



# Sukoon

Art . Poetry . Prose

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Volume 1 | Issue 1 | Winter 2013

*From the outside in,  
and from the inside-in.*

## Sukoon is:

an Arab-themed, English language, online literary magazine; the first of its kind in the Arab region, where established and emerging artists, poets and writers of short stories and personal essays, publish their original work in English. Writers need not be Arab, nor of Arab origin, but all writing and art must reflect the diversity and richness of the cultures of the Arab world.

Sukoon is an Arabic word meaning "stillness." By stillness we don't mean silence, but rather the opposite of silence. What we mean by Sukoon is the stillness discovered within, when the artist continues to follow the inner calling to express and create.

A calling that compels the artist to continue on the creative path for the sole reason that he/she does not know how not to.



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## Editor's note:

When I sent out the call-for-submissions for the first issue of Sukoon at what feels like a decade ago, I was emailed back/asked on various occasions whether Sukoon is purely based on the Middle East. The term 'Middle East' kept coming up.

First of all, thank you for asking. Secondly, the content is not purely based on the Middle East. The term Middle East is a broad term, including some, and excluding others, whom we regard under the umbrella of the "Arab-speaking" world. For example, Turkey is regarded, geographically, part of the Middle East, but the Turkish people are not Arabs nor are they Arab speakers. Is Sukoon interested? Of course. How?

This is how: If a Lebanese living in Turkey tells of her experiences, her strengths and lessons, and what it means to be alive, then it is Sukoon relevant, because the Lebanese is speaking. If a Turkish living in the UAE tells of his experiences, his suffering, his celebrations and fears, then it is Sukoon relevant, because the element of the UAE, which is Arab, is included. Sukoon wants to address the richness of the Arab world, from the Levant to North Africa.

All these cultures in between are poles apart yet they are each rich in their own way. And they all speak Arabic, each region/country/even village, pronouncing its very own dialect.

Sukoon wants to highlight this cultural wealth, this diversity as well as this unified experience. We all say we are "Arabs," making us easy to clump into one large and limited stereotype. Is this fair? I don't think so.

We are very different from each other, and I think that's okay and what's more, we need to say that it's okay. It certainly does not mean we should turn into sworn enemies or that we ONLY focus on our differences. New Yorkers, as a culture, are nothing like those from California, and it's not even a different country. We are raised to feel that it's not okay to say we are different from each other, yet that we are all "Arabs."

Perhaps we need to get to know one another a little better, for the world to get to know us a little better too.

Sukoon wants to engage the different parts of this misunderstood/misrepresented world, to show, and celebrate, not only from the Arab's point of view, but also through the eyes of an Australian living in Egypt. Or even from the viewpoint of an American, who's never lived or worked in an Arab-speaking country, but who has Arab friends, listens to their stories, shares their pain and joy, is curious about world news, and reads world literature, at least every once in a while.

The artist need not be "Arab" but the theme, whatever it is, should be Arab-related. This is what Sukoon is trying, and

will continue, to promote; this getting to know one another, from the outside in, and from the inside, in.

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Well, it took long enough to get this inaugural issue up and out. So, you're thinking, it better be good. And I'm thinking, it is.

For many reasons; one of which is that this first issue of Sukoon not only includes stunning visual art pieces of calligraphy and photography, engaging poetic voices from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Ireland, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, England, UAE, and North America, addressing what it means to "be" an "Arab" or to live in an Arab world, it also proudly includes previously unpublished poems by Naomi Shihab Nye, as well as an interview with her, about her life and her craft—two notions too intertwined to be as meaningful on their own.

Nye, over and over again, through her writing, succeeds in celebrating and confirming our shared humanity.

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What also confirms our shared humanity is our insistence upon resisting extinction. Like the oak tree on the cover of this issue. It's a photo I've taken years ago in a small village in South Lebanon, where, for the sake of preserving that tree, the mountainous road was carved in such a way that did not demolish it. The municipality chose to defend it instead, appreciating its value, history and symbolism.

Perhaps we, who come from an Arab-speaking world, should be more like this

oak tree; our experiences just as vital to document and communicate, even if they aren't necessarily expressed in Arabic; and maybe especially.

Our responsibility is to "be" a live demonstration of our significance, in any language, the way this oak tree managed to be; we do so through words, images, paintings, calligraphy, in the best way we know how.

Perhaps this is also a way we can offer confirmation, not only for others but for ourselves, for insisting upon existing, and asserting veneration, because goodness knows we, the Arab-speaking world, have managed to stray away from that. We should assert this vow despite globalization, fanaticism—and our various impotent governments—of thriving, of defending what's really significant; words and art, and the absence of borders.

REWA ZEINATI

## Losing the Language

Your were good at the language,  
not the English we spoke every day  
but the older air of Irish,  
fluent with the curl and ride  
of its notes on your lips.  
And I knew enough of it myself  
to be easy in my listening.

Those first years in Birmingham  
you would call me at work  
from the headache of your desk,  
your concerns wrapped in a melody

that could not be decoded  
by your listening colleagues or boss.  
And I knew enough of it still  
to respond in a mongrel tongue.

Today the need to get by in the tough  
aftermath of an economic crash  
has me distanced in Dubai.  
Now when you call, your English  
lilts the line in an echo of that song.  
But the Irish, you say, is lost:  
infrequent use leaving you tone-dumb.  
And I don't know enough anymore  
even to hum.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Full Moon- UAE  
Photo by ARZ AZAR

## In a Place of Darkness

*Sia-sarah* the man called us, *Black-heads*,  
because of our black hijabs.  
He demanded to know  
where our fathers were, our brothers.

He would have beaten us, being unaccompanied,  
had Waheed not come and looked at him,  
the way a hawk might look at a mouse,  
a stallion at a whelp of a dog.

I took my husband home and washed his hair.  
Though there was no glass left  
in our window, that night the curtains  
held the cold to the street.

I would meet Laila by the stream  
under the pomegranate trees.  
We would splash our faces and talk of her trouble.  
*Not another day with him*, she would say.

When she went to the courts for a divorce  
I wanted to stay at home, admire the broad back  
of my own husband, a sail rising from the sea  
of our bed. I wanted to float there with him forever.

But I had him take me. *It's a man's court*, he warned,  
*she will win nothing but another beating*.  
Laila was silent when they told her  
to go home and be obedient to her snarl of a husband.

The colour was sudden, the blue aura of it, the flash  
into gold, red; into shrieking, writhing, black; into hands  
of flame, a voice no longer hers hammering  
at Allah's door. And all the men were silent.

When war came everything I knew was flattened.  
First my voice,  
then the light in my head.

Now there is just day, then night.  
They just happen  
the way smoke and blood happen.

And noise.  
Sometimes it's another's noise,  
though mostly it's my own.

When war came,  
it came all the way inside  
and then nothing was quiet ever again.

The birds are fighting.  
They stab and slash at each other.

They have razors in their beaks.  
They go for an eye, a throat.

Pain is what they feed on now –  
a broken wing, a ruptured breast.

They have no interest in the sky,  
only this feast of death and dying.

I take my blue shawl from the chest  
just to have colour in the room.  
*Sky blue* Waheed said when he bought it for me.  
But the sky has been rotted with smoke and dust.  
Everything is black, even the blood  
burnt into the street.

Waheed used to say *Allah makes all things beautiful*.  
*If you look, you see*. But Waheed is gone,  
a shadow running through the hills.  
I am nothing now.  
I am just a woman holding on  
to a blue shawl in the dark.

There are many shades of black.  
There's the black that comes at night,  
its faceless voice banging out of the dark.  
There's the morning black when the day  
heaves the great hump of its back  
in front of the sun. There's the black of the heart,  
its black river flowing inside me.  
Then the black I have seen within the flame.  
And, in shame, the black of my mouth cursing Allah.

Look at that bird in its black tree.  
It could easily fly from this place of darkness.  
Yet still it remains pecking at its black deeds.  
If it were to go, it would carry  
its own small blackness with it.  
I am like that bird, my soul black within me.  
I would come into the new with the stain of the old.  
The man called us *Sia-sarah* because of our black hearts.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Tuna Fishing- Hatta, UAE  
Photo by ARZ AZAR

## Attrition

ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant

Peace comes  
when everything else  
is  
destroyed,  
when we have killed  
the colours  
and we stand  
swaying  
in a symphony  
of greys.

When we walk  
our steps are soft  
like biting into pears,  
feet crunching  
through beaches  
of ash  
and  
bone.

Peace comes  
when  
there is  
quite simply  
no  
other  
option,  
when  
there is  
nothing  
left  
to burn  
and we  
can  
no longer  
live  
here  
anyway.

HELEN WING





**"See Them There" - *Ad Infinitum***  
Photo by MARIE DULLAGHAN

## **She looks at her love**

My eyes are filled with the honey of Fergana valley flowers.  
My skin is spun from the silk of silver-brown Kyrgyz worms.

Do I have to admit I am ordinary?

I rub the full moon milk on my belly before I come to you  
and in the Spring I wash my feet in the prairie dew  
when no-one is there to see.

Do I have to admit I am ordinary?

I don't want you to know  
I have sores on the soles of my feet.

I only want you to think  
that I can dance  
with the strength of a horse,  
that I am  
all  
the flavours  
of the wind,  
that frankincense  
and aniseed  
are mere whispers  
of who I could be for you  
who stand there  
pawing the ground with your  
abashed and square-edged foot,  
you,  
with the cinder eyes of a brandishing khan,  
you,  
with your apple hand letting the jute bag  
drop  
flump,  
to the firm, ample earth,  
you,  
my love,  
stre...eee...etching  
to  
touch

---

Ah!  
When I die,  
remember I only want  
you  
to  
leave  
Kazakh tulips and Uzbek apricots  
on my grave.

Save the perfumed Kyrgyz rose  
for your next  
love  
who may be

---

different.

HELEN WING



**“No,” acrylic on canvas calligraphy**  
by MAJID ALYOUSEF

## Misrata Dawn

The girls are quiet.  
There have been 20 of us before.  
The captain beats us until we do it,  
gives us  
\$5 as a reward.

It is my first time with a woman.  
I like girls,  
especially sweet, dainty  
quiet  
ones.  
I have four sisters  
like that  
at  
home.

Souad makes fatoush  
on Thursdays,  
while I accompany  
Latifeh and my mother  
to the mall.  
I buy Baklava and Mini Rose  
and carry them home on a cardboard tray  
wrapped in wax paper tied with string.  
Maryam makes the coffee  
for my father and myself.

I like to steep my cup  
in full four spoons of sugar  
and stir the grains ten times  
clockwise  
and ten times  
back  
and sip  
and bite  
into the dainty Mini Rose  
with my sweet and silent tooth.

Of all my sisters  
Leila is the quiet one.  
I have never seen her climb the stair  
up onto the roof.  
She of all my quiet sisters  
never looks over the wall.

Here in Misrata too  
the girls are quiet.  
There have been 20 of us before.

HELEN WING

## Krak des Chevalier, Kalaa't al Hussen by MARIAN HADDAD

A three-hour ride from Damascus to Krak des Chevalier, a fort and military base dating back to the 12th or 13th century that houses a literal palace, what many call a castle. The edifice, an amazing fortress that feels something like Camelot, located in the Kalaa't al Hussen bil Waday al Nassara, The Christian Valley, not far from the village of Maramrita.

Medieval stone walkways make up this place, steps made up of long, wide platforms “in order for the horses to climb,” cousin LaRae reminds. On the property are moats and all. The towers make powerful statements of space and importance. We did much walking, made our way through stunning archways and stone corridors—climbed deep, steep stairs in our ascent and through.

Amer, our tour host, announced, “If you’re afraid of heights, you don’t have to come, but it is safe.”

I’d assumed he was merely speaking of the ten or so steep steps at-hand, at our vantage point, and no railing—they seemed high enough.

That was just the beginning. We continued climbing up slopes of dirt and rock; all the while, the views of the valleys below, vast and sweeping, the luxuriant low and gently-arc-ing hills. The wind gathered strength as we neared the precipice.

And then, there it was, that long and linear—and high—walkway—that overlooks the entire village, from miles up, the low stone walls seemingly offered little, if any, protection—and all the while strong winds blew.

The walkway there, high and frightening, was very, very long. And there they were—all the siblings and friends making their way up, and without any reserve. Sada, an older sister, feather-light, marched straight up in that shaking wind, her deep purple pants and top—ballooned with wind. I thought, for certain, she’d be blown off that stone boardwalk—only to find her terrible way down! But no, she gave no thought at all, and walked up—and up and up—further away—with the rest.

Bryan, a few paces behind, busy catching, on camera, the majestic views on the other side of his lens, a prism, the varied colors of seeing. And when I’d begun to climb the few steps that would take me up to that much-too-high and seemingly-dangerous boardwalk in the sky, the wind picked up, again, I struggled to keep my stance; I had made it up to the top, but I would not walk what seemed at least a mile across—what they said was a wide walk but—with my fear of heights, it seemed, to me, pencil-thin, particularly in such gusting wind.

They’d go later to a castle tower—and even higher—where any Rapunzel might’ve called out for her rescue. Had the wind not been so strong, I might’ve gone.

Bryan urged, “Wait here till we’re done.”

And I began to take picture upon picture, tried to keep my hat from blowing, holding it with my left hand, busy snapping pictures with my right. I watched Bryan climb the steps to the long walkway in the sky, his pants puffed up by wind. I could tell, by the way he was dipping his knees in a squat as he walked—he was trying to keep—his bearings. I prayed. At one point, while he’d made it to the onset of that walkway—and had begun—his forward walk, I was diverted by and into snapping a picture, a mere second. And I’d lost view—where was he? I began frantically praying, thinking, wondering—and knowing—he hadn’t had enough time to walk the full walk, where could he have gone?

I, again, had visions of winged siblings—then—I saw him descend what must have been a few steps to a lower walkway. Relief! I began to think they were all unthinking—for doing that, and they probably thought I was a ‘fraidy cat—and I was.

This was a wall I would not walk, though the others made the trek—in dangerously-high winds.

In the time I was walking about the large landing, the place I chose to stay, it felt as if an hour had passed, and they were far away. I began to see—travelers from France, Germany, Korea—making this same tour—speaking their wonderful, musical, or guttural, or staccato languages in this historic Syrian-scape.

Three early-twenty Koreans; we began to talk. And one of those young men was taking the picture of someone up on a high tower, which I thought was perilous in that high wind. The Korean young man looked up and screamed to the boy—up top—“SOORRA! SOORRA!”—“picture, picture.”

The joy I felt at hearing—this young Korean man mouth an Arabic word; I asked the young girl if they were visiting for long. She replied, “We are going to school here, in Damascus.” I asked what her major was, “Arabic,” she said.

And how I loved the idea—students from another country—wanting—to study the Arabic language—in an Arabic country. Our tongue. Earlier, I’d run into some from Venezuela. To know—or believe—that the rest of the world loves this place—was healing to heart.

Bryan did come back for me; he said it took a while to come—and then for us to go back down, another quarter-hour, I’d say.

Earlier, I was under the impression the whole group would be coming back this way. I did not know—they’d go up to an even-higher ground, the king’s castle. Storybook-entry—I missed that.

But if it were higher than that walkway I avoided—a good thing.

Bryan and I made it, trudging, back down to our starting point—there was no bus. We’d assumed the group had gone to the nearby restaurant; and us, unknowing, that they were still climbing up and down what Tanya said was a high, thin stairway, up to the castle-top.

Bryan and I asked passersby—if there was a restaurant up the hill (where we imagined the entirety of them might be—tired and hungry—and ready for lunch, after the long journey); someone said, “Ah, el mat’em, el’mat’em, hone,”—“the restaurant, the restaurant, it is here.”

One up the hill, not far at all.

We climbed the steep, winding hill, alongside a herd of sheep, worried an oncoming car might take the curve in the road too fast and run—into us. And when we arrived and opened the glass and chiming door of this place, no group was there at all—and we heard loud honking. Our driver was coming down the fork in the road. He picked us up in an empty bus. Bryan asked, “Waynon?”—“Where are they?”

“Isahon hineen.”—“They’re still there.” Thank God for such a bus, a prayer that saved. Angelic driver in a khaki shirt, a gold tooth.

And this other restaurant, overlooking Krak des Chevalier, Kal’aat al Hassan, stood proud, on an even higher hill—we could not have climbed without collapse—it was called “The Fort”—we took our table pre-set with mezza, the preparatory foods one eats before their main meal. One finds, almost always, the following foods in a spread: plates of black olives, green olives, spiced olives, goat cheese, shunkleesh (cottage cheese in rounded balls—aged and rolled in fragrant zaa’tar), and plates of zaa’tar in small mounds, the pungent hills, served alongside small, glass pitchers of olive oil to add—and we dipped into—with soft pita bread. Then the tart, thick labnee, and the laban itself. Fresh Arabic cucumbers, the ridged-skin of them, the fruitfully-full globes of vine-ripened tomatoes, the size of grape-fruits—the roasted flavor of baba ghanouj—garlic-laden-hummus—and more.

Finally, they arrived. We took our places, sat to eat, rather quietly, calmly, tired—from the long tour in the heat. Then came the arrak, the cloudy-and-liquid-anise, the licked lips of licorice—Amer, our tour guide, calls it “Haleeb Al Assad” ... “Milk of the Lion” or “Milk for the Lions”—strong, and often-furious.

Many at the table drank this Lion's Milk, and began the singing—the dancing! The restaurant was chock full of Norwegian tourists, by then. Tables, large foreign-touring groups, as well, sat, drinking beer or wine—eating the same foods we ate. Two tables full, from Poland, and a small table behind us—Canadians, and others who seemed Italian—French. Many people coming through—to tour these ancient, historic sites.

So, there we are, and everyone's feeling light-hearted, and well, light.

Our tour guide began singing (maybe because we pressed him to). "Amer, ghunnay, ghunnay!"—"Sing, sing!"

He said no at first, but the happy group kept pleading—starting off songs he'd finish—and then—he hit it—and the fun rose from there. My sister, Sada, the quiet one—my brothers, Bryan and Albert, joining in—and in lieu of a durbkee, someone began to play the table. Many rose from chairs—to dance—making loud and celebratory noises, zalagheet, while others were videotaping our group. I know this—because I saw—two women from another country do so—I ran into another family on the tour, later on, who said, "Aren't you the people who were singing—and dancing—at the restaurant?"

"Yes, that would be us."—after the arrak, which the Greeks call ouzo (and which Father George used to wash his hands at the table after eating grilled chicken) and after the food—the dance.

We boarded our bus where most everybody fell asleep on the long ride to Hama.

A long walk up to—in and down—from and through—a castle—an old and historic place—does that to a person. And I assume—the arrak had something to do with that. Just enough to let loose and relax, and play the table as a drum.

*Summer 2008, HADDAD traveled, for the first time, with many of her siblings, all-Syrian born, to the country of their birth. It was their first time back in over thirty-five years; it was her first time there. She fell in love with the place and prays now for peace. This piece first appeared in a very different form, as a longer travel journal, as a Special to MySA.com, online version of The San Antonio Express News, June 2008, prior to it becoming this shorter essay.*



**"Freedom," acrylic on canvas calligraphy**  
by MAJID ALYOUSEF

# “Poetry flourishes in the margins”

## Interview with Naomi Shihab Nye

BY REWA ZEINATI

In the world of poetry and writing, the name needs no introduction. In the world of art and photography, Nye has been an active participant, offering image after image, using the tools she uses best: words. Currently a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, she is author or editor of 33 books, including *Transfer*, *A Maze Me*, *Honeybee*, *Different Ways to Pray*, *Yellow Glove*, and *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. Born to a Palestinian father and an American mother, she regards herself as a “wandering poet,” which is probably the very best kind a poet, an artist, could hope to be.

**RZ: In one of your earlier poems you’ve said, “Love means you breathe in two countries.” How does your background affect who you are as an artist?**

NSN: It seems it would be impossible for most artists and poets to separate from background. **Background is always the soil, the nourishing, complicated earth, we spring out of.** What we do with it? Blossoms have many shapes and colors. Our eyes learn to see, through what they have already seen, what they are given to see. And if we are lucky, we never stop looking for more. Truly, I think love means we breathe in EVERY country. Somehow.

**RZ: We find a longing in your poetry, a strong sense of exile. Your first experience with your roots was when you were 14 years old, where you lived in Jerusalem for a year and met, for the first time, your grandmother, who had a huge impact on your writing. How did going back (or forward!) shape your craft?**

NSN: Well, that’s not quite accurate. My first experience with my roots was when I began to know my father, so, from the very beginning. To live with a restless person, a beautiful, humble, funny, magnificent person who is always longing for his homeland, for justice for his people, marks someone. You can’t pretend it isn’t there, even if you haven’t been there yourself yet.

**RZ: How necessary are words? How necessary is art in a fast moving, zero-attention-span, consumerist existence?**

NSN: Words are extremely helpful. Art is immensely necessary. A way to slow down, to hold, to connect, to contain - we are never bored and we don’t need anything we don’t already have. Hardly an advertising tool, but a way to live, for sure...

**RZ: What do you think about Arabs adopting languages other than their own, mostly by choice, for their writing?**

NSN: They are smarter than I am. I think it’s fine.

**RZ: How important are literary journals, if at all?**

NSN: Extremely important. **They have given us so many ways to find one another.**



**RZ: Ironically enough (considering the history of Arab poets!) in the Arab region, poetry is considered at most, a hobby, a pass time. Not a lot of people take poets seriously. (Who makes a living out of poetry they think!) Especially poems by Arabs written in English. How do you recommend this perception be changed?**

NSN: **I don't think you have to make a living out of something for it to be crucial. No one makes a living out of staring at the sky, but what would life be like, if we couldn't do that?** A lot of people make a living out of making war, making and selling weapons, and how great is that? I have never been bothered by the sidelining of poetry - **poetry flourishes in the margins.** Reading Walt Whitman - will restore all the hope anyone has lost.

**RZ: Unfortunately, we live in increasingly hostile times, politically speaking. As writers or artists with Arab roots, and those who've lived in the Arab world, but have been influenced by the West, there is a cultural dichotomy, a mass schizophrenia almost. If we adopt anything from the West, be it cultural/social/educational, everyone freaks out that we are "losing our culture." As a writer how do you think we can remedy this dichotomy?**

NSN: I think we need to **keep sharing our indelible, beautiful habits, customs, graces, details, foods, music, spirits, and nothing does it better than art.** Art has a lot to balance out in our world. We should focus on the positive as much as possible - focusing on the negative only erodes our energy.

**RZ: As a prolific writer of poetry, essays and novels, what advice would you give to emerging writers/artists in the Arab region, and/or in general?**

NSN: **Write more! Write on!** Read as much as you can, write regularly, **find a way to share your work.** Wishing you the best! We need your voices!





**Dubai Skyline**  
Photo by OMRAN ALI ALLOWAIS

## **So You Think You're Arab?** by NOUR ALI YOUSSEF

It's common knowledge that Arabs aren't fans of Westerners. Sure, we love the yellow hair, the science and how hot your actors are, particularly in comparison to the likes of Tamer Hosni. That's as far as we'll extend our kind feelings towards you. Everything else you are, and do, is inherently haram (Arabic for forbidden.)

However, and I say this with certitude, the only thing we hate more than Western governments, and by extension their nations, is each other. Almost every Arab nation is harboring under the belief that every other nation is jealous of its resources, its history and its people; yet prides itself for being the only one keen enough to maintain the "Arab nationalism" alive.

In theory, the Arab nationalism is the idea that all Arab countries are one, because they share the same culture, speak the same language and have the same faith. In reality, the Arab nationalism is a pretense we keep up to make the West uncomfortable. More of a defensive stance adopted due to our dominant conviction that the powerful West wants to abolish Islam and crush the bones of small Arab children.

This called for the creation of the subliminal 'So You Think You're Arab?' contest. Its aim is to tap into our childish nature and have us compete against each other to see who is most patriotic and most Arab. The following is the competition's criteria:

## 1- Get on Allah's good side

Being Arab is generally synonymous with being Muslim. So in order for a nation to prove its superiority; they must first prove that their average Mohammed is (at least seemingly) more pious and conservative than all the others. So essentially, the more covered women are; the more mosques you have and the more Islamists dominate your parliaments; the more Arab you are.

According to this standard, Saudi Arabia and other gulf nations top the charts. Whereas countries like Lebanon and Egypt, the homes of almost all music and film production, are not as Arab. This allows the gulf nations to roll their eyes at less-Arab nations for being "too open" and accommodating to western agenda; although gulf governments are always referred to as "good/close allies" by the US and are the largest consumers of these "licentious" Egyptian movies.

Also, ignoring the fact that if it weren't for gulf tourists, two thirds of the surely dissolute nightclubs in Egypt would be out of business.

## 2- Hate on the Jews

When Arabs gather in groups, we either plot terrorist attacks in Western Europe or complain about jokes like this one. After 9/11 and the propaganda war on Arabs and Muslims, the word Arab was exclusively associated with excessive facial hair and explosives. White people were making stereotypes about us, faster than we could kill them. So we, rightfully, condemned the West for their discrimination and bigotry at the time. Bad, bad West.

But that logic doesn't apply to us. For instance, when we use the word 'Jew' to describe stinginess, wickedness and general villainy, that's not discrimination or bigotry. That's wisdom... Arab wisdom (i.e statements mostly based on historical prejudices and superstition.) Arab intellectuals like to sugarcoat the hate on Jews, "Oh, it's Zionists we hate" or "We have nothing against the Israelis/Jews, we hate Israel."

Err- yeah, not true. The great majority hates the Jews period; be it based on religion, history or how Israel came to be. And it seems to be mutual. They call the truth ugly for a good reason.

So one can easily imagine how Arab nations feel about a Jewish state wedged between them. They're particularly not fond of the Israeli government picking on a fellow "frenemy." Thus, they have developed a disease called Israe-phobia, which is the fear and/or blind rejection of anything remotely related to Israel. To them, it is not a disease, but a badge of honor and nationalism that, according to the majority, we all must wear.

A macho Arab would refer to Israel as the it-that-shall-not-be-named. Any recognition is a supreme act of treason to the Arab nationalism. Because pretending that half of the story doesn't breathe the same air always helps in resolving problems diplomatically. Also, the art of being a macho Arab includes watching movies about Nazi Germany and hailing Hitler while squinting your eyes hoping you could mind-squeeze yourself back to the 40s.

Disclaimer: This doesn't absolve Israel from its faults or its much-neglected responsibility towards the peace process. But let's cut the crap, both sides, at least their authorities, want peace and coexistence as much as they want their heads caught in a highly alert African Beehive

### 3- Fight or pretend to fight (or fall to the ground and pretend to be injured from your pretend fight) for Palestine

Moving on to the other side of the coin, Palestine. Or to be precise, the miserable dwindling patches of land, the West Bank and the Gaza strip. They are a great opportunity to display one's masculinity and good old-fashioned nationalism. Any self-respecting nation's leading figures must make empty promises to the displaced Palestinians, then release even emptier, ambiguous statements about "helping" them out, without specifying a means or a time frame.

Governments aside, Arab nations are as passive and dormant towards the Palestinian cause, as is an autistic child to physical affection. It's hard to care about the suffering of people you don't see, or hear, or speak about, particularly when your own country is in turmoil. Now that doesn't mean we will refrain from criticizing the international community for not helping out either.

Again, bad, bad West.

Since all Arab states recently pledged to maintain ties with Israel, and their nations are either too busy to care, or not angry enough to pressure their governments to do "the right thing," they too, stand still staring at their feet, rub their necks and whistle, hoping their hypocrisy would go unnoted.

Whatever little anger Arabs have left, usually invoked by a particularly sad song or graphic imagery, will be directed at the nearest nation in sight, because "why are they not doing anything to ease our little twinge of guilt over it?"

### 4- Kick a ball around

Feeling awfully westernized today? Your turban keeps tilting, shamelessly, to the left? Nothing beats a good soccer match with a chilled soda drink in one hand, your country's flag in the other, with some cheering and snarling at your TV set. Except if that soccer match would be followed by a wrestling frenzy between fans.

Sports are competitive by default, but they're Hunger-Games-vicious between Arab nations. Although people are generally advised not to beat each other to a pulp with truncheons, many do so anyway.

Most prominent example of just how seriously we take our sports is the Algerian-Egyptian diplomatic spat that started over a qualification match to the world cup of 2009. Fans literally flew to Sudan (the third country to which the match was rescheduled to, in an ironic attempt to avoid riots) to kill each other.

Result: Ambassadors were exchanged, tantrums were thrown and phones were hung up in each other's faces, as each country tried to ward off mass protests calling for actual war. While a land war wasn't in the cards for the two countries at the time, a media war was full-fledged. Sports shows turned into communiqués, politicians divulged secrets about how unhygienic the other country's diplomats are and national newspapers turned into the diary entries of closet-murders calling for "evening the score" via killing expatriates in their country and burning down their businesses.

Normally, the degree of hate and violence generated is directly proportionate to how loved is the sport played. So on a scale of 1 to soccer, table tennis would score a 2 in aggression.

Truth is, Arab nations are like PMS-ing 14-year-old girl "frenemies"; constantly complaining and whispering gossip to each other's ears, about each other, in front of each other. And their sole purpose in life is to prove, beyond reasonable doubt, that they're better than each other. Albeit, we do share historical, cultural and religious sentiments that tie us together, but that tie is now thinner than a cancer patient's hair.



**"Enchanted"- *Ad Infinitum***  
Photo by MARIE DULLAGHAN

## **Jesus Slept Here**

You know that thing I do, a woman walks  
into the picture and the day is reborn,  
like finally finding out where you are  
on a map that reveals its secret.  
It was hard not to notice her among the ancient  
stone, her hair was so black against all that gray  
like one of the hieroglyphs come to life  
from the frozen faces. She stepped from a stele  
into the Egyptian Museum, another person wandering  
alone among the tour groups. We circled the same  
great chamber together and time after time stood closer  
than two married statues. I had stopped reading the exhibits  
long ago. Now I felt exhumed  
and unable to speak to her. We stood opposite  
one more mummy. Mummy mummy mummy

was all I could think. Outside was Tahrir Square  
which I had avoided on advice; I'd waded through traffic  
to stare down at the rocking feluccas blaring dance music  
to no one. The Nile still flowed north. So what, I thought.

At last she walked past me  
with exasperation toward the doors of escape  
as if we'd been entombed all this time,  
and I let go my expectation of living again  
only to feel that cloud of regret lowering  
like rain that threatens but never arrives.  
After a few more aimless glances at cases holding  
what museum cases hold, I tried  
to free myself to find the stairs.  
I had no idea that above me in his headdress of gold  
lay the sarcophagus of the world's most famous  
traveling mummy, his untethered heart  
in a jeweled jar. No,

something drew me to another wing on the first floor  
and there she was again and there we were  
alone in a room as though we were reunited  
among the undisturbed dead. If there are words  
for how apparent she made it  
that my saying hello after centuries  
was no more welcome than finding her brain had been  
pulled through her nostrils, I have not uttered them.  
I wandered away, and at the great doors of the temple  
turned once more to the dust of my dreams.

The next day, on a guided tour of old Cairo  
I visited a church where Jesus, Joseph and Mary  
sheltered on their flight from Herod.  
I gazed down at the cellar where they slept.

STEVEN SCHREINER

## The Language of Salaam

Her English emails from the States  
began with *Marhaba*<sup>1</sup>, ended with  
*Salaam*<sup>2</sup>. She believed *Salaam*  
declared itself, imposed  
meaning, and so it  
did. She said,

"In our language,  
we repeat and repeat,  
we call to the eye and the night,  
we have so many absurdities  
and words for love,  
we have nuance, nuance,»  
and nuance, of course,  
was her favorite word  
in English and French.

"In our language," she said,  
sketching her thoughts across the air,  
"we have letters  
that get stuck in your throat,  
actual letters  
that pronounce you.  
And how can anyone not love Umm Kulthum?"

She counted in French, wrote in English,  
was nostalgic, like us,  
this Lycée and American University generation,  
for Arabic,  
and when she spoke the language of  
*Salaam*, words melted,  
like the setting sun, in her mouth.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK

<sup>1</sup> Hello in Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> Peace, short for "Peace be upon you."

## I am no Palestinian

I am no courageous,  
Fearless, valorous, gallant,  
Proud, adventurous,  
Selfless patriot  
I am a soul in exile  
Expressing my thoughts in  
All languages but mine  
"Hi...I am Palestinian"  
"Salut...Je suis palestinienne"  
I cut my mother tongue  
In half  
نصبت المبتدأ و لعنت أبو الخبير  
كسرت الضمة التي ضمت ما بيننا  
Palestinian poet  
Rafeef Ziadeh was right when  
She said  
"Allow me to speak my Arab tongue  
Before they occupy my language as well"  
Well... to that I must add  
Allow me to be the Arab  
That I am  
Allow me my right  
To learn, to travel, to pray  
Allow me to walk through any  
Foreign street without having  
To feel this shame  
Without having to think twice  
About my clothes, my face, my name  
Or the visa I had to work  
Day and night for the claim  
Because at the end of the day  
I am not the one to blame  
For Bin Laden, 9/11, and all your  
Absurd schemes and games  
I am but a soul in exile  
I am in no hall of fame  
I have to opt to be  
Someone I am not  
Just to fit in your frame  
Despite the agony I went through  
Despite the struggles I overcame  
Despite the diplomas, the degrees,  
The awards I acclaim  
I am still no Palestinian

No matter how many  
"I love Palestine" stickers  
I stick on my car  
No matter how many times  
I cry over Gaza and  
Argue over the Israeli settlements  
No matter how many times  
I curse the Zionists, blame the media,  
And swear at the Arab leaders  
I am still no Palestinian  
Even if I memorize the  
Names of all the Palestinian cities  
Even if I recite Mahmood Darwiche's  
Poetry and draw Handala on my walls

Even as I stand here tonight  
In front of you all  
I am no Palestinian  
أنا مش فلسطينية  
And I might never ever be  
And that's exactly what  
Makes the Palestinian  
In me.

FARAH CHAMMA



"Bright With.." - *Ad Infinitum*  
Photo by MARIE DULLAGHAN

## WITNESS

Who walks the briefest light smooth-hummed each smoke-grey sleep  
& tuft of thistledown, who took our mouths  
to the highway's slacked sides, no diplomatic relations since 1979  
& signed legislation to rush economic rescue, all goddamned white people  
imposed new sanctions & meddle in Lebanon's sovereignty  
when you are gone, fine-looking little coffeehouses when you are gone,  
the lines of wet clothes across kitchens so beautiful  
when you're a child, the salt & the bread already a thousand corpses  
through your arms. What's left. Hezbollah threat echoing



the course of Egyptian police arrests of all persons HIV-positive.

Plato said, The Good dream of what the bad do. I would comb

your long brown hair & sometimes I think I live there still,

across the country border Ave Maria at least I hear the horses in Gaza—

KENNETH E. HARRISON, JR

## MANIFESTO

Beirut, 04/2008

Someone must stop them  
those who bang war drums round our homes  
this cannot be the only way  
someone must stop them  
i am a coward  
i will not die for your absence  
your silence  
but someone must stop them  
we do not have much time  
our world is sitting on a ledge  
legs ready to jump  
we watch from the dirty bathroom  
razor blades wait at the  
defeated edges of our wrists  
asking if we are  
ready

HIND SHOUFANI



## Vola

I wonder  
If you still take a spoon of honey  
At sunrise  
Before you light  
Your first cigarette  
And if you still put cold yogurt  
On your face  
Every morning  
Sitting against the open kitchen window  
Picking the stones from the lentils  
On a tray  
In your lap  
Letting the new sun  
Dry your face

I wonder  
If you still stand  
Facing the clock  
With your two fingers  
On your left wrist  
Counting  
While you cook the best stuffed stomach  
Or chew on your home-grown alfalfa sprouts  
Or your left-over macaroni with no sauce

I wonder  
If you still have your hair  
Neatly pulled back  
And the gold cross  
Hanging around your neck  
And the Heart of Christ  
Pinned inside your warm bra  
And if you still gently beat  
Your chest  
As you pray your rosary  
Lighting a candle  
For Mar Charbel  
And one for Mar Elias  
Pleading  
For cures  
Safety  
And money

I wonder  
If you still get scared  
Every time

A door is slammed  
Or one of us kids cry  
Thinking of bombs  
Jumping on your feet  
Calling Jesus  
Mary  
And never forgetting Saint Joseph

I wonder  
If you still sneak to the closet  
To take a sip  
Before you make a wish  
On the deck of cards  
In your rough hands

I wonder  
If you still sleep  
With the radio on  
Next to your ear  
Listening to the news  
And Saint Rita  
Under your pillow

And I wonder  
If you ever knew  
You would be the first to leave  
If you ever knew  
You were leaving  
And if you really wanted  
To burn  
All the saints  
Before  
You died

LOUAY KHRAISH

## Birthday Wishes

The girls ask for gifts  
Surprise us mom  
They say  
We love surprises  
And their eyes open wide  
Fields of almond  
Honey soaked knuckles  
A universe of tan lines  
Dimples  
And pierced belly buttons  
Mine

I gave you the best gift of all  
I say  
No brothers  
No clenched fists  
No teeth gritting  
No one to tell you no  
But you  
Your bodies  
Minds  
And hearts  
Yours

I let you be  
And paved the way wide  
For your mistakes  
To blossom  
Into triumphs  
Against the seeds I aborted  
In the bathtub  
When you were sleeping  
And Latifa was nine months old  
Whimpering in her crib  
Waiting for her midnight feeding  
And once again  
When she was one

How dare a boy attempt  
To steal Latifa's milk?  
The arrogance of a Y chromosome  
Even before it draws its first breath  
Its need to dominate

I let your voices sing loud  
With tequila shots  
And paid for your fake IDs  
And painted your ceilings pink  
And listened to Xena fall apart

Over the abs of a 22 year old boy  
Who grilled hot dogs for her on the Fourth  
of July  
Your high school crushes  
Prom dates  
We shared secrets  
Loves  
Diets  
Laughter  
Midnight snacking  
Mistakes  
Lip gloss  
Heart aches  
Nail polish  
Strapless bras  
Sometimes we didn't even know  
We were sharing

I gave you books to read  
In all languages but mine  
Uprooted you  
Orphaned you  
Saluted you  
Respected you  
Burnt all the straightjackets  
Into which I was born  
And let Arabic rust on your tongues  
So words like

عيب

عار

عورة

محرم

Would never be a part of your vocabulary  
I carved a treasure chest for you  
In my flesh  
Into my bones  
And let you choose your destiny  
No uncles  
No nephews  
No grandpas  
And best of all  
No brothers  
Who would have mistaken you  
For stains.

HAJER ABDULSALAM



Dubai Skyline  
Photo by OMRAN ALI ALOWAIS

## Death May Have

Three men in white sit by the sea.  
I think they may be poets. They are old  
and walk with canes. They stoop a little.  
One morning I saw them sitting together on a bench  
singing, or reciting verses. Their headdresses  
lifted in the early breeze off the water.  
One nodded with wet eyes and an uncustomary  
smile. Their white gowns reached the ground.  
Around them came and went the women,  
some in groups, following children pedaling  
their first bicycle. It was hot to be veiled  
all in black, covered in gloves, only the eyes  
open and mysterious; the long summer white  
dishdashas flowed when men strolled  
hand in hand. From a land of rain  
foreigners fished between the rocks, casting  
lines far out into the fruitless sea.  
And from everywhere came the thin cats, with half-closed  
eyes, and scars, proud to be closest  
to the Prophet. The day would soon begin  
to boil and until evening the heavy water grow still.  
On my way back the men were singing.  
It is a long life. Death may have something to say  
to me, more intriguing than love.

STEVEN SCHREINER

## Henna Days

In shallow water, her wrinkled  
feet still glide –  
                  henna'd like a girl's

Imprinted decades redden  
her soles, blood orange memories  
                  creasing underfoot-  
Intricate as cone shells, decades redden  
her soles, blood orange memories  
creasing underfoot-

*Eid days, prayers and dresses  
when she ran the sandy streets  
visiting, gifted sweets*

*And as a bride, gilded with rosewater  
oud and frankincense, hands  
swathed in red gold, dripping*

*Her babies, curled in the nest  
of her lap, eyes kohled and  
liquid brown, bracelets ringing*

Now, in the early morning of her age  
she is a black whisper  
                  almost inaudible

But in the sea, her feet  
are nymphs in the waves, painted,  
                  singing

BECKY KILSBY



Burj Khalifa Background- Dubai, UAE  
Photo by ARZ AZAR

## #Trending

We broke  
the breaking news  
from the palms in our hands.  
Streaming guts from Al Tahrir Square.  
#Trending.

Toolkit  
for citizens:  
smartphone heady Reuter  
feeds, hot blogs. Net-savvy Arab  
Spring. Live.

Steel strong  
web filigree,  
cradling aspiration.  
Forty tweets a minute earthquake  
stasis.

Digi-  
chorale: instant constituencies  
out-holler Charlie Sheen.  
Change, YouTube-sprung,  
Flickr.

BECKY KILSBY

## A Few Love Lines to Beirut

I think I might have lost you in writing,  
somewhere between the smell of paper and lead.  
I think I might have lost you in my sleep.  
My attic mind stirs  
too much dust, too little memories.

Memories.  
They age faster than us,  
die sooner,  
disappear silently like hair,  
without a passing date, a suicide note, a last vowel.  
And what are we then? What  
are we then?

Surely a memory, the memory of a memory  
could be remembered again.  
Surely the shadow of a memory,  
the memory of a shadow...

I am tired, tired of trying  
to repeat you in my head.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK



"Measureless" - *Ad Infinitum*  
Photo by MARIE DULLAGHAN

## Exhaustion

1

It is not fine to say We are in a time of war  
if you started the war.  
In Arabic this is called Haki Fawthi – empty talk.  
As if war were weather you couldn't stop.  
Snowing this morning, get your cap!  
To make it seem you're doing the right thing.  
To justify.

2

I cannot clap for military people on planes.  
Invite us to clap for teachers, now that I'll do.

3

A word called "progress" can never be applied to war.  
Nor a word called "success."  
These are crimes against language.  
You will have to be silent for a year if you commit them.

4

It is not fine to go to church, mosque, or synagogue,  
then go out bombing, because every single religion  
says THOU SHALT NOT KILL and  
it's not a casual remark.  
Not a hopeful suggestion  
like when the waiter says,  
Anyone interested in dessert?  
and everybody says no and he brings the menu anyway  
to try to change your minds.  
And sometimes peach crumble does.  
It's not like that at all.  
You cannot kill, then act religious.  
And that's the full-on truth.

4

My German-American grandma had a book called  
Making Friends and Influencing People.  
Who did she want to influence?  
The tax collector, the knee doctor?  
She could barely open her mouth at the bakery,  
she was so shy. I don't think War had any chapter  
in there.

My Palestinian refugee grandmother couldn't read.  
But her heart held one word in high relief, Peace.  
She placed her hand over it. Told us it was in there.  
Ran her fingers over it when she couldn't sleep.  
Never let it fall out.

5

In all the countries I ever visited,  
people were hungry, wanted friends,  
washed faces, strolled in a park,  
stared at waves, paid for a ticket,  
carried a sack of bananas,  
felt lonesome, wanted more friends.  
Not one ever said, I hope there will be

killing around my house. Not one.

Don't listen to any government that says  
killing is okay if you are the one doing it.

First job of a citizen.  
Say no it's not. Shout no. Write it  
on the air around your bed.  
Proclaim it on your forehead.  
No it's not. It's not okay.  
Everyone else wants to live  
as much as we do.  
This is a sheep  
who has lost its way.

Speaking of sheep, how many  
get killed in wars? How many goats,  
and cats? They never get a head count.  
Birds in war zones are said to be  
continuing what they were born to do,  
collecting sticks and hay, migrating.  
Gathering at the river.  
Looking for their trees.

6

Try this bumper sticker –  
even if you don't have a car.  
WAR IS TERRORISM WITH A BIGGER BUDGET.  
Find a song with lots of harmonies in it.

5

A taxi driver in DC asked,  
You wanna know the truth?  
Sure, I said. Tell me.  
We had just met.  
He said, It's the military industrial complex behind everything.  
Making wars. It's the gun factories, the bomb factories.  
They want money so they make wars.

You may have something there, I said.

We were passing the Washington Monument  
before it cracked from the earthquake.  
He said, Of course I have something.  
It's the absolute truth.

What can we do about it?

Say it, he said. Keep saying it.  
Say it till everybody  
knows it and says it.  
Then say it again.

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE



## Festival of Buzzards (Sestina for Ahmed)

I have this recurring dream.  
My eyes are suffering from slurred speech.  
Every time they try to tell my brain, "See!", all that comes out is this hissing sound  
enveloped in dark space.  
Two black holes made of the mass and spin of black holes.  
It is easier being blind when you know you can't see.

Every year in Hinckley, Ohio, there's this Festival of Buzzards where every one comes to see  
these scavengers come descend like the REM stage of a dream.  
Where the maggots of carrion cower deep down in their holes.  
After dawn when the official buzzard spotter gives his speech,  
the onlookers, on cue, back away, and give these birds of opportunity their space.  
As everyone in awe makes no sound.

Can you imagine the sound  
made by rubber bullets impacting the eye? Through a magnified scope, the sniper can see.  
Accurate to the square inch in Tahrir Square, the gunman keeps his space.  
One by one, he unflinchingly aims at destroying each revolutionary's dream.  
A one-gun dictator, he dictates not through speech,  
but through the emptiness where he burrows his holes.

These buzzards swarm and make partial of what is whole.  
In Tahrir square where ideologies converge like the Puget Sound.  
The most humbling sensory loss is sight not speech.  
Not taste, smell, nor touch. A revolutionary needs to see.  
How else may he dream  
with all of this black space?  
Ahmed El-Belasy still returns with one working eye and a rubber bullet in the space  
where the other once saw, just trying to make Egypt whole.  
He wishes it was all a dream  
when the buzzard came and took his other eye. He knew it when he heard the sound,  
the splat of the bullet against his sea,  
The hissing of the eye's slurred speech.

You can hear the rhetoric in speech.  
Can detect the propaganda through the space  
of each word. Like a C-  
section, discernment splits open the lies that they hold.  
You don't have to make a sound.  
We can all hear your dream.

Today, a martyr's message is not delivered through a speech  
but in the sound his body makes when a bullet invades his space.  
For out of these holes the rest of the world can see.

DORIAN "PAUL D" ROGERS

## For Syria, My Love

Death is maturing, my love,  
its greed for blood has grown.  
Silent it is not these days,  
quiet no longer.

Tags of sectarian labeling sought out.  
Simply death is not enough.  
Torture of bodies still in shock  
with the reality before the end.

"I'm almost home dear"  
words heard over space of a face dear  
to a heart  
of a soul still young  
of a dreamer seeking life  
cut short through hate  
blind to reason.

"You're home my dear, You're home,  
You're safe my dear, You're safe,  
in Your grave my dear You're safe,  
no longer can they hurt you my dear,  
You're safe."

We watch in horror  
as fears talked about in voices  
skeptical of a situation manifesting  
in reality take form.

What can now quiet down a blood rage  
half of it mad with hate  
the other mad for revenge?

How can you steady an arm  
from killing those with whom  
they have lived all their lives?

Death has matured my love  
and tomorrow is no longer safe  
for the blood rage is brewing,  
and the fighting no longer  
against a common goal.

I fear for you my love  
I fear for you for the time you are living  
for the madness you are witnessing  
for the hope that is dwindling  
and for the fear you will be experiencing.

Be safe my love, be safe.  
Be strong my love, be strong,  
for the days to come will only get harder.

DANA SLEIMAN

## Migration

An unmade bed,  
an empty shelf,  
a wardrobe stripped  
of all its youth,  
bent hangers  
dangling

An empty space  
bounded by walls  
sentenced to drift  
into the void.

EMER DAVIS



**Arabic for "Where liberty dwells, there is my country," - Benjamin Franklin**  
**Ink on handmade paper calligraphy**  
by MAJID ALYOUSEF



## Democracy

The old farmer Mohammed Al-Atrash was standing in shock, speechless...

On the first day after the Eid, everyone out and about,  
returning to school and work, but Israeli soldiers had a plan.

They brought massive forces starting at dawn, circled an area  
over one square mile declaring it a closed military area.  
Dozens of olive, almond, za'rur, and pine trees were destroyed.  
For pictures of the corpses, see footnote 1 below.

Never mind, we will not include pictures of the corpses. Though stumps,  
they are too big for the page. They scorch its edges.  
We would like the trees to tell their own stories but  
it is hard for trees to speak, once cut. What does the world know  
of the tree-tender's sorrow? How many places, how many years?

Before cutting a tree, anyone might hear  
almond shells clicking into a bowl, olive oil sizzling in a skillet.  
Leaves in sweet successions of light and shade speckling anyone's face,  
saying yes, you are lucky to be part of the esteemed human race.

(Indented sections from an email by Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, Occupied Palestine, 2011)

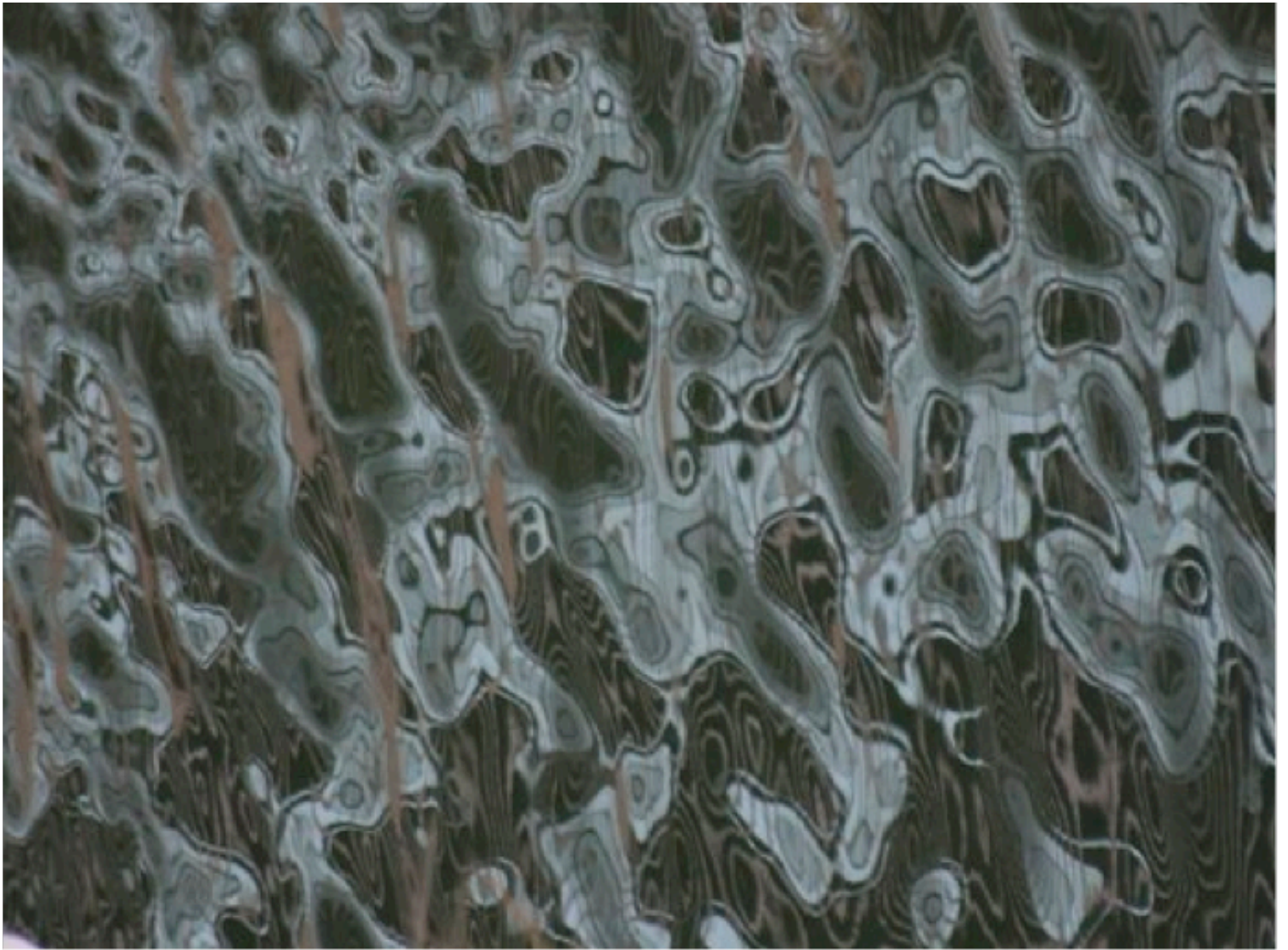
NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

## On the Plane of Men Without Legs

A deep lull engulfed us up and down the aisle.  
Some lacked arms or hands as well.  
I wanted to beg, Tell me your second thoughts  
about war, or your fourth. Once the cloud settled  
and silence coated the changed air...where  
were you then? I would not wish to enter even  
the slimmest corridor leading back. But ask,  
Where are you going today? My seatmate  
says glumly, We are going to a gathering  
of people like us. To learn how to live again.  
He doesn't say, anything accomplished.  
He doesn't say lost or won.

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE





"Close Your Eyes"- *Ad Infinitum*  
Photo by MARIE DULLAGHAN

## Traitors Are Translators

Pocahontas said

*I put my whole life in danger.  
I didn't imagine it was going to be like this.*

Sacagawea said

*Anybody associated with the Coalition,  
they're all seen as traitors by the militias.*

Hiawatha said

*They can't make exceptions for us  
despite the enormous sacrifices we have made.*

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS

## PICK ME UP (for Palestine, who defies geography)

smiles freeze, drop off the faces of strangers who try  
their pick up lines of sleaze  
on trains through France, who see a redhead  
made up in tight clothes that show off the curves  
international, woman, all throughout, and they  
inevitably ask, where are you from, and i watch  
the eyes widen, in dismay sometimes, sometimes in respect  
often in pity, always a controversy  
always an opinion, i'm with you, i'm with them, you don't exist,  
they should never have existed, but you're  
so pretty, said with surprise, like i am supposed  
to be ugly, how strange, your accent is all perfect and  
you don't look funny, and by funny, they mean swathed  
in black mourning and veils  
wailing murder and disease and misery  
and when some official wants to know  
who's this uncle, and how come you live alone  
aren't you an arab young woman, why are you  
traveling so far from home, and where were  
you born, and what passport do you hold, and how come your accent  
is all fucked up, because mr. official man with too much time on your hands  
i have languages for every occasion  
different words in different situations to the rescue, i play  
the right card at every given chance to  
make sure one gets by, one gets the best, in this racist  
test of endurance, you say,  
you're from here, but born there, and you don't know  
where your uncle is, and you haven't met  
all your thirty three cousins  
and there is a grandparent who never saw you  
and you speak not the same language as your sister-in-law  
nor do you run into the same family name,  
and your home might have been  
bulldozed flat by those powers that be,  
that you know cannot be, should not be  
and yet they are, here, and they  
will to stay, they think, eternally.

and you grieve,  
daily and you did not hold your father's hand when your mother  
died, and you did not go to the funeral of the only  
grandmother you ever knew or loved  
and you may not make it to the wedding of your  
favorite cousin, and you cannot tell if they will grant you  
the visa for that scholarship  
you deserve and need and  
over the telephone your life is lived  
and emails become your heirlooms of jewels

and pictures are what you make do  
with night after morning  
of absence  
and you grieve  
and you wish  
you wish you held your father's heart  
when your mother died  
but he was not there and what do you say  
when he cries at the news  
when he is helpless, these children on tv beseech us  
on borders  
iraq beirut amman ramallah jenin  
left to rot in the  
putrid air of war and warfare and the powers  
universal that don't care  
how to wash away the childhood  
spent witnessing  
massacres of bloodied bodies  
strewn about here and there  
and your mother tried, she tried all she could dare  
to give you innocence, but the persistence  
of memory is such that the war torn  
limbs of your ancestry are  
always there and what does it feel like you say?

well,  
you wake up everyday  
and you pray visas and passports didn't take precedence  
over the need in your center for  
the family reunion  
and you spend lifetimes in lands distant astray  
your rights are given to you by governments alien  
and democracies you cared not for  
with not an olive tree to heal you and yet you  
are thankful, grateful, jubilant  
even that your kids  
are accounted for, asleep in their bedrooms  
with their crayons and dolls, and  
so you stay, year after year in exile  
you stay. you grind your teeth at night, and take your blood pressure medication  
and weep into the phone  
and weep into the letters that are the only way.

you  
stranger on a train who thinks i'm sexy  
who thinks i'm an american  
in my Levi's jeans and blue tie dye t-shirt and purple  
lipstick, and my walkman blasting the prodigy, for teenagers are the same  
everywhere, this is where i'm from, and you  
you who think  
i'm young and filled  
with mystery and exotic lands  
and an alluring sense of oriental tragedy  
this is it

do not see your children  
for years  
if you knew where they were  
to begin with  
do not bear the news for another day

do not whisper a word when you need to scream out what they've made  
you and who've you become  
and how it is to be questioned at every turn  
about the political activities of your uncle  
whom you never met  
who ran a pastry shop  
and forget you will forget  
that a family is a normal unit  
of harmony and people just get on planes  
and marriages are joyous occasions not  
reasons to panic  
and feel robbed of your rights  
count not the tears that are wasted in nights  
when you cannot tell  
why one should hold on to their name  
and know that this is what it's like to not have an answer  
to where you are from,  
for you are from everywhere  
and nowhere  
and you have a home  
but it is not there  
it was never there  
for you  
you were never allowed to see  
you were born a refugee  
and this is what is to be  
Palestinian. This is what it is to be Palestinian.  
this is what is to be, and be and be  
and not be.

HIND SHOUFANI

## I AM YOUR DRIVER FOR TONIGHT

Where do you want to go?  
I am your driver for tonight  
What smoking boulevard, what red light  
districted restricted neighborhood?  
The wheels caress the floor and go off just like  
daddy does  
\*the driver sighs\*  
But never mind me, love  
Where do you want to go?  
Streets left and right and silhouettes in every  
alley looking left and right  
But in our head dear, wheels never leave their  
grounds  
In our head dear, we stay where we are as the  
world comes to us  
Oh I have you an Amsterdam with New York  
combined  
With Middle Ages around the edges  
All in an Acid Techno Age in a land of machines  
With hearts as big as hands  
With choirs of little boys  
I am your driver for tonight baby  
I offer you the world on the tip of a claw  
What smoking landmines, what dead light  
unrestrictive restricted figment of your mind  
are we treading into now?  
What's going through your mind baby?  
I am your driver for tonight

THE AMAZIN' SARDINE



## McChurch

Microwave my salvation.  
Zap my rosary beads until  
they become one big plastic  
glob splattered inside.  
Deep fry my blessings  
full of cholesterol and selfish intentions,  
sizzling hot and over-seasoned.  
If we are the salt of the world,  
deluge me with more until I  
can taste my righteousness  
calloused on my tongue.

Read me scriptures at a drive thru window,  
short ones like John 11:35  
or 1 Thessalonians 5:16.  
Make sure you put enough grape juice  
and crackers in the bag with my straws and napkins.  
I know Jesus is on the main line but,  
what's your customer service number?  
I'm calling your manager.

Preach me a sermon on how I can save my money.  
Tell the choir to sing forte so they can drown out  
what's left of this conscience of mine.  
Anything else is preaching to the proverbial choir.  
If God loves me, he will bless me with a Bentley.  
What did I deserve to get this Kia?  
What curse was put on my forefathers  
that made me have to work this 9 to 5?  
What Eddie Long and Catholic priests do to little boys  
has nothing to do with me just as long as  
they intercede for me to get my bills paid on time.

Pray for me in text message language, though,  
for football comes on in one hour  
and the roast is in the oven.  
I may burn in hell but I'll be damned  
if the supper is over-cooked.  
I may burn in hell but I'll be damned  
if the supper is over-cooked.

WWJD? I have no inkling of a clue.  
That's why I'm tithing the bishop,  
rook, or whatever title men use to make themselves  
feel holier than me.  
All I want is to be more than a pawn  
because lately I have only been able to make  
one move at a time.  
Service is too long.  
Let me hold someone's sleeping baby  
so I can pinch it to give me a good excuse  
to walk out of service.

Make a website so I can fellowship  
from the comfort of my computer screen.  
I can multi-task during worship.  
I can finish my to-do list during prayer and still  
remember the sick and shut-in list.  
So shut up before I shut down altogether  
and visit the atheist congregation I call my living room.

Forgive me until I'm washed to a prune.  
Allow me to destroy myself until it hurts.  
Let me live happy with my legend of demons.

DORIAN "PAUL D" ROGERS

## The Split by HELEN WING

I am no one, my flesh has dried off, my bones are bleached. I am beached. I don't like it here. Let me go!

When I first saw the Burj al Arab I thought it looked like a cockroach, the curved white horizontal and vertical struts, the blue glass plates, an insect carapace. Menaced, I flinched. I can only scurry up and down surfaces here. I miss life. And so does everyone else.

I've had to buy a watch but still I do not know which day it is, which month, which season. Am I immortal? Is this heaven? The light, the heat, the still sea, the dark windows and the high walls. Time does not exist here, though Ramadan descends on the wave of an apricot cradle moon. I stay at home and the air-conditioning pounds. I am constantly in-between, on life support, plugged in and down. I feel like I live on a ferry, what with the noise, that I am traveling the Styx, always. Too much light is like being in the dark. When I meet people it's like I'm answering a wrong number phone call, swiftly shut down and out. Here everyone is alone.

The Emirati girls don't have feet. They are swaying black willows. Gorgeous for a while. Later, after the kids, they move like slugs. Everyone's a lady, no one a woman. Emirati men are gentle and vain. An arcane femininity makes aristocrats of them all. Everything is shielded in the sun. Black abayas and the white kandoras, but nothing is black and white here. Only once have I seen men rub noses, in Abu Dhabi, in Starbucks. Is that cultural difference or simply a tenderness we should all employ?

I am no one and yet I am multitudes in my Dubai desert daze. If you let me go I will remember all those people I never got to know because I have been blinded and shriveled by the sun all year. I'll remember the Scottish Trotskyite, who moved to Russia to be a Communist, who is now stuck in his retail nemesis with a train wreck of a marriage to his Caucasian mountain wife; I'll remember the South African Indian magnate who keeps a tiger as a pet, retailing the wild and endangered and marketing his success whilst his alter ego withers in its concrete tomb; I'll remember the Filipina who said 'in the Philippines all the women lose,' which is why she's here and far from her estranged daughters who have been told by her husband that their mother has left them, and thus he moves his lover into the house. She sends them money every month and lives above the beauty parlor with eight other girls in their forties. I'll remember her boss and her pointy nose and wrinkled lips; I'll remember the Indian Marya, widowed at twenty six, who works for school fees and a dowry for her daughter and fears her own mother will sell off her child before she gets back to Kerala. She likes it here because she can use her given name, which her mother-in-law and dead husband refused to use. They changed her name to Yasmeen; I'll remember the happy Yemeni taxi driver who loves the British because the only history book he has seen about his country, the most beautiful country in the world, was written by a Brit. He has been here for six years paying off a loan for a tractor that he bought with the bank's money. The farm he bought it for is on the side of a most beautiful hill where the best coffee and fruit in the world is grown, he said. His farm was entirely washed away in a flash flood. He laughed, 'And I still have a tractor.' He called me 'Habibi' and was far more engaging with his unruly joy than anything that went on at the literary festival I was attending at the time; I'll remember the smile-or-die prozac poppers who play tennis everyday at the Dubai Ladies Club who

have really firm buttocks that no-one ever touches. They nudge each other when I go to their café; I'll remember the quietly desperate Irish pranic healer who appears to be utterly unaware of the contradiction she inhabits; and then finally I'll remember the Greek opera singer, Panos, who came to stay and sing Verdi. He went up the Burj Khalifa and said that somehow even the real experience of going so high has been made artificial, as if he were not really doing it.

Even the real becomes fake here. What hope then for our love?

Whatever you decide, I am vanishing.

In the light your chrysanthemum eyes bleed desert death onto my grave. My hope, such as it is, is that you never find the exact spot of my post abode, that my mortal dust stay indistinguishable for you from the sand stuck to your rubber-soled career path. Your eyes are the antechambers of cloud-scented perceptions. Nothing resides. Clarity is for the afterlife. You look. I look. No one sees: multiple.



Beirut Streets  
Photo by ARZ AZAR



## Nooh

Another pint glass of Multi-Pure. Listening to Tortoise's  
First. Ace Hardware in the Castro has plastic coffee cones.

When did I fall asleep?

Rashid speaks Arabic to me and smiles  
As if I secretly knew his language all along.  
Driving the compact above the wadi's red line  
Midway I worry so give it some gas and motorboat.

I don't recall the moment I entered the flood  
Or the moment I was across and out of the water.

Runner of errands, Rashid gets my visa cancelled at the airport and smiles  
Goodbye after I surrender my labor card.

Transiting through Amsterdam  
Security called upon me to explain  
My one-way ticket from the Sultanate.

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS

## (The Story of Our Romance?) She Dreams of Me and then Writes:

We were flying this 6-seater plane into Damascus  
& you put it on autopilot & went into the bathroom.  
I kept yelling for you.

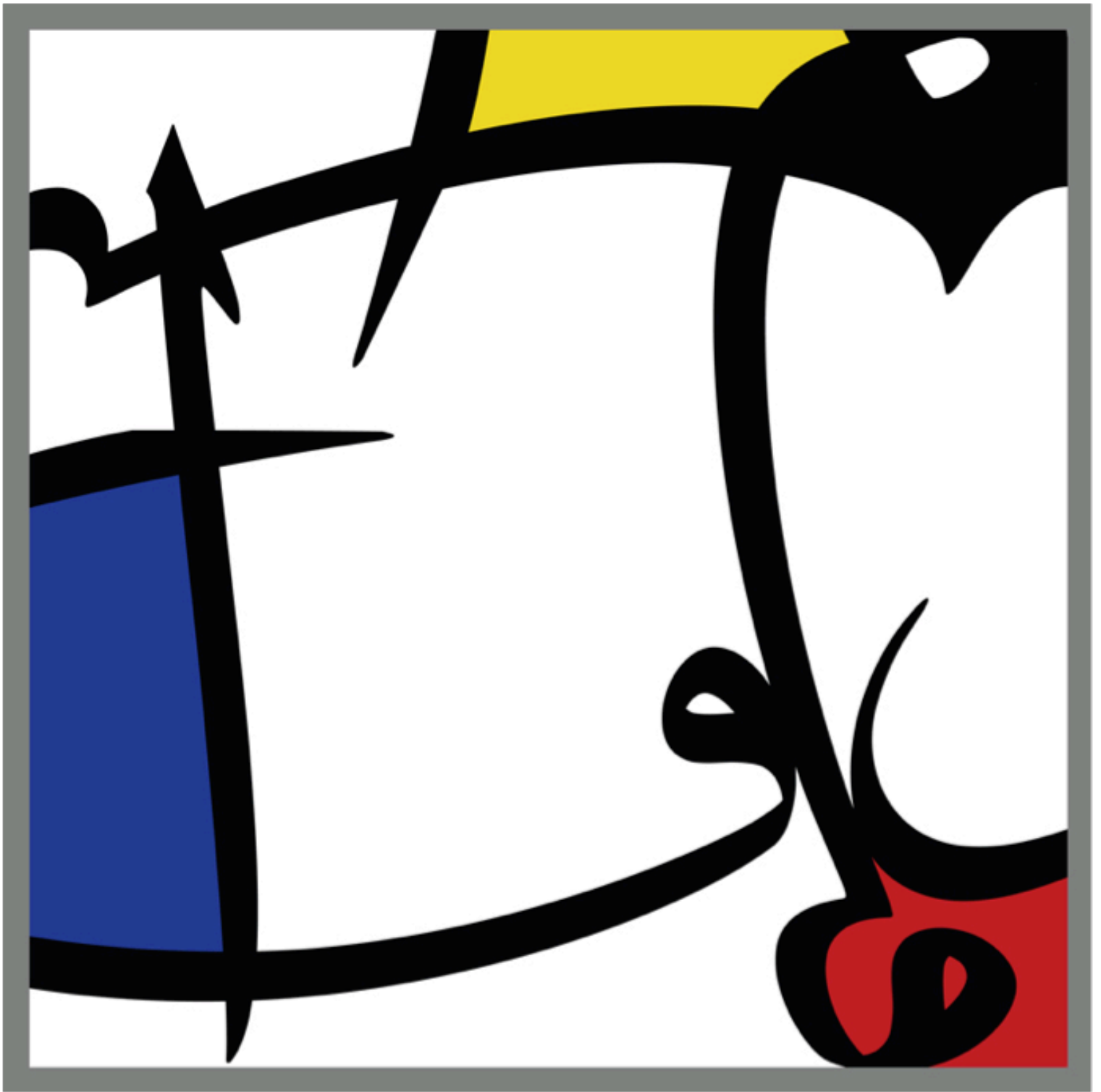
The wingtip hit a building and sheared off  
so I flew it & it crashed into this river.

You were all bloody & wild-eyed.  
I tried to hug you but you backed away & said, "Why'd you do it?"  
You thought I crashed the plane on purpose!

We yelled a whole bunch & I suddenly realized my bags were gone  
& then I was yelling, "Fuck you, Nick. I'm going shoe shopping!"  
It was pretty exciting.  
Besides the bathroom incident, you were a good pilot.

The Klamath was the river flowing through Damascus  
& the water was quite cold.

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS



**"Dialogue with Mondrian," Acrylic on cardboard calligraphy**  
by MAJID ALYOUSEF

## Artists' /Writers' bios (in last-name alphabetical order):

### HAJER ABDUSALAM

I am Palestinian.

I am a mother.

I am a poet.

Everything else is irrelevant.

**OMARAN ALI ALOWAIS** is an Emirati architect, established his Architecture design studio called "centimetercube" in 2003. Currently, having his masters in Urban and regional planning at Paris Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. Through his design work, he makes his photography as part of his design process, and documents buildings all around to be inspiration.

B'uit Satwa: representing the past and the current architecture

The photos were taken in Dubai with a 35mm Film Camera, with 50mm f0.95 lens.

**MAJID ALYOUSEF** is a Saudi calligrapher, designer and creative professional. His skills combine calligraphy, typography and digital art. Although he carries a deep passion for calligraphy, Majid continued developing his other creative and artistic inclinations during his academic years and early career, leading him to earn his expertise as an interactive designer and digital artist. With a Masters degree in Computer Art, with a focus on Interactive Design and Game Development, Majid continues to offer, and benefit from, his services to internationally reputable advertising agencies, design houses and corporate clients.

**ARZ AZAR** was born and raised in Lebanon. He works in advertising, an industry in which he's been involved for over ten years. His fascination with photography stems from his idea that snapshots capture moments that the naked eye will otherwise never be able to identify. He began taking photos since his school days, a long, long time ago, during which school trips would be his favorite occasion. He would find himself taking photos of his surroundings, setting up compositions, and noticing details and stories, when everyone else was busy taking photos of each other.

2014 Pushcart Prize Nominated poet, **ZEINA HASHEM BECK**, is Lebanese, with a BA and an MA in English Literature, from the American University of Beirut. Her poems have been published, or are forthcoming, in *Quiddity*, *Silk Road*, *Copper Nickel*, *Crosstimbers*, *Mizna*, and *Nimrod*, among others. She lives in Dubai with her husband and two beautiful daughters, and is part of the Dubai/Beirut poetry performance group, the Poeticians.

**FARAH CHAMMA** is a young Palestinian poet currently studying at the Paris-Sorbonne University in Abu Dhabi. She began writing poetry at the age of 14, the same age she began exploring her personal relationship with her faith. She is one of the youngest members of the Poeticians, a group of poets and writers from/spoken word performers in, the Middle East.

**EMER DAVIS** was born in Dublin, Ireland and spent most of her childhood on Achill Island on the west coast of Ireland. She was involved with the Green Ink Irish Writer's Group in London in the 1990s. After returning to Ireland she set up the Viaduct Bards Writers group and organized monthly poetry sessions until she moved to Abu Dhabi in 2011, where she currently lives. Several of her poems and her short stories have been published in various anthologies, journals, online magazines and exhibited at art exhibitions in Ireland, UK and the USA. Her first collection of poems *Kill Your Television* was published in 2010. She is a member of the Abu Dhabi Writers Group. She has read at Rooftop Rhythms Spoken Word Event and A Sip of Poetry in Abu Dhabi. Her blog is available at [viaductbards.blogspot.com](http://viaductbards.blogspot.com).

**MARIE DULLAGHAN** left her native Dublin with a degree in Irish and English Literature and a Higher Diploma in Education. She lived in the UK for many years where she developed an interest in the visual arts, and in 2009 completed a B.A.(Hons)Photography at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. She made her debut on the arts scene with the series *Mother and Son*, which received an honorable mention in the International Photography Awards (sometimes known as the Lucies) in 2010, and in 2011 the series was shown in a solo exhibition in the Dar Ibn AlHaytham gallery, Dubai. Although still a UK resident, Marie currently spends several months a year in the UAE where her husband, poet Frank Dullaghan, lives and works. Her most recent project, *Ad Infinitum* was inspired by what she describes as the “fairy-tale quality” of Dubai, and was shot at Jumeirah Lakes Towers, Dubai.

Her photo project titled, *Ad Infinitum* is a study of reflections in the artificial lake at JLT, (a residential and business area in Dubai, comprised of high towers and artificial lakes.) The constantly changing surface of the water offers a fascinating and often surprising range of images. Nothing stays the same, and you can never go back to how things were before; during the several months of shooting, I could never replicate an image exactly. So in one way, the whole project is a meditation on the subject of change. *Ad Infinitum* also explores the concept of 'Real V Unreal'. Sometimes buildings, objects and people are reflected on the water's surface with mirror-like clarity, and it's hard to know whether the image was a photo of a building or a photo of its reflection. Real or not real? At other times, everything is distorted in the reflections, but the buildings, of course, are unchanged. It's all about perception; and so the question arises: when we look at a building, do we see what's actually there? Or do we create our own reality through our personal perceptions? What, in the end, is Reality?

**FRANK DULLAGHAN** is an Irish poet, living and working in Dubai, UAE. He has two collections published with Cinnamon Press in the UK- *On the Back of the Wind* (2008) and *Enough Light to See the Dark* (2012). He holds an MA with Distinction in Writing from Glamorgan University. Frank is a previous editor of *Seam Poetry Journal* and was one of the founders of the Essex Poetry Festival. He is a member of the Dubai Performance poetry platform, Poeticians, the Emirates Literary Group and the Dubai Writers Group. Frank has given poetry readings, run workshops and given seminars in Dubai and Sharjah and has read at the Emirates Literary Festival each year since 2009.

American-born **MARIAN HADDAD**, San Antonio Puschart-nominated poet, essayist, manuscript consultant and creative writing instructor, was born to Syrian immigrants who settled in El Paso on the US/Mexico border in the mid 1950s. Her poems and prose pieces have been published in a number of poetry and prose anthologies published by presses including Milkweed, Mutabilis, Praeger, Greenwillow, Trinity University Press, UT Press, Texas A&M Press, TCU Press, Michigan State University Press and have appeared in various literary journals and periodicals, including *The Texas Observer*, *Bat City Review*, *The Rio Grande Review*, *Sin Fronteras/Writers without Borders*, *Redactions*, *Borderlands*, *Mizna*, and *The San Pedro River Review*.

**KENNETH E. HARRISON, Jr.**'s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly*, *Drunken Boat*, *Orange Quarterly*, *Packingtown Review*, *Pleiades*, *TYPO*, and elsewhere. He teaches English composition, Literature, and poetry at Webster University and Florissant Valley Community College in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

**BECKY KILSBY** has loved and studied poetry and creative language, has taught and written about literature, for most of her life. Only recently has she shaped words into poetry, exploring emotions, places and situations rooted in her own experience. British by birth and education, she has lived in the Middle East for over twenty years, has raised children here and enjoyed the opportunities to peel back the skin of other cultures. Travel has given her a stronger flavor of who she is and has certainly opened her eyes to other ways of living in this world.

**NICHOLAS KARAVATOS** is a graduate of Humboldt State University and New College of California. He currently teaches at American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Of his recent book, David Meltzer writes: “[No Asylum] is an amazing collectanea of smart sharp political poetry in tandem with astute and tender love lyrics. All of it voiced with an impressive singularity.”

**LOUAY KHRAISH** was born and raised in Lebanon. He holds a Ph.D. in the Humanities from the University of Texas at Dallas. His fields of studies are media and film theory, creative writing, and world literature. Khraish also holds an M.A. in Media Studies from the New School in New York. His bachelor's degree was earned at the University of North Texas in Denton. In addition to teaching university-level communication and media courses, Khraish continues to work in the media industry. He has recently completed a manuscript that he is pursuing to publish.

**NAOMI SHIHAB NYE** is a Palestinian-American poet, novelist, essayist, anthologist, and educator. Currently a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, she is author or editor of 33 books, including *Transfer*, *A Maze Me*, *Honeybee*, *Different Ways to Pray*, *Yellow Glove*, and *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. She has received a Lannan Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, four Pushcart Prizes, and the Jane Addams Children's Book award for Social Justice, for her novel *Habibi* and her picture book, *Sitti's Secrets*. Nye was one of PeaceByPeace.com's first peace heroes. In 2013, Nye will receive the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature and the Robert Creeley Poetry Award.

**DORIAN (PAUL D) ROGERS** is an award-winning poet, certified Language Arts teacher, and Hip-Hop artist from Albany, Georgia, with a poetry book, spoken word CD, and four rap albums under his belt. In 2007, he helped Slam Charlotte to a first place finish at the National Poetry Slams, the world's biggest poetry competition. Paul was recently featured on AIB's Emmy-nominated "Sound of Youth" television program for his poetry mentoring in Atlanta area schools. In 2005, he won the Southern Fried Poetry Slams, beating out over 100 poets in the world's biggest regional slam competition. He has shared the stage with Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Stevie Wonder to name a few. In 1999, Paul D helped found the progressive rap duo, THER.I.P.Y. (The Radiance Is Purely Yours).

**HIND SHOUFANI** is a Palestinian writer and filmmaker currently residing between Beirut and Dubai. Born in Lebanon, Shoufani was raised in Amman, Beirut and Damascus. With a BA in Radio/TV/Film Communication Arts from the Lebanese American University, in Beirut, and an MFA in Film Writing and Directing from the Tisch School for the Arts- New York University, Shoufani has published two poetry books in English by xanadu\*, titled *More Light Than Death Could Bear* and *Inkstains on the Edge of Light*, and attended the prestigious 12-week residency at the International Writing Program, at Iowa University, in 2011. As a side hobby, Shoufani founded the Poeticians collective, an elastic group of bold writers who perform in monthly events in different bars, cultural hubs, cities and festivals. Shoufani is the editor of the first Poeticians anthology, published in 2012, and titled, *Nowhere Near a Damn Rainbow*, which contains unsanctioned and uncensored writing by 31 poets based in the Middle East. She has been performing poetry and spoken word in various countries for five years, makes a mean Mexican salad and is interested in glitter and light; a free and secular Palestine; writing poetry to combat bitterness; women's rights and liberties in the Middle East; bonding with like-minded artists all over the world; traveling; and hunting for colorful shiny Indian bindis to wear on her forehead in Dubai.



**DANA SLEIMAN:** "I turn to writing to make sense of what's around me. Of Syrian origin- grew up between the Emirates, Egypt, Pakistan and Lebanon. A book lover, music fanatic, always hoping that we can grow beyond ourselves someday, and not allow history to repeat itself in its bloodshed."

**HELEN WING** is a poet and fiction writer who lives in Beijing, Cairo and London; mainly Beijing at the moment where she is Writer in Residence at Harrow International School. Her collection *Archangel* was published last year on e-kindle at Amazon. Her short stories are published in the *Mississippi Prize Review*, *Southern Cross Review*, and *Tale of Four Cities*. She is working on a poetry book with students from a migrant school and an international school called *My Heart is your Heart* and trying to finish a novel called *I swore I'd set that donkey free before I left Beijing*. She is convinced that the Poeticians in Dubai saved her life and will forever be grateful to them for their vision, strength and truth.

**NOUR ALI YOUSSEF** is an Egyptian aspiring writer and college student whose self-appointed purposes in life is to observe, criticize (and ridicule) and write about Arabs and their strangely simply, complex world. She also writes for *The Peculiar Arab Chronicles* at Mcsweeney's Internet tendency.

**STEVEN SCHREINER** is associate professor of English at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, USA, where he teaches in the MFA program. He is the author of *Too Soon to Leave* (Ridgeway: 1998), and *Out of Egypt* (forthcoming, Cervena Barva Press), and a chapbook, *Imposing Presence*. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Image*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Poet & Critic*, *Gulf Coast*, *Margie*, and *River Styx*. He has been awarded fellowships from The National Writers Voice of the YMCA and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He is the founding editor of *Natural Bridge*, a journal of contemporary literature.

**THE AMAZIN' SARDINE** is, the long awaited Mahdi in hiding, a golden Jazz Devil singer of songs, an unsettling psychotic cross dresser, a pedophile priest, a writer of trash pulp fictions, a doodler of drawings, a film noir protagonist. All in all? A racist, sectarian, self-destructive, foul excuse for a human being.

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