and died. He was 64, already in fragile health and like many in the country, facing severe difficulties accessing proper healthcare and medication, a situation that has resulted in countless avoidable deaths.

Thousands of Venezuelan writers and poets now live abroad, actively engaging with their host societies, with each other, and with those who have remained back home. One such poet and teacher is Eleonora Requena, who has been based in Buenos Aires for the past nine years. She left Venezuela reluctantly, feeling that her life and voice were being suffocated by a climate of insecurity and the absence of basic guar-

antees, and followed her adult children into what she describes as an unwilling exile. “I never imagined I’d have to leave my country in this way,” she said. “Exile is certainly full of complications; but on the other hand, new doors have opened in terms of readership and dissemination.”

A translated collection of her poems, *Outside Texts: Textos por Fuera*, was published by the New York-based Ugly Duckling Presse in 2022. In Argentina, she has also experienced the friendship and solidarity of a culture that deeply values the written word, along with its long tradition of offering refuge to political dissidents. Eleonora also compiled, together with fellow poet Kira Kariakin, the online publication *El Puente es la Palabra (The Bridge is the Word)*, with the support of the Catholic charity Caritas. Published in 2019, the anthology brings together the work of 100 displaced Venezuelan poets, whose writing reflects the challenges, setbacks, personal costs and achievements of the migrant diaspora. Looking ahead, such initiatives may well contribute to future processes of reinsertion and reconciliation within an increasingly fragmented society.

Although most would undoubtedly wish for different circumstances, Venezuela’s displaced poets and writers have found new audiences, new openings for publications and creative opportunities that are often denied those who are left behind, amid the turmoil of present-day Venezuela. In many ways, more Venezuelan poetry is being published than ever before, albeit largely outside the country. Within Venezuela itself, writers, often supported by compatriots abroad, continue working actively with their communities and encouraging new generations. Yet in the current domestic climate, anyone wishing to raise a critical voice must proceed with extreme caution or speak in carefully coded ways. Otherwise, the consequences can be severe: imprisonment, beatings, or worse.

To conclude, I ask Eleonora for a verse that might sum up her experience of displacement. Her reply:

*Donde te creíste a salvo
también duele*

*Where you thought you were safe
it still hurts*

Piotr Kozak is a bilingual writer, translator, editor, and poet with over 30 years’ experience in Latin America and Europe. He writes on cultural, environmental, and social issues, exploring intercultural perspectives, human rights, and migration. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *El Diario*.



Photo: Piotr Kozak

Women's Creativity and the *Imaginaire* of Gender: Inheriting the Future



Exiled Writers Ink was honoured to have been represented at this conference which took place at Bordeaux Montaigne University. Our plenary session was called 'Exiled Women Break the Silence' and in our round table we aimed to explore why exiled women needed to write poetry in exile, how their poetry created female subjectivity and what exile meant to us as women poets. The three poets, Denisse Vargas Bolaños, Dr Nazand Begikhani and Dr Jennifer Langer represented the identities of migrant, refugee and second generation. Here is part of the conversation:

Denisse Vargas Bolaños:

Although I emigrated to the UK by choice, migration is never simple. Before leaving Bolivia, I already felt displaced. There are many ways to be exiled from your own country. As the Bolivian feminist María Galindo writes in her book *Bastard Feminism*, intuitive feminism comes from lived experience rather than theory. I didn't know much about feminist theory when I was young, but I could feel patriarchy in my body, in school, at home. I resisted it in my own way, and that often made me feel like an outsider. In the UK, I realised that patriarchy isn't only Bolivian; it exists everywhere, in different forms.

This realisation made me want to write so I could name what I had always felt. Writing poetry helps me raise my voice, stay aware, and resist the pressures that try to keep women quiet. It connects me with other women, those who came before and those still

finding their voice.

Experiencing different cultures has broadened my perspective, but it has also made me aware that I often exist between worlds as an outsider. Living between cultures gives me freedom: I am less bound by the social expectations I experienced in Bolivia, which allows me to create and explore in new ways. At the same time, I constantly reflect on my roots, memories, and the expectations of two cultures. As Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet, writes, "We have become loosened from the gravity of identity's land." That line speaks to me, because sometimes the land that shapes us can also weigh us down with expectations. I am also aware of how my skin colour, accent, or the way people exoticise me can mark me as different. Microaggressions or being seen as "exotic" are subtle ways of being undervalued.

I try to inhabit this space of life as an immigrant ➤

➤ ➤ by reflecting on who I am, questioning assumptions, and exploring the ways I relate to both cultures. Living between places allows me to see the world differently, discover new ways to express myself, and embrace freedom and constraints, while remaining aware of the inequalities including gendered, racial, and social structures that shape both countries.

I used to write mainly in Spanish, but after living in the UK for a few years, I began writing in English. That shift made me realise that I am expressing myself in two colonial languages. My mother tongue is Spanish, but I come from a country where more than 40% of the population is of Indigenous origin. Even though Indigenous languages like Quechua and Aymara are still widely spoken, Spanish remains the official and dominant language. I never learned those native languages formally, and that absence has always felt like a missing part of my identity — one of my fragments.

Writing in another language also makes you aware of limits: you hesitate, search, and negotiate meanings. Yet that same limitation can be liberating — it allows you to play, to reinvent, and to create new spaces of meaning where Spanish, English, and memory coexist.



Nazand, Denisse, Marie-Lise Paoli

Nazand Begikhani:

I fled Saddam Hussein's war and genocide in the 80s, after being imprisoned and tortured and having lost many members of my family, including my brothers and my father. I fled without a passport, without money, but with dreams and hope, and found myself in a different land, speaking and writing in a different language. How does that make you feel? In the beginning I was feeling relieved, out of danger and trustingly happy that I was in Europe, the land of freedom and human rights. So, I buried my traumatic fragile self and became a functional person, shaped by the dis-functioning politics on migration and refugees, by the structural discrimination and the lack of confidence and the deep feeling of not belonging, of marginalisation and exclusion as a woman, as a Kurd and as a refugee.

Embodying a functional self with the lack of confidence, I underwent different forms of abuse and suffering, which became part of my identity and, in the beginning, most of my decisions were made not as a well-planned action, but out of the necessity to survive, to become someone, someone with self-confidence who could reclaim her emotional being. And in the west, I learnt that art and culture are compatible with an industrial liberal system making the human machine-like while undermining altogether the human soul. Having said that, exile gave me the paradoxical freedom to see more clearly my Kurdistan, my community, and being critical, I engaged in campaigns against honour-based crimes and have become the voice of voiceless men and women in my homeland and an advocate for justice and equality.

When you are a Kurd with a country divided between four states whose very existence is founded on the annihilation of the Kurds both physically and culturally, your identity is made of resistance, of opposition to these state powers. I was also resisting the family and community violence against girls and women, then as a refugee I had to speak out against structural discrimination. That helped shape my conceptual understanding of the self as an alienated woman, as a Kurd and as a refugee, and the intersectional concept and analysis helped me to better deal with the painful process of reconstructing the self. When I arrived in Europe, for a long time, I felt I was the Other, an outsider, and through my creativity and my advocacy activities I was trying to thread these different intersected forms of alienation and violence together and to make a stronger identity. ➤

➤ ➤ Although exile is double edged and painful, it is also a space where you can create different perspectives about the self, about your community and homeland and about the human condition in general. Then through hard work, through my university education, through knowledge, through reading, writing and creative expression, I reconstructed my shattered self, created a home, a family and an identity made of words and poetry. Throughout, I have tried to transform my personal and national trauma into an art of beauty and disturb the comfortable silence the super

powers have created around us. Officially, I don't have a country, I don't have an official identity, my homeland is in the words, in my writing. My identity is multiple, made of different challenging experiences on the personal, familial and national level.

The trauma remains an important part of my identity, but I can weave these personal experiences of loss and dislocation with collective memory, transforming trauma into art and creativity, which alternatively heals the shattered self, paving the way towards integrity, agency and a solid compound identity.

Braids

Nazand Begikhani

This poem is dedicated to the 'Braids Movement' launched by women in Kurdistan following the rape, murder and cutting of the braid of a Kurdish woman fighter by al-Jolani's jihadists.

Three layers of hair

Layer upon layer, one with the other, one beside the other

They gently interweave

A girl braids a tress

The flag of an enduring nation

Scattered across the world

Each strand tells a story

The story of struggling against oppression

The story of fighting against domination

The story of standing against erasure

The story of breaking the silence

The legend of the resistance of Kurdish women

When we walk tall and

With our braids flowing free

It sounds a death knell

Shaking the manhood of Al-Jolani

Intimidating his jihadists

Reminding them that

We exist and that we will remain defiant

We will never bow down

The braid recalls our memories

The memory of our sexualised bodies

The memory of the fingers of girls

Who interweave strength and hope

In their fight against fanatics

The memory of our mothers

Mourning their children's execution

The memory of our forbidden language

The memory of our mutilated country

This braid is not a decoration

Nor a cosmetic symbol

It is a frontier

The spirit of our earth

The roots of our home

The map of an ancient territory

Unrecognised homeland

The heart of our flag

As long as our hair can sing in the air

As long as our fingers can weave

The layers and cyphers of hope

Our braids continue to break the scissors of ignorance

Telling the world our story

The story of the resistance of Kurdish women

Nazand Begikhani is the Vincent Wright Visiting Professor in Sciences Po, Paris and was previously Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol. She is an award-winning poet and activist with several international prizes including the Kurdistan Gender Equality Prize (2015) and France's Simone Landrey Feminine Poetry Prize for her collection *Le Lendemain d'Hier*.

Role of the Poet in Times of Turmoil

Shirin Razavian

When the streets of Iran erupted in protest at the end of December 2025, it was not a sudden flame but the ignition of stored rain - years of unemployment, inflation, economic collapse and political suffocation spilling into the open.

Tens of thousands marched not just against prices or policies, but against a system they felt had stolen both their futures and their voices. From Tehran to Rasht, from Mashhad to Isfahan, ordinary people - children and elders, students and shopkeepers - took to the squares demanding dignity, accountability, and an end to clerical authoritarian rule.

Reports from Iran including videos show that people were mostly shouting the name of crown prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of the late king of Iran. And the state struck back with unprecedented ferocity. On January 8 and 9, state security forces - the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other militia units - opened fire on crowds demonstrating across hundreds of cities. Hospitals overwhelmed, ambulances exhausted, and bodies outnumbered body bags. Independent estimates now suggest that thousands - some reports into the tens of thousands - were killed in just two days of killings that many human rights organisations and journalists have termed a massacre. Official state figures say around three thousand may have died - a figure Iranian authorities released as part of a carefully controlled narrative. But independent tallies assembled from hospital records, eyewitness accounts and human rights groups, paint a far starker picture, with confirmed deaths exceeding 30,000 and many thousands more under verification. Other credible assessments place the toll as high as 50,000 or more, making this one of the deadliest suppressions of dissent in Iran in modern history.

And then came the silence - an internet blackout, phone networks cut, communication deliberately stifled so that the world might forget what was happening in real time. Arrests followed. Over 40,000 people have been detained - young, old, teachers, nurses, artists - swept into a prison system where families fear they will simply disappear. In many instances the injured demonstrators managed to get themselves to hospitals and received treatment but the militia killers went into hospitals and assassinated the patients by shooting them in the head. The regime started

charging the grieving families, extortionate prices to release the body of their loved ones.

Yet even this did not still the pulse of rebellion. Around makeshift graves and in cemeteries that have become demonstrations in their own right, families have begun to mourn with music and dance instead of silence and tears - defying both grief and the state's demand for somber obedience. These celebratory funerals have become rituals of resistance: women uncovering their hair, crowds singing not just for the dead, but as a refusal to cede their joy or their identity.

In moments like these, when atrocity bears down on the body of a nation, what is the poet's place? The poet stands where the state demands silence. Where the regime insists on erasure, the poet names each loss. Where broadcasters' mute witnesses and blackouts swallow signals, the poet lights language. Poetry becomes the repository of memory when the world tries to look away - a ledger of souls that refuses to balance itself by sacrifice. If a regime can kill a body, it cannot kill a name that is spoken, breathed, written, shared. The poet does not merely describe misery - the poet hosts the grief of a people, turns private anguish into a shared testimony, insists that no death go unrecorded and no scream go untranslated. When the Islamic Republic waged its deadliest crackdown yet, it was poets - and the poetry shared in whispered verses, in banned pamphlets, in quiet recitals - who held the horror up to the light and would not let it be hidden behind political euphemism or bureaucratic obfuscation.

Atrocities can steal breath and break bones, but they cannot steal the words that were born from those breaths. Where bullets sought to silence, verse arose to name each fallen voice and make it unkillable. Poetry is the lifeline of memory in the face of massacre - the place where the dead continue to live in language, and where the living learn never to let their stories be untold.

February 2026

Shirin Razavian is a British-Iranian poet whose work has appeared in a range of literary journals. She has published six Farsi and English poetry collections and is the co-editor of *Songs of Freedom: An anthology of Iranian and Afghan women poets* (Afsana Press, 2024).

Suppliants of Syria

Theatre Production

Border Crossings, March 2026

Review: Piotr Kozak



Photo: John Cobb

'No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark,' wrote the Somali-British poet Warsan Shire in *Home*. In the multimedia, interactive theatre production *Suppliants of Syria*, we are invited to look directly into that mouth.

Created by Border Crossings, a company with more than three decades of experience in intercultural performance, the production is a collaboration with Çukurova University, the Meryem Women's Co-operative, and Hoxton Hall. It also forms part of a wider programme of exhibitions, debate and community engagement.

The performance reworks Aeschylus' 463 BC tragedy *Suppliants*, a play about women seeking refuge, placing it in dialogue with the filmed testimonies of displaced Syrian women in Turkey, who also perform the choruses from the original play. Their testimonies and choral performances are woven into the live staging, where three actors respond to and echo their words. The venue's walls are adorned with artwork by local refugees, extending the experience beyond the stage.

The result is ambitious and layered. Ancient text and contemporary witness sit side by side, challenging media narratives of the "refugee crisis" and foregrounding women's lived experiences of safety, dignity and rights. The production does not allow its audience the comfort of abstrac-

tion; it insists on the human cost of war, forced migration and gendered violence. Not all elements cohere seamlessly. At times, the transition between filmed testimony and live performance feels uneven, and the interactive audience debate midway through the evening raises complex questions that the format cannot fully resolve. Yet these moments underline the project's experimental nature and its commitment to dialogue rather than passive spectatorship.

The most disturbing sequence incorporates footage showing preparations for an ISIS/Daesh mass execution staged in the Roman amphitheatre of Palmyra. The material is difficult to watch, but underscores the brutal realities refugees flee. The images linger long after the performance ends. We also witness scenes from post-war Aleppo, filmed discreetly by the production's artistic director, Michael Walling. A vast flea market fills the screen: hungry, displaced people selling second-hand clothes and whatever they can to survive. Equally disturbing are scenes from the Dublin anti-migrant riots, highlighting growing hostility in Western nations toward refugees and forced migrants.

Suppliants of Syria is a demanding and frequently unsettling work. Its strength lies not in offering easy answers, but in creating space for voices too often marginalised in public discourse. By bringing ancient drama into conversation with contemporary testimony, it asks us to listen, to reckon with what we hear, and to respond with empathy.

From Here to There: 101 Poems on African and African Diasporic Migration

Civic Leicester, 2025

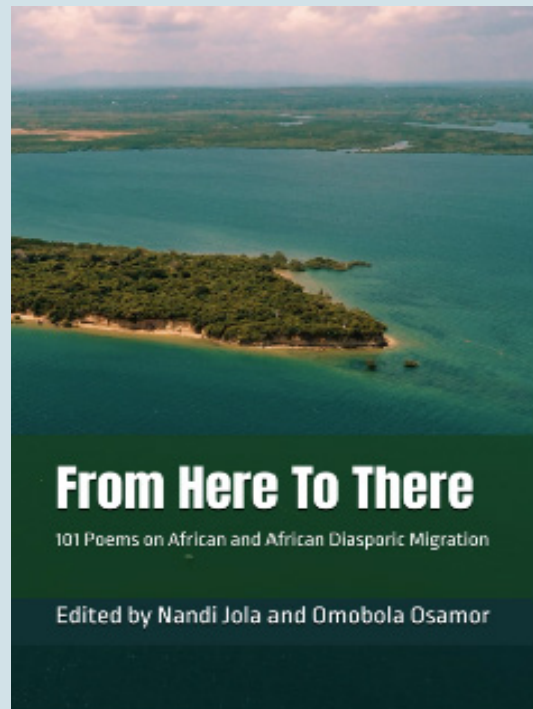
Review: Samantha Rumbidzai Vazhure

To open an anthology with the greeting *Sawubona* (a Zulu word meaning “I see you”) anchors this work in mutual recognition and shared journeys. Edited with care and ambition and dedicated to “All who are looking for home,” the anthology gathers 101 poems on African migration, bringing together 63 voices across geographies, generations and forms, offering not a single narrative of Africa or exile, but a dense, polyphonic field of encounter. What emerges are poems speaking to one another across distance, difference and dislocation. The title *From Here to There*, signals motion before the book is even opened, a promise that this anthology understands migration not as metaphor alone but as lived, ongoing practice.

The title poem provides a resolute compass for the anthology: “...so, from here to there I move, make my way to a better life.” The line carries neither sentimentality nor spectacle. Instead, it names movement as necessity and hope as labour. This tonal restraint resonates across these poems that resist reducing displacement to either tragedy or triumph.

Across the poems, language itself is a site of passage. “I speak many languages... Each language spoken is a door,” is a line that captures the anthology’s deep attentiveness to voice, translation and code-switching. Multilingualism appears not only as a skill but as a survival strategy and a way of navigating worlds that are often hostile, provisional or unstable.

The body recurs as another map: racialised, gendered, prayed over, disciplined, desired. Poems move between ancestral memory and present fracture, between rural landscapes and urban strain, between ecological intimacy and environmental precarity. Rivers, soil, animals and cities recur as witnesses to both continuity and rupture, reinforcing the sense that land remembers even when people are forced to move.



One of the anthology’s strengths lies in its formal openness. Prose poems sit comfortably beside tightly wrought lyrics and extended meditations; experimental typography and more traditional lineation coexist without friction. This diversity reinforces the editors’ refusal of a singular African poetic mode.

Rather than offering closure, *From Here to There* asks for attention. It’s a textured record of survival, endurance and continual becoming that invites the reader to linger, to listen and to recognise the multiplicity of lives shaped by movement and memory. The anthology asks us not only to follow these movements, but to acknowledge the lives within them, and to consider what it means to be always looking for home.

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| Binding | Paperback |
| Extent | 184 pages |
| Price | £9.99 |
| ISBN | 978-1068221033 |

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Imprisoned Souls: Poems of Uyghur Prisoners in China

Edited by Aziz Isa Elkun

Hertfordshire Press, 2025

Review: Jennifer Langer

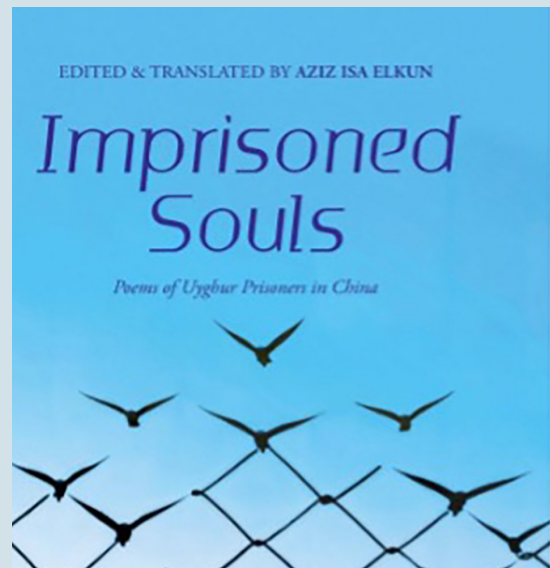
I am full of admiration for Aziz Isa Elkun's remarkable tenacity and dedication in his resolve that the voices of imprisoned Uyghur poets should be heard despite their cruel incarceration in concentration camps by the Chinese government. His untiring labour of translation and his persistence in locating their work have resulted in a very important anthology.

The twenty-five poets use the power of the pen creating a poetics of resistance and pride in their identity. Defying the Chinese oppressors' aim to stifle any manifestation of Uyghur identity, the poets refuse to allow their voices to be effaced. In fact, the anthology contains courageous responses to the imminent terror of arrest and persecution facing the poets, with some lamenting the oppression inflicted on the Uyghurs while articulating a longing to be free, such as in Wahitjan Osman's 'The Warning':

'They said you cannot stay here/Cannot walk here/
In the sky there are no such words/Son, you should become a star'

Language has become a cry against violence and oppression and yet, the poetry is not polemical or strident in its tone or content. Instead, the reader is moved by the emotion of love conveyed in many of the poems - love for the homeland and its beauty with the poets drawing on symbols of nature, reminiscent of traditional Persian poetry, on Uyghur myths and historical heroes. Love for beautiful Uyghur women is a similarly striking theme and arguably, this love for idealised women is a manifestation of the Beloved, characteristic of Sufi poetry.

However, it was devastating to read Gulnisa Imin's poem on her fear of arrest and expected loss of her two



children although she expresses resignation about her fate. Urging the Uyghur people not to worry about her once she has disappeared, she entrusts them to love her motherless children:

'Do not shed tears in sorrow to remember/Nor let your faces grow pale for my sake'

What fundamentally disturbed me was the final tragic sentence of each biography which was 'His or her current circumstance and whereabouts remain unknown.' Since 2016, the Chinese government has intensified its campaign of ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure against the Uyghurs. These policies have led to the detention of over two million Uyghurs in concentration camps across the Uyghur Autonomous Region. With media attention currently elsewhere and Western governments' fear of offending powerful China, the exposure of the gross human rights' abuses against the Uyghurs has ceased and therefore the persecution has gone unchallenged and another layer of silencing has been created. We must not forget the poets and as Aziz Isa Elkun writes: 'Be the voice for their stifled cries echoing from their prison cells'.

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| Binding | Hardcover |
| Extent | 280 pages |
| Price | £41.16 |
| ISBN | 978-1918395006 |

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

The Almond Garden of Kabul

by Mandana Hendessi

Afsana Press, 2025

Review: Rouhi Shafii

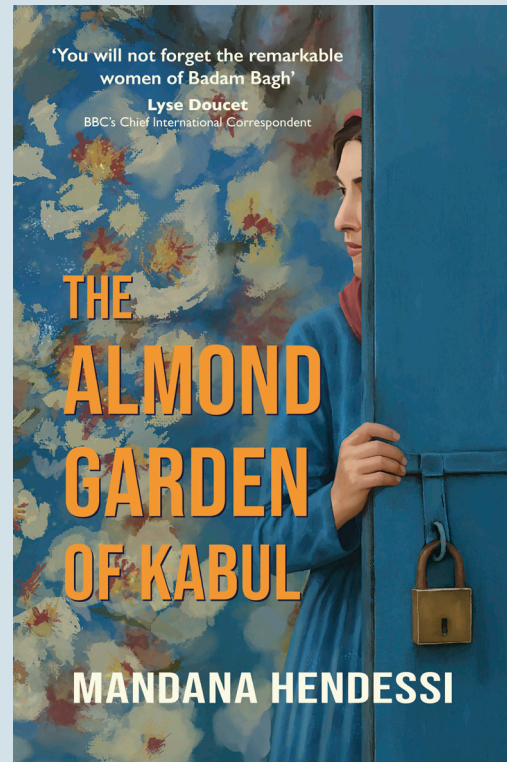
Mandana Hendessi has spent over thirty years working on women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa. While living in Kabul, Afghanistan, for eight years, she began visiting the city's largest women's prison, a place of dimly lit cells where women whispered confidences while cooking on makeshift stoves. Many of the inmates were imprisoned on charges closely tied to the harsh realities of their lives — circumstances that had forced them into desperate choices.

During her visits, over countless cups of tea, the author encountered a complex world shaped by bravery, cunning, brutality, and unexpected moments of humanity. The women, despite inhuman conditions, found ways to make life bearable. Like many prisons, Kabul's women's prison has its own hierarchy. At its centre stands Sultan — a strong, ruthless, yet at times protective figure — who has chosen two young women as her "wives," expecting their loyalty and obedience. In contrast, Setara, an educated inmate, feels out of place yet becomes indispensable, writing letters for others to their loved ones outside the prison walls.

The novel is woven with humour, tragedy, and endurance. The story rarely leaves the prison itself; instead, it brings the outside world in—most chillingly when groups of young women are dressed up at night and transported by bus to the homes of

powerful men. The full tragedy unfolds as pregnant women begin to appear among the inmates.

The Almond Garden of Kabul offers a powerful portrayal of contemporary Afghanistan. Through Hendessi's vivid narration, the novel opens a window onto a nation marked by war, betrayal, and the quiet resilience of its women.



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| Binding | Paperback |
| Extent | 208 pages |
| Price | £14.99 |
| ISBN | 9781068495809 |

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[Afsana Press...](#)

Shamiso

by Brian Chikwava

Canongate Books, 2025

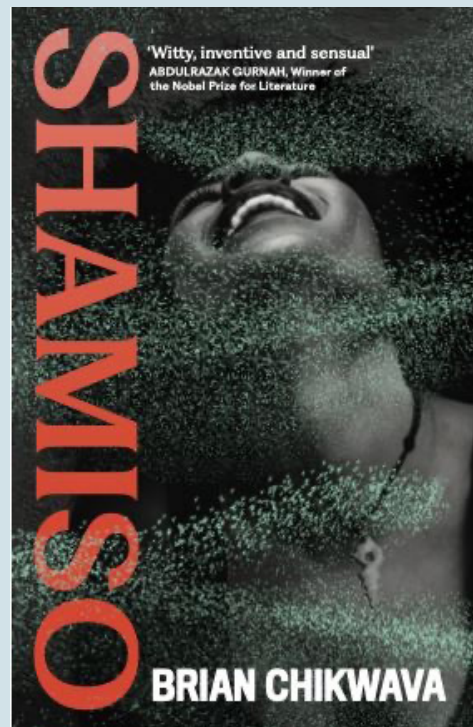
Review: Marsha Glenn

This is a story of migration and of building a life through routine and rituals. This is about knowing when to return to one's roots after weathering all the seasons and forging connections in other lands. This is the self-discovery journey of young Shamiso guided by her deceased, elderly uncle, *Babamukuru* Jimson.

The beginning of the novel offers a vivid picture of Shamiso's ancestral legacy in rural Zimbabwe and Harare. The narrative of a deadly fistfight between Jimson and his disrespectful neighbour seems almost as normal as attending a football match. The first chapter concludes when fugitive Jimson finally returns to his village after eleven years of travelling the world. He is welcomed by his people as "*he's theirs*".

Brian Chikwava adeptly summarises the generational trauma of civil wars and the creation of the Republic of Zimbabwe through Shamiso's family dynamics. Jimson speaks to dismiss the pride of a young soldier, Shamiso's father: "The country has always been here. You left it, returned to it, and say you returned with it? Did you carry it on your backs or in your pockets?" Jimson rescues Shamiso, a motherless child and stays around to teach her traditions and shape her dreams and sense of identity as an artist. The importance of a pendant of the *Nyami Nyami* river god beautifully symbolises the loving relationship between the generations.

Once Shamiso migrates to the United Kingdom to pursue her passion, she finds herself living near the sea for the first time and navigating a completely different terrain. She does not feel like she belongs here, but she does not know where to return to. Cultural shock lingers and socialising never gets easier due to the foreign references and lack of common interests. The author has portrayed Shamiso as a complex character who keeps her head down most of the time, but then she fails to maintain her silence when the hypocrisy hits her hard. Her longing for love with George and losing it over discover-



ing herself, is a prominent conflict of youth.

I enjoyed Shamiso's voice as an independent woman expressing her thoughts. Chikwava has been successful in conveying how much she wants to enjoy her freedom of choice, but deep down, she cannot calm the little girl who was deprived of love and affection. The narrative in *Shamiso* helps me see the cultural similarities between British stoicism and the Zimbabwean way of life. The same applies to the bold and witty humour that enriches the novel.

I found it challenging to follow the shifts between pronouns as I am still familiarising myself with the new rules around the gender identity discussion. I would perhaps also enjoy a slower pace that allows for more exploration about Shamiso's early childhood. It is very satisfactory to find out that even for Shamiso, at some point in her life, she feels that she could go back home. It is the same Shamiso who was not ready to meet her father visiting from Zimbabwe at Euston station and hid in plain sight. I highly recommend this novel. The complexity of the story promises the pleasure of reading it more than once.

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|----------------|---------------|
| Binding | Hardback |
| Extent | 176 pages |
| Price | £12.99 |
| ISBN | 9781805301271 |

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Instants Poétiques

by Chahla Chafiq

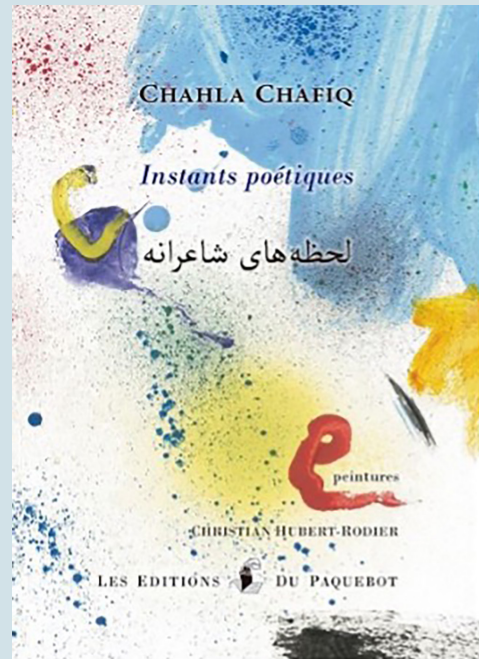
Les Editions du Paquebot, 2025

Review: Jennifer Langer

Chahla Chafiq grew up in Iran but was forced to flee after the Islamic Revolution. She has lived in France since 1982 where she is a sociologist, women's rights advocate and writer with numerous books contesting the Islamic regime as well as the short story collection *Chemins et Brouillard* (2005) and novel *Demande au Miroir* (2015). Her literary versatility and talent are now further displayed in her impressive dual language poetry collection in French and Farsi.

Chafiq states that literature is her home in exile, allowing her to write what would be forbidden in Iran. Indeed, her first section is prefaced with the statement: 'For years I have called for freedom for Iran with my words 'Woman, Life, Freedom' and this call brings forth the hope and despair, joy and bitterness expressed in the poems. One opens with a reference to Mahsa Jina Amini followed by the awful fate of rebellious women and opponents of Iranian rulers over the centuries.

I love the minimalist way Chafiq uses imagery, such as rain, sun, twilight or autumn, to suggest deep personal emotions and moods, evocative of Verlaine's poetry: 'It rained the whole day/It sobbed with leaden sorrow?'. Achieving emotional nuance, her poems capture her inner subjective states such as agony, anger, happiness, melancholy, longing and nostalgia. The collection is divided into themes: 'From so far away, from so close, Iran, freedom', 'Remembering and Forgetting', 'Dreams and Nightmares', 'Love – finding it and separation' and 'Of Living' (tide and backwash). The moving penultimate poem is about Chafiq fleeing from Iran thirty-three years ago but it is also a poem suffused with longing. She remembers how the bewildered group



of escapees fled in lorries, on horseback and by boat, walking along winding paths across mountains and waters. Thirty-three years have passed and those resisting the regime and escaping continue to increase day by day. Her final stanza is 'O moon/O stars/When will you come with loving steps/Into the night of the exiles!' In contrast to this poem steeped in sadness is the final exuberant poem 'The Taste of Colours' about buying a yellow or green lemon, the joy in their colour and resolving to plant the lemon in the hope of an enchanted flower. On this note, the amazing explosions of colour by Christian Hubert-Rodier that illustrate the collection, enhance the emotional impact of the poems.

Through its poetic moments, this wonderful collection provides profound insights into the complexity of exile with its struggle of existence in the present, its never-ending yearning for the past and for a future free Iran and its continuing resistance to a brutal regime.

You can order this book at:
[Les Editions du Paquebot...](http://www.leseditionsdupaquebot.com)

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.

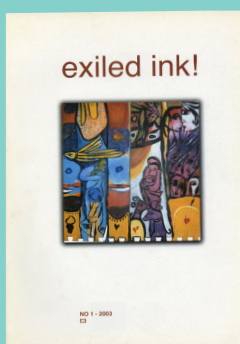
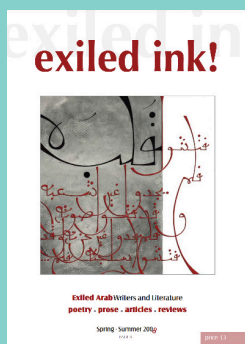
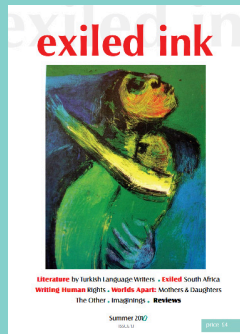
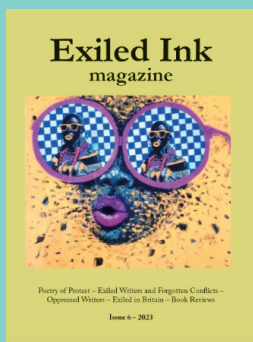
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