

THINK OF OTHERS
THE ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Compilation of Poems



20 WORLD CONFERENCE
24 ON STATELESSNESS
SOLIDARITY . KNOWLEDGE . CHANGE

We are delighted to share with you, this poignant compilation of poems on themes such as statelessness, belonging and identity. They shed light on the experiences of statelessness, penned by both stateless individuals and compassionate allies. Within these verses, you will find narratives of struggles, resilience, and the quest for justice in the face of bureaucratic indifference, violence and oppression.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the contributors whose words breathe life into these pages: **Abdul Kalam Azad, Benjamin Alizada, Rukhsana R. Chowdhury, Mona Kareem, Rifaat Al-Areer. Worshan Shire, Moheeb Barghouti, Fady Joudah, Masuma Tavakoli, Amal de Chickera, Khaled Juma, Shahd Qannam, Mwaffa Al-Hajjar, Chandran Kukathas, Dhakshavini Sooriyakumaran, Eleftherios Chelioudakis, Nellie Jo David, Thida Shania, Yasmin Ullah, Mayyu Ali, Ro Anamul Hasan, Pacifist Farooq, Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, and Aria Iqbaal.**

Their voices illuminate the often-overlooked plight of stateless individuals. Through poetry, they forge connections, challenge perceptions, and advocate for the recognition of the inherent dignity and rights of all people, regardless of their nationality.

Think of Others

By Mahmoud Darwish

Translated by Mohammed Shaheen

As you prepare your breakfast, think of others
(do not forget the pigeon's food).

As you conduct your wars, think of others
(do not forget those who seek peace).

As you pay your water bill, think of others
(those who are nursed by clouds).

As you return home, to your home, think of others
(do not forget the people of the camps).

As you sleep and count the stars, think of others
(those who have nowhere to sleep).

As you liberate yourself in metaphor, think of others
(those who have lost the right to speak).

As you think of others far away, think of yourself
(say: "If only I were a candle in the dark").

Every Day on the Calendar is Nellie

By Abdul Kalam Azad

I live with a strange fear
I cannot sleep

Night glitters and my heart flutters
My ears pop like a rabbit's

On this new moon night, I see
Every day on my calendar stained with blood
You have seen blood all your life, I tell my heart
Why are you scared of blood?

I close my eyes
Another handful of fear rumbles in my
belly.

May is not marked in blood- the Beki's waters
Have washed it clean

I was scared in Khagrabari. I walked down through Beki and reached Mazidbhita.

Haishyor Bhai's one and a half year old boy
Drowned
And his body hardened
One fine day in June

Nearby Uncle Fajal trembles like a leaf
Uncle has a fever, hasn't eaten for two days
He sits on a bamboo bed the size of a calendar
Aunty trembles too
What if the waters rise some more?

The wet calendar dries
Fear drenches my mind
In a dark room, my hands turn the pages

A damned fox maybe a civet stole my hens
The cacophony of chickens struts over
My calendar

Sister Halimon was taken to detention leaving her three-month-old son behind
Sister Hasina had her baby inside the detention camp
In four years the little boy has not seen the world outside this coop

My world shivers in fear
I cannot sleep

Lend me some strength friends
Lend me some false hope

For one, just one night on this calendar
Let me sleep

Get up and dance

By Benjamin Alizada

Get up and dance on the blue waves in the seas
Keep rowing in the river of blood and dance on the ocean
Dance on the beaches, on the sabulous in the burning deserts
In Afghanistan, in Syria, in old Berlin, get up and dance with the Nazis

Dance next to the battle tanks with the sound of bullets, hand to hand with the Taliban in the middle of Dehmazang.

Wrap your arms, tighten your legs, kiss your lover's lips, and dance with burning moans
Let this be the last visit, recklessly dance with the security officers
Sew your lips shut and dance with thirsty on the broken glasses
Be a fire on people's lives, in the middle of the Pole-Sorkh¹ memory of me

Dance in cafes, dance in the squares
Get ISIS up and dance with tears to this world
Let these vile people cut off your head
With a headless body, Dance in the midst of dying

Dance until your dance becomes a symbol of freedom
Intoxicating you, becoming the thoughts of the sleepless
You yourself are a coup and you have thousands of words in your heart
Get up, get up with all your words, this time dance with death.

¹ Before the fall of Kabul, Pole-Sorkh was a gathering place for cultural figures, writers, poets, artists, stylish and well-dressed couples with modern and crowded cafes. Now the sidewalks were occupied by Taliban fighters with Kalashnikovs in their hands ready to fire, bare feet, soiled and long clothes, uncombed, dirty and long hair, which in the subconscious of Afghans are a true symbol of terror.

بلند شو در دریاها روی موج های آبی برقصد

خونه آبه پارو کن و در اقیانوس ها برقصد

توی ساحل ها روی ریگزار ها در دشت های سوزان برقصد

در افغانستان در سوریه در برلین قدیم بلند شو با نازی ها برقصد

در کنار تانک ها با صدای گلوله دست در دست طالبان درست در وسط ده مزنگ برقصد

دستانات را حلقه کن پاهایت را محکم بوسه بزن بر لبهای یار و با ناله های سوزان برقصد

بگذار این آخرین دیدار باشد بی پروا با ماموران امینتی برقصد

لبه‌هایت را بدوز و تشنه بر روی شیشه های ریخته برقصد

آتش بشو بر جان آدمها وسط پل رسخ با یاد من برقصد

در کافه ها برقصد در میدان ها برقصد

داعش را بلند کن و با گریه ب این دنیا برقصد

بگذار سرت را ببرند این انسان های پست

با بدنی بی سر در حال جان دادن برقصد

انقدر برقصد ک رقصد شود سنبل آزادی ها

مست کند آدم را شود افکار بی خوابی ها

تو خودت کودتایی و هزاران حرف بر جان داری

بلند شو بلند شو با تمام کلماتت اینبار با مرگ برقصد.

This poem was written
to express solidarity with the millions of refugees and stateless people of the world.

By Mohammad Hasan

Translated by Rukhsana R. Chowdhury

Whether one is a city dweller or a villager
Citizenship is essential

Whether one is rational or remains immature
Whether one is blessed or stays deprived
Everyone must be aware
Citizenship is essential

Whether one is a migrant dweller
Or a son of the soil
All hearts have conviction
Citizenship is essential

Surrounded by crisis of the new century
Chaos and turmoil everywhere
Citizen is in search of Citizenship
Citizenship is essential

Dust

By Mona Kareem

*"We did not cross the border, the border crossed us."
—from the chants of indigenous Americans*

My grandfather crossed the desert
like it were the threshold of his house
in his eyes, it did not seem yellow or infinite
the way I see it
he knew intimately each layer of its skin
how it changed its shirts with the sky
when it raged, and when it calmed
to allow his arrival

My grandfather did not die
with men in the sun
nor did he travel across an iron gate
he crossed lines
the state was yet to discover
in his memory
the borders remained dust
even after they declared names and maps
my grandfather did not go to school
where they would pilfer his geography

He never expected that one day
he would have to keep still
to look towards the opposite bank
and find nothing
he squints his eyes
covers them with the tents of his palms
perhaps he'd retrieve a fraction of an image

My grandfather did not die
in an epic revolution
or a pointless, bloody battle
between his clan's cabals
he left his sickle in the oil fields
and spent the rest of his life
preparing sweet tea
for guardians of the iron gate

He died in the ICU
surrounded by a tribe of grandchildren
white, and sterile
no sky pulled on his color
and no skin set in him

Kumari

By Mona Kareem

Dear Kumari,
I, of course, do not know if Kumari was really your name,
It became a custom in the Gulf to change the name of the servant upon arrival,
The mama says to you, "Your name is Maryam/Fatima/Kumari/Chandra,"
Even before she gives you your cotton apron,
The same apron that the previous Kumari used
Before she ran away
And became free
Crowded in a single room with ten others
Watching their pictures on the walls
Fading under the air conditioners.

Kumari,
They may talk to you in English
And give you your own room,
But they will dress you in a pink uniform,
For the concubine is no longer required to seduce.

Or they may talk to you in Arabic and the language of fingers,
That which depends on hand signs in some days,
Or on slapping your cheeks in others.

You might have to help the son
Discover his sexual desires,
Or even sacrifice
For the father's bodily failures.
In both cases, do not run to the police station,
From there all fathers and sons come.

Kumari,
You must cut your hair regularly,
Mama might get angry one day
And claim your braid as a rope in her hand.

Write all the songs that you love in a notebook,
No forgotten songs can be found there.

Get angry, Kumari,
Hang yourself with the clothesline,
Use your knife outside the kitchen,
Teach the Mama and the Baba and the Bacha a lesson,
Let them create all those myths about your gods
Who ask you in your dreams
For some Khaleeji blood
To feed the belly of history.

Run, Kumari, run
And steal everything you find;
A ghost gotta act like one.

Leakage

By Mona Kareem

Jimena arrived in Los Angeles in the early '90s. Near America's door, she hid behind a cactus, waiting for the guard to step out for his break so that she could leak into the land, carrying the entire world in her suitcase. At first, she lived near the beach, and picked up jobs in touristy restaurants. It is difficult for America to build doors facing the pacific ocean; practically a submerged quagmire, it gnaws at the land, the waves eroding its feet.

She spent the '90s without a trace. Some thought she was a folk legend, a ghost or apparition, or perhaps a mermaid, afraid crossing too deep into the city would kill her.

Whenever she leased an apartment, she made sure it had a yard. And even before settling in, unloading the boxes, and raising the curtains, Jimena would drag her suitcase to the yard, and start planting cacti of different sizes and ages—some with heads larger than their bodies—arranged in concentric circles. She would sing: *Open up, flower. Shut your eyes, flower.* Her garden would stop passersby in their tracks; even those who claim to abhor nature.

Whenever she had to move, she would take an ax out to the garden, and the neighbors would assume she was on the brink of a massacre. If the cacti were small, she would yank them out by the soles of their feet, or else cut off a taller one's leg, or the arm of a more chubby one. With the care and tenderness of an exemplary mother, Jimena artfully plucked the limbs of her young, and the roots of her friends. She packed the remains in dirt bags, and carried them, along with her other belongings, to a new destination, where the flowers will open and shut again.

This is how she took home with her wherever she went, and how she keeps the world leaking inside of her.

Lot's Wife

By Mona Kareem

Lot's wife stands near the entrance, deformed more radically by the artist than she had ever been by the Lord. The artist didn't preserve her salty body; instead, he restored her in bronze, crafting a prisoner of eternity. She can't visit the neighbors to gossip about her new visitors; she can't even cross the gallery's threshold. Mummified and silent, she overhears fleeting conversations, surveils countenances with incurious eyes. People of various races—jinn, humans, angels, and prophets—walk past her daily. In a previous life, she squirmed when she had to carry strangers' stories in her belly—so she wandered the neighborhood, disgorging one tale after the other.

She is no longer a threat to secrets. Now, Lot's wife pays the price for her fleeting nostalgia, her passion for the past, which compelled her to take one last look at Sodom. Looking back, she barely managed to archive the colors of her life, barely captured the morning's scent before it went missing, together with geography. She barely swallowed the language whose extinction would render her dreams obsolete. At the border checkpoint, a migrant is not allowed to occupy herself with anything but the present moment. They said that in turning back, she had compromised the identity of the Lord. Or that in her gut, she believed Sodom innocent, wrongly battered to dust.

Perhaps if she had waited until she reached the cave before letting nostalgia overwhelm her, the plot of cosmology would have gone in an entirely different direction. In fact, it might have ended in that cave, and left us in peace. Why wouldn't the Lord understand that all she wanted was to write a poem about ruins? Is it because men have a sole claim to ruin?

She looks tiny on the plinth; her head like a newborn with no talent for wailing. The artist has stripped Lot's wife of her limbs. Perhaps he feared she would escape the gallery, and travel back to the underworld.

If I Must Die

By Professor Rifaat Al-Ar'eer²

If I must die
you must live
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze-
and bid no-one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself-
see my kite, the kite you made, flying up
above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale

² The Palestinian poet Professor Rifaat Al-Ar'eer - who did his doctorate at University Putra Malaysia - published this poem shortly before he was killed in Gaza in December 2023.

Home

By Warshan Shire

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbours running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what I've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

Café Ramallah

By Moheeb Barghouti

Hey short story writers, poets and novelists of either sex
kick me out of your gatherings, and pour oil on my memory
for the likes of me are good for nothing but homelessness and leftovers.
You deserve Kundera, George Bataille, Rimbaud and Satre.
My thoughts are sinful, my waters sewage
and my room is smaller than Your Excellency's bathrooms

...

Oh, friends of cookery,
do as you wish;
use every weapon of torture and destruction
to inflict pain on me, to turn me into ruins,
and use every kind of technology
to drag my memory through the streets;
yet I beg of Your Excellencies and I crave from Your Honours;
leave me Café Ramallah
and go wherever you wish, even to hell.

Mimesis
by Fady Joudah

My daughter
 wouldn't hurt a spider
That had nested
Between her bicycle handles
For two weeks
She waited
Until it left of its own accord

If you tear down the web I said
It will simply know
This isn't a place to call home
And you'd get to go biking

She said that's how others
Become refugees isn't it?

Go to sleep my little one

By Amal de Chickera

Go to sleep my little one,
You're safe in my embrace.
Close your eyes my little one,
No monsters in this place.

I call you little, you've grown so big.
You've worked so hard to learn:
 To speak, to eat, to walk, to run,
 To paint whole worlds, to wash your bum,
 To sing new songs, cartwheel and think,
 To add, divide, ask questions, wink,
 To tell great jokes, know wrong from right,
 To show you care, to win a fight.

You are my world, my little one,
Your smile, your voice, your shining eyes.
I am so sorry, my little one,
When I see you now, I hear their cries.

The wails and screams of little ones,
Just like you, precious, pure, good.
Tormented, hurt, maimed, orphaned, killed,
Parched of water, starved of food

This evil, this hell that defies words,
Takes little ones like you each day.
When I look at you, I now see them,
And broken, I do turn away.

We have failed them, my little one,
In a flash, I'd take their place.
If I could take their pain, their death,
If I could lift them up in grace.

And now I'm crying, my little one,
I'm burning deep inside.
I keep you safe, but can't save them,
From this heartless genocide.

We can't give up, my little one,
We fight, write, strike, sue, boycott, march.
For freedom, justice, to ease this great pain,
So little ones can be little ones again.

Oh Rascal Children of Gaza

By Khaled Juma

Oh rascal children of Gaza
You who constantly disturbed me
with your screams under my window.
You who filled every morning
with rush and chaos.
You who broke my vase
and stole the lonely flower on my balcony
Come back,
And scream as you want
and break all the vases
Steal all the flowers
Come back.
Just come back

Child of darkness

By Shahd Qannam

I'm a child of darkness
a human animal
an uncivilised

I'm a child of darkness
a third-generation refugee
a stateless

My skin is brown
My passport a haunting testament
to my journey through the shadows
of statelessness
of otherness
of exile

My birthright legacy: forced displacement and dispossession
My roots: intertwined with colonialism, racism and iniquity
My struggle: for survival, for dignity, began long before I was

I am a child of darkness
Yet colonial stereotypes will never, not ever define me
or my people
We may be voiceless to those who try to drown us out
We may be invisible to those who paint us into a corner
We may be powerless to those who only see strength in oppression

But we will never bow to their kings
We will never be bound by their chains
We are speakers of our truth

"Yousef, my son, 7 years old, curly hair, light skin, and handsome."
"يوسف ابني عمره ٧ سنين شعره كيرلي وأبيضاني وحلو"

"This is my mum; I know her from her hair."
"هاهي أمي بعرفها من شعرها"

"My kids died hungry and without eating."
"الولاد ماتوا بدون ما ياكلوا"

"The soul of my soul."
"هادي روح الروح"

"My three kids, look with me; I may find one of them alive."
"أولادي ثلاثة يا عالم دوروا بلكي بلاقي واحد عايش"

"visit me in my dreams, I swear to God I miss you"
"تعالولي في المنام، والله بشتقلكم"

"I was planning to host a birthday party for her"
"كنت ناوي اعملها عيد ميلاد"

We are 2.3 million in Gaza
We are 14 million in the world
We each are a story, stories, galaxies, the universe
The horrors we've endured surpass lifetimes, stretch imaginations
But we still are

I am no poet
nor am I a writer
I am a human burdened with anger and grief, seeking refuge in the fragile art of translating these
emotions into words
The echoes of injustice have become my pen, and the cries of the stateless have become my ink

My story
Our story
The Palestinian story
Is not one of defeat

It is a story of triumph against all odds.

Let me tell you Hind Rajab's story.
The innocent bloom cut before her time

Refaat Alareer wrote "if I must die
you must live"

And for that we rise from the ashes of oppression
Our story will be written in the annals of justice.

I am not, we are not, Palestinians are not
defined by the wounds inflicted upon us
but by
the courage with which we rise above them.

As the echoes of my words fade into the silence,
remember this

When the world dares to refer to us as

Uncivilised

human animals

children of darkness

remember this

Within this child of darkness, the ember of resistance burns bright,
Within this child of darkness resides, the combined strength of generations
Within THIS child of darkness, shines an irresistible light

The Conservation Law of Ballads

By Mwaffaq Al-Hajjar

Mwaffaq Al-Hajjar is a Syrian poet and engineer. This poem is from his book *Poetic Entropy* published when he was a refugee in Malaysia.

The mailman in my town,
I mean the town of my emigration
as my hometown is not my hometown anymore,
for towns have a habit of rowning
in rivers made of people

They move like
 a picnic boat
 passing
 years and ages
 never minding
 the dead nor
the martyr.

Towns never care
about sadness in the poetry of those who left
towns are like that, they only embrace those who survive!

The mailman in my town
the town of my emigration I mean,
is an eccentric fellow, he knows that I am,
a lonely man,
that I sleep after dawn
and that I love poetry in such a way.

He still asks me, have you ever loved a lady?
I reply;
Who would love one of the lost men?

“Lost women! Get out of the window and look, my dear sir, lovers are drawing
lines on pavements, teaching poetry to the poor!

Do you write – every day – in vain?
Have you understood, the meaning, the purpose, and the essence?
Anyhow, do you have any letters – to your people – that I can send?

I laughed and said:
No – nothing worth mentioning!

“Have you written another poem?
I laughed and said:
No! No!

I have no stamp
nor a destination to send meaning to my people,
but I have written about the land
and about the details of
breaking free from the myths of the clan.
Nevertheless, I still need some time
to eject all the death inside and paste together

all the images
I would also need to equalise
the sides of the poem
as I cannot accept a relation
that bows not to science.

The famous principle of
energy conservation
or
The conservation law of ballads;

Input:

1. The tears of my heart.
2. That long moment of silence and
3. The stray

Output:

1. The perception of trees
2. The sound of water in corneas
3. Excitement on the face of a moment merchant

In other words
Grapes of the worn-out poet
is wine in the hearts of those who listen

“I do not get chemistry
but I love when you talk science
it feels like
music will gush
from the walls of the house
a waterfall
of words
will glow next to me
or a cloud
will enter via that window!
I reach the stage where I desire sadness
when I see you
and anyway
I must say farewell now.
Write, write, for yourself
or for others, my dear sir,
I shall roam around the city.”

Never mind! Just be careful of words in the abdomen of letters.

The mailman in my town
the town of my emigration I mean,
is an eccentric fellow, he knows that I am,
a lonely man,
He keeps asking me to write against my will
And says
Put everything you want to forget
into that box of mail.

Imagine If You Needed A Visa to Fall in Love

By Chandran Kukathas

Imagine if you needed a visa to fall in love
Would you have to make an application to the Office of
Love Affairs?
Would you need to specify with whom you wished to fall in love?
Would you need to supply details of your past dalliances?
Would your love have to explain why other lovers wouldn't do?

Imagine if you had to take a test to fall in love.
Would you have to demonstrate how well you understood
your love?
Would you need to show you could answer questions about
love's history?
Would you be expected to know the sociology of love?
Would you need to know how many people have loved, how long,
and where?

Imagine that you had to prove you were ready to fall in love.
Would you have to supply bank statements to prove you could
afford it?
Would you need references from past lovers confirming
your suitability?
Would you promise to fall in love with one person and
no other
Would you guarantee that if love failed you would burden
no one?

Imagine that you had to leave your love to fall in love.
That you would have to seek permission to love, from a
distant shore.
That you would have to specify how long you proposed to love.
That you would hope to eventually enter permanently into a state
of love,
But could be sure only of a temporary entry permit to love, and not
for long.

Imagine that you could be told that your permission to love
had expired.
You could be told that you may no longer love the one you choose.
You could be told that without a valid love market test your case
is weak.
You could be told to love another, or to love no one, but not love the
one you want.
You could be told all of this and have no say in the matter at all.

Imagine that you needed to retain a lawyer to fall in love.
That if you had limited means you would have access to legal aid
to help you.

But if serious would have to engage an advocate who understood
love's laws.
One who grasped love's connections, but who also had good connections.
Someone who knew how to play the game, to help you play the
game of love.

Imagine there comes a time when everyone laughs at how little
sense this makes
When the dispensers of love visas are giggled at for how ridiculous
are their demands.
When lovers everywhere poke fun at official requests.
When we laugh at the thought of anyone controlling our loves.
Try to imagine that, though it seems to be the most unimaginable
thing of all.

My Name is a Spell

By Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran

My name is a spell
It can't be held
In the mouths of oppressors
Reminiscent of territories
Of bodies, invaded
The database collects my name
But cannot understand it
Yet the database decides
Where I will go in this life

Life, is a series of borders
Built and policed by those
Without access to themselves
But if we can be sorted, ordered, owned
By walls, by data
Then so can they
Eventually, borders creep
But our inner worlds
Cannot be stolen, like land

Land is a source
Of our innate, ancestral power
The soil and water
That nourished my infant body
Lives on in me
Even here at the borderlands
Where my Tamil is broken
And our people
Indefinitely imprisoned

To be imprisoned for seeking safety
For fleeing a genocide
For escaping the erasure of language, culture
For leaving a broken country
For resisting the regime that broke this country
For being born in a country broken by Empire
For being ripped from our homelands
For sacrificing ever being home again, whole again
Is to be imprisoned for existing

Existing is not possible
Without building worlds
Made up of music
Sound and stillness
In frequencies their ears can't hear
Our 'selves' are fluid
Complex, interwoven with 'other'

And at the same time non existent
Not to be contained in 1's and 0's
The seeds of liberatory systems

Systems we live in
Could bend and break under
The pressure of presence
Of a stillness so deep
It feels close to death
Perhaps even colonisers could access
Their own stillness, could speak our names
If only they stayed quiet
Long enough to hear it.

The Birthday Party

By Eleftherios Chelioudakis

A nervous young student in a foreign city
Was looking for ways to make his birthday pretty;
But drones in the skies above his head
Decreed as suspicious his shaky tread,
His skin's too dark, his clothes are too old,
The algorithms race to determine his mold.

They shout to the boy – STOP RIGHT THERE!
They run his face through their classy software,
They ponder and predict his risk-assessment score;
It's the highest, they muse, it's a four out of four!
“The system tells us you're a troublemaker,
You are a drug dealer, a potential house-breaker;
You've served four years in the Gates lock-up.
What? No. Not possible for our system to mess-up.”

“But it's just not true”, the young boy protested,
Suddenly terrified he was being arrested,
“Please scan my face just one more time,
I have never been in any prison for any kind of crime.”

“REQUEST DENIED” the policemen said,
“Please place your hands behind your head!
Our system is perfect its A-L-W-A-Y-S correct!”
And thus, on his birthday, his dreams were wrecked.

The Surveillance State of O'odham Lands

By Nellie Jo David

The Border Patrol operates in O'odham territory
Our sacred lands,
Our indigenous lands.

Our people are hospitable.
Our beautiful desert landscapes
were not meant to be death traps.

And yet here we are.

Straddled by an international border line,
In the middle of a 'drug war'.
Lands unjustly taken from O'odham
turned into a military playground of global destruction,
These military bases, the National Park Services, the Department of Homeland Security
Ensure that *our homelands*
are inaccessible
to us.

They've taken our old villages
and turned them into
Strategic military vantage points
And
Practice for killing
(in wars abroad).

This Surveillance State
was definitely not put in place to keep us safe.
Each version of the Towers
- temporary, mobile, integrated, fixed, permanent –
embolden some deadly strategic function
in their "Prevention Through Deterrence" policy.

The Towers ensure that
those fleeing from already difficult circumstances
head into increasingly hostile terrain.

The chance of death is higher if one has to scale a mountain
to avoid the detection of a tower.
and in an area where water is so scarce,
even a blister could mean death.

Such death
is not part of our normal way of life.

Our people are hospitable.
Our sacred lands,
Our indigenous lands,
Our beautiful desert landscapes,
were not meant to be deathtraps.

Before Trump's devastating physical border wall,
We were raising awareness of the 'virtual border wall'
and the plans the government had
to militarize O'dham land.

Governments know that we as a people have needs
Needs that are manipulated in the government's favor.

Agents came to council meetings
With pictures of
Integrated Towers,
Fixed Towers,
Mobile Towers,
High tech cameras,
Night vision cameras.
And promises of better roads
If we agree.

Our sacred lands,
Our indigenous lands,
Our beautiful desert landscapes,
also have monsoons,
and flash floods

Good roads are always needed.

Elbit's Integrated Fixed Towers
Overlook entire villages,
Border Patrol vehicles remain
on a semi-permanent basis,
Communities know that DHS
is a constant occupying force.

The constant eyes on our people is an uncomfortable part of our reality.

We cannot travel
from one place to another
Without going through several stages
Of
being
watched

The powers that be
Who do not have our interests at heart.

We remember Bennett Patricio
O'dham
And so many others
that lost their lives to DHS
And had their deaths covered up in a public relations campaign.

Our sacred lands,
Our indigenous lands,
Our beautiful desert landscapes,
were not meant to be death traps.

An Ox for a Wad of Paan

By Thida Shania

What does this air suffer from?
My lungs suffocate when I breathe.

Why does the sun look desolate?
There is twilight without dawn.

How can I satiate hunger?
An ox swapped for a wad of Paan.

Where can I hide my body?
Corpses, everywhere in every house.

How can I die in my land?
My kin have been buried alive.

How can I cross the border?
Rivers bleed human blood.

What happened to the Queen of Justice?
I search for her everywhere —
nowhere I find her.

They're Kind Killers

By Mayyu Ali

A stream of blood gushes
From where my husband and son were killed.
I watched
My baby snatched from me,
Thrown into the bonfire
Reflected in my eyes.

He couldn't even cry for full song,
Burnt to fuel in a minute.
At least I didn't have to see the corpse like others did,
Nor did I have to bury them.
They're kind killers.

Killers who enjoy the hunt.
One soldier asked for money and gold,
I gave him everything I owned, including my earrings
And then they raped me one after another.
The last one said:
I am not going to use my penis on you.
Instead, he used his knife.
They set me alight and left me for dead.
I find myself silent and bleeding.
The world is too brave to watch us being killed.

That's Me, A Rohingya

By Mayyu Ali

When I was born,
I was not a baby like you are
Without a birth certificate,
Just like death

When I was one,
I was not a child like you are
Without a nation,
Just like a pet

When I was at school,
I was not a student like you are
Without a Burmese face,
Just like the bleakness of the future

When I was in another village,
I was not a resident like you are
Seeking approval overnight,
Just like a crazed detainee

When I pass through my town,
I'm not a citizen like you are
Holding Form-4 authorization,
Just like a nomad

When I go to university,
I'm not a fresher like you are
No professionalism and major
Just like illegitimate

When I approach people,
I'm not acceptable like you are
Suffering apartheid and chauvinism
Just like quarantine

When I want to marry
I'm not a fiancé like you are
Approved for marriage,
Just like an alien

When I want to repair my hut,
I'm not allowed to like you are
Facing palpable denials,
Just like an invader

When I arrange a little trade,
I'm not a vendor like you are
Ongoing restricted and confiscated,
just like a pauper

When I apply for the civil service,
I'm not a candidate like you are
Receiving the motive of rejection,
Just like someone segregated

When I'm hospitalized in the state-run clinic,
I'm not the favorite patient like you are
Marginalized and discriminated,
Just like an outsider

When I choose religion,
I'm not faithful like you are
Restricted worship in a demolished mosque,
Just inhuman

While I'm in the orchestrated riot,
I'm not a survivor like you are
No assurance of safety,
Just like a rape victim

When the New Year turns,
I'm not a civilian like you are
Under decades-long operations,
Just like an inventory-item

Even when I live in the country where I was born,
I can't name it as mine like you do
Without identity,
Just like an immigrant

Even when I breath the sky's air,
I'm not human like you are
Without a reliable undertaker,
Just like a loner

Even when I watch the sunrise,
I'm not a living like you are
Without the fertility of hope I live,
Just like a sandcastle

Despite living on the apex of inhumanity
And the direness of immorality
I'm quite surrounded.
My skin trembles
Just to feel once the full meaning of freedom
My heart wishes
Just to walk once like in my own world

Nowadays, no one is like me
Only myself
Just a Rohingya!

My Life

By Pacifist Farooq

Here's my life in brief...

I was a frog in a well,
A prisoner in the jail of fresh air.
In the dark, dark cosmos,
No days, just nights, nights.

A small cormorant survives
the genocide waves
by being flung, crashing
into the world's strangeness.

Storm of racism, of hate –
This is my life.

Just like an action movie
In which you are the gangster.
Just like an actor who cannot discover his lines

In Arakan, they kill and bury you
under the treasure of human rights.

Being Rohingya

By Ro Anamul Hasan

Tell me why my world is so different from others?
I grew up in a dark circle.

Where should I look for happiness?
Even time has no trace.

Why does the dream melt inside my eyes?
Reality is unauthorized.

My life has no luck. Why are lines of fate
Erased from my hand?

We all wear human organs. Am I not the same as you?
The world treats me like some other creature.

Numerous complaints on my lips,
But nobody tunes their ears to listen.

I sent a message once, it reached the sky,
Collided there, echoing, unanswered.

I am baited for the hook
By those I trusted the most.
Let the sharks swallow me.

I am a tiger for the rifle-shoot
By those I honored the most.
Let the shooters kill me.

I am slaughtered in cold blood
By those I obeyed the most.
Let the earth devour me.

I am handed a life sentence
By those I served the most.
Let the cell encircle me.

I am burnt alive in the bonfire
By those I relied on the most.
Let the fire incinerate me.

Are all these things about race or religion?
Am I not a human being?
I've been tolerating all this,
Just for being a Rohingya.
I was born in hell.
I was born in the bloodshed.
I was born on the battleground.
I saw on television they had rescued a man.
Many navy boats, helicopters.
But not one wooden boat was sent to rescue
Thousands of us drowning in the river.

Sleep-destroying Sounds

The camp shaft on hilltop
I get no sleep at night
I get up from bed and sit on stool
The sounds heard while staring
deafens the cochlea of my ears

A deep sign of the soul
This is the sound coming out
from the cries of a widow
who lost her husband
at the hands of the war monsters

I hear back another sound shortly
this sound is mourning of an orphan,
his parents were killed
and he escaped for life
arriving in the refugee camps

Sometimes I hear another sound
this voice is nostalgic _
leaving the homeland
too longing from the bottom of the heart
chiming like a tune

These voices come traversing
by air-assisted medium
I am sitting as insomniac
accompanying the silence of the night
makes it dawn.

အိပ်ရေးပျက် အသံ

တောင်ပေါ်စခန်း တဲကလေးထဲ
ညဉ့်နက်ချိန်ခါ အိပ်မပျော်လို့
အိပ်ယာမှထ ခုံပေါ်ထိုင်ပြီး
ငေးနေချိန်မှာ ကြားရတဲ့အသံ
ထိမိလှ၍ နားစိုက်ထား၏။

ရင်တွင်းထဲက ရှိကြီးကြီးတင်
ထွက်လာသလို ဒီအသံက
စစ်ဘီလူးရဲ့ လက်ချက်များဖြင့်
လင်သည်ယောက်ျား ဆုံးသွားရှာတဲ့
မုဆိုးမရဲ့ ငိုသံအလား။

ခဏမကြာ ကြားပြန်ရတဲ့
အသံလေးက မိသားစုလိုက်
သတ်ဖြတ်ခံခဲ့ရန် ပြေးလွတ်ခဲ့ပြီး
ဒုက္ခသည်စခန်း ရောက်လာကြတဲ့
မိဘမဲ့ကလေးရဲ့ ရှိကြီးသံအလား။

တစ်ခါတစ်ခါ ကြားလိုက်ရတဲ့
အသံလေးက လွမ်းချင်းပမာ
စွန့်ခွာရတဲ့ မွေးရပ်မြေကို
တမ်းတလွန်းပြီး ကလီစာထဲမှ
ထိုးထွက်လာတဲ့ တေးသံအလား။

ကြားခံနယ်ကို လေအကူဖြင့်
ကူးခတ်လာတဲ့ ဒီအသံများအား
ထိုင်နေတဲ့ငါ မအိပ်မငိုက်ပဲ
နားစွင့်နေရင်း ညတိတ်တိတ်လေးကို
အဖော်ပေးကာ မိုးလင်းစေ၏။

-ရီအေနာမုလ် ဟာဆောင်

The Unfamiliar Home

By Yasmin Ullah

I keep missing a place I barely know.

Home _ untouched
families I can never return to,
how I long for their hugs.

Countries are known
for architecture, buildings, landscapes,
so accessible on-screen,
but on-screen _ how can you know
anything
about beauty missed.

None of it makes it
to the cover of magazines,
yet I wish you knew this place,
my place, my home,
taken from me,

I wish _ you saw the family
they ripped apart from me,

I wish you knew
through even one or two pictures,
so, you would at least be able to relate,
and maybe... only maybe,
you would cherish this place
as much _ as I do,
Perhaps you would
try to protect it,
from tyrannical oppression of the innocents,
in their own home.

How _
I wish you could know.

Crash

At the shore
Wave after wave
Crashing against rocks
Carrying news
From faraway.

I sat
On one side
This water
So vast

We are
Oceans apart.

How do I
Reconcile
The distance?
How do I
Pull you in
Closer to my chest?
How do I?
Embrace your shaking body
How do I?

At my feet
Waves crashing
Ashore
My people
Whose life revolves
Around water
Vast ocean
Doesn't seem to
Suffice,
As a safe haven

Is that why
God sent you
Wandering
The earth
Searching?

Is that why
Water
Keeps coming back?
Is that why
Your life
Unravels
Like the Exodus
In the parting red sea?
Where is Moses!
While we flee.

Were we meant to drown?
In this violent
Cycle of floods
Us
Frightened and cold
In our flimsy
Bamboo shelters
With no anchor to hold.

Were our children's feet
Never meant to
Touch the ground?
Is our life
Too indignant
To remain
In part or in whole?

Was this water
Tears
Of our ancestors?
Were these Waves
At my feet
A prayer
From those lost at sea?

Waves crashing
At my feet,
Tears flowing
In my heart.

How do I,
Save you?
How do I,
Swim across
The vast ocean
Catching you
From falling
Rescue you
From this life?
In this sea
of misery.

How do I?

While Pharaohs roam free
You
Tied down by your knees
Immobile
While they exploit your riches
You
Left at the mercy of their greed
They
Hold counsels to discuss your
Worth
While you beg to be free

How do I tell them?
"Don't call us,
Boat people"

Because
Seeking refuge
In the dark depth
of this Earth
Was never
Ours to choose!
Call us
The People
Embraced by water,
Even when
It swallows

Us whole
Again, and again.
The water
Still far safer
Than dry land
Ruled
By tyrants.

When we drown
Our sorrow
Our pain
Our breath
Turns insignificant
Unlike bullets
By Pharaohs
Unlike deafening silence
Of bystanders
Unlike broken promises
Of safety.
Water is
Certain
The hole
In our chest
Was it meant
To be filled?

Perhaps water
Come to mend
Our sorrow,
Perhaps
There will
Never be
A parting sea,
Perhaps
We are meant
To Swim
The Earth
Round and round,

Since water
Is our safest place
Of refuge,
When the land
Is filled
With heartaches.

The waves crash
At my feet
Are they calling
Me back home?

A prayer
Solace
A safe place
No human ever will
Grant us
So, the people,
Of water
Must return
To water.

The Waves crash
As we fall
How do I
Erase your pain?
How do I
Stop this flood?
How do I
Lift you up
As we drown?
How do I?
How do I...

The Name

By Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

I

From the *raised*
traded for an otherwise presence,
to spirits
gathering to dislodge the body,
ruffling its limbs.

The *anonymous*
always on guard.

II

I could swear that my name lies in memory.

III

My claiming asylum happened on unclaimed territories.

IV

I was constantly reminded that for the claim to make sense, I needed to reclaim the name.

V

In their eyes, when a name is handed over, it is to be verified as a name for the yet-to-be-named.

VI

It is in the name that I am pronounced alive and dead at the same time.

VII

When they first asked for my name, I dissected the sounds with a scalpel so the name's innards became too bare to be ignored.

VIII

Once the name is misspelt, attending to the crack becomes a matter of time.
My name – is it not the antibody taking the body's hand?
When the Officer asked again for my name, I could not but laugh.
Since when are names inanimate?
When I was left to fend for myself I hid in my name.

IX

What becomes of the name?

A tombstone
A reclusive shadow
A relic
An amulet for the evil eye
A deciduous memory

X

No one can survive a misspelt name.

XI

My mother, to remember how old she is, remembers the catastrophe.

XII

Since misspelling only happens once, the name dies then.
Why is it that it is the one name that is misspelt?
A refugee's name is evidence to survival.
Can you not see that a misspelt name is a wounded name?

A Gate Cut Out of Dreams

By Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

Dear Officer

Forever grateful I will be
to the line you retraced across my fragile *name*

through the *date of birth*

all the way to my *heart*
cross-examining my intentions

no *eye-contact*

or welcoming poetics to tame the abnormal in the air

your palms simply resting on overcrowded texts
a nib-less pen to the side to gesture for the path that wasn't
a line from a past interview for me to follow—
a fault-line

I stand before you
a leather briefcase freshly tagged for the occasion

nothing of significance inside
barely a few documents to remember who I am

Handed over so you could see the other inscribed in yesterday's ink

My hand opening shutting

letting go and

Recoiling

I whisper to the air between us: Those are the tremors that remain
the involuntary dancing for a deferred promise

the body curdling its own –
my body
whose difference is no longer different but a patterned mould for the same

for the refugee after
for the refugee before

for the face to become a trap
A borne scandal –

for the hastening crowds to cast a glance

The projection of my voice from a safe distance to the guttural thoughts in my head

Gait, for you, to measure the body in motion

To standardise the pain of fleeing
of bodies falling into one

For me, *the gate* that is slammed shut in my face

A thwarted escape from place to place

An imaginary gate cut out of dreams

Of what will never be

so on and so forth

I wait at the threshold

It is time to remember that in the shade of waiting, seeing grows

I walked to come to you in my other's absence
on earth

the my as difference

as an attached pronoun steadying a tilting frame

I know that what I say is a minor detail in your eyes

My broken veins as collateral damage

A sign of a former life

DESTINATION

By Aria Iqbaal

The place I am at, it's up upon the hill
Far from the place I will ever reach
We are under control
For no crime
A midday full of rules
The time we choose
Will be our choice

We pray all day
For the rain and snow

*Buy a hope
With my tears
All the laws
Bring us here*

Every morning is a lifetime
Which never gets a green signal
But as I rest against fears
And look back through these tears

The sound of waves
Alters me: Hey
Look at your journey
Over the sea

The reminder to the few
Who go from here
We will never know
Who dies here.