



Sukoon

Art . Poetry . Prose

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | Winter 2015

*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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Sukoon would like to thank Dubai-based calligrapher and artist, **Majid Alyousef**, for Sukoon's unique logo design.
www.majidalyousef.com

Editor's note:

Has anything changed in the Arab world since the last issue of Sukoon? Yes. Things have changed. They've become more horrific, more complicated. Mind numbing. More and more people from all faiths have been forced from their homes, displaced; more beheadings and destruction and ruin. A new war is switched on. And the most important one of all, shelved. Postponed. Forgotten.

But this issue is not about war, or shelves, or forgetfulness. This issue, like every issue, is about finding the beauty and showing it. Finding the love and singing it. Which is why I decided a beautiful art piece, by Palestinian artist Ali Shawwa, of Umm Kulthum, the world's most famous Egyptian singer, works best as a cover page. To indicate and remind us of song, because how else do we survive, through wars and shelves and forgetfulness? To sing about love and loss, but to sing about love. To sing about pain and life, but to sing about life. To simply sing. And sing and sing, as poetry and story and art. Through slaying and insanity and devastation. And to continue singing, long after the lights go out and the guns disappear.

I am so pleased with this issue, and honored to be including award-winning Arab-American poet Philip Metres, and once again, wonderful poet Hedy Habra. To have met through email, and coincidentally, in person, poet, filmmaker

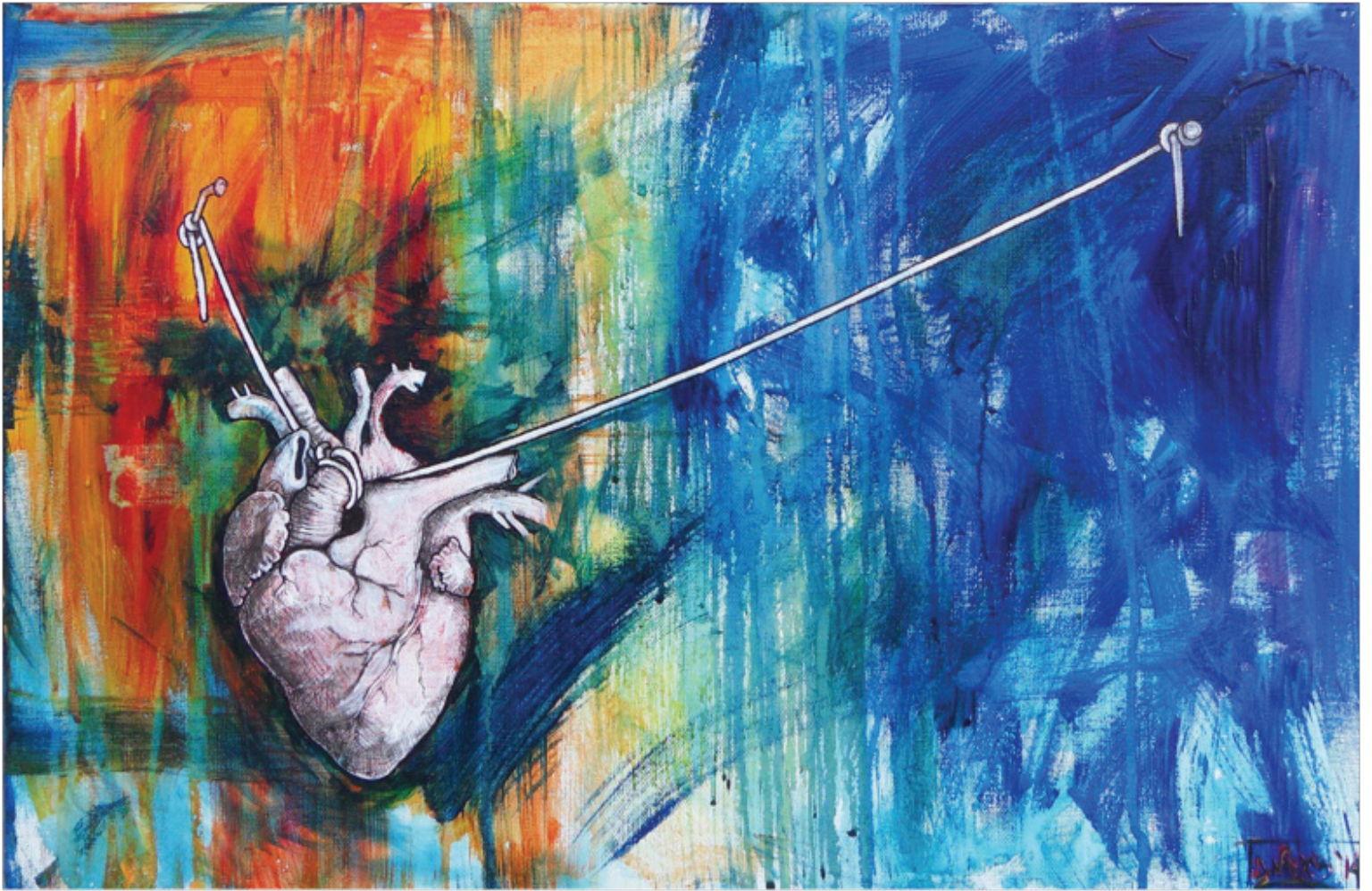
and activist, Shebana Coelho, and gotten introduced to her great work at Ashtar Theatre, in Ramallah (as Land-Out-Loud), and to all the students who were taking her workshop. To have discovered writers like Jennifer Jazz and Aziza Quzeiz, and Pushcart nominee, Lena K. Tuffaha, among so many other new and established voices and artists from across the world. From the US, Philippines, Poland, Lebanon, Kuwait, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Croatia, Saudi Arabia, India and Ireland.

And speaking of Ireland, I am delighted to be sharing an interview with wonderful Dubai-based, Irish poet, Frank Dullaghan. His latest collection, *The Same Roads Back*, was published recently by Cinnamon Press and is a quietly intimate yet stunning collection of poems, about love, memory, and the Arab Spring. Dullaghan writes about family and his life back home as delicately, and with as much heart, as he writes about his first-hand experiences in the Arab world, after living in Dubai for many years.

'Look how joined-up we are: /father, mother son - that timeless circle - /like we've just found out that we are gods.' he says in one poem entitled "The Wide Ocean of the Sky."

I say, 'Look how joined-up we are' as I work on every single issue of Sukoon Magazine, made possible only by the stories and songs of all its contributing writers and artists.

REWA ZEINATI



Heart on a String, from The Literary Organs Series, mixed media 24" x 16"
BY DEXTER DEADWRITER BETANTOS

PALESTINAE [RUDIMENTUM NOVIT[!]ORUM] [1475]

Palestine (Attempt by novices)?

Let me be clear, the ambassador stated, Palestine does not exist in the Bible.

Palestine (Attempt to reconstitute)?

It was a Roman invention to ensure the elimination of the Jews.

Palestine (Handbook for Beginners)?

There is no such thing as a Palestinian.

PHILIP METRES

PLAN OF JERUSALEM (12TH CENTURY) II

[the eye is captured

first of all

[by "the Temple of the Lord"

[now called "the Dome of the Rock"

"Jews had fought side-by-side with Muslim soldiers to defend the city, and as the Crusaders breached the outer walls, the Jews of the city retreated to their synagogue to "prepare for death."

"[Our leaders] also ordered all the Saracen dead to be cast outside because of the great stench, since the whole city was filled with their corpses; and so the living Saracens dragged the dead before the exits of the gates and arranged them in heaps, as if they were houses...no one knows their number except God alone."

[at the edge of the map, Mount Qaratena

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain,
and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world,
and the glory of them.
And saith unto him,

All these things will I give thee,
If thou wilt fall down and worship me.

PHILIP METRES



Oman, Photography
BY HAITHAM MEDHAT EL ATTAR

THE TULIP TREE

They wanted to tear down the tulip tree, our Jewish neighbors, last year. It throws a shadow over their vegetable patch, the only tree in our backyard. We said no. Now they've hired a hand to chainsaw an arm—the crux on our side of the fence—and my wife marches in tousled hair and morning sweats to stop the carnage, mid-limb. She recites her litany of no's, turns home. Minutes later, the neighbors arrive. The worker fingers our unblinded window. I want to say, it's not me, slide out of view behind a wall of cupboards, ominous breakfast table, steam of tea, our two young clueless daughters alone. I want no trouble. Must I fight for my wife's desire for pink blooms when my neighbors' cukes will stunt and blight in shadow? Always the same story: two people, a tree, not enough land or light or love. They want to let the sunlight bathe their garden—how can we refuse them? This is the only tree in our whole backyard—how can they insist? By rights they could cut every bit that begins on their side of the line. Like the baby brought to Solomon, it can't be cut in two and survive. Someone must give. Dear neighbor, it's not me. Bloom-shadowed, light deprived, they lower the chainsaw again.

PHILIP METRES

A SAVING APHASIA

I'm dreaming your body
 undone of the bindings
 of leather and thread—
 a thrumming vibration
that stitches my mouth shut

and opens my eye—
 the something that happens
 when no one is watching,
 the urgent desire
to spill all the blinds

and harness the friction
 of body and body,
 a silly conviction
 I have that you're mine.
This kind of music

reminds us of knocking,
 of pressing and pressing
 until something gets in.
 Just like in the dream, when
beginning to fly

you think that you're dreaming,
 you know you lack wings,
 but something inside you
 will not stop beating,
refusing to leave

the come-hithering sky.

PHILIP METRES



Tongue Tied, from The Literary Organs Series, mixed media 24" x 16"
BY DEXTER DEADWRITER BETANTOS

**THESE BOMBS CALLED MY BACK— A JOURNAL ENTRY FROM MY FIRST NIGHT IN
FILASTEEN WHEN THE INVASION INTO GAZA BEGAN THIS SUMMER**

By Aziza Quzeiz

"to be arab is to be simultaneously emphasized and ignored,
invisibilized but hypervisibilized in times of crisis"
-joanna kadi in *food for our grandmothers*

TAK, TAK, BOOM

the sound of a firework that probably wasn't a firework woke me up and i cried for the next few hours because today was the first time ive ever felt connected to being arab, stopped denying it, and started to let myself feel the pain ive been holding back my entire life.

SMA3I SHWEY

i grew up saying, "listen to me" instead of sorry. i was armed with mouthfuls of justifications because my existence as an arab woman was already an apology. sorry for taking up so much space. sorry we are so oppressive and fucked up. sorry we are power hungry and that a few of us represent the whole.

in other communities of color in the u.s. we are resented for internalizing “model minority complexes.” we are not real to the census or governmental institutions. we are told we fade into whiteness but receive none of its benefits. if an arab immigrant mother has to be rushed to the hospital in the u.s. she cannot receive translation services because she is “white,” so we are voiceless even when we speak. we are represented in literary discourse as light-skinned, upper-middle class, wanting-white. no one wants to listen, even for a little bit—shhhh—sma3i shwey, we are undocumented, we are Black, we are Brown, we are dark-skinned and poor too, we are not all muslim, we are queer and our sexualities are expansive and complicated, we are threats, we are problems, we are refugees and the bags they carry, we are borders, we are the sound of bombs dropping during rainstorms, the confusion in the streets, the act of discerning which sounds are real and which are imagined

AYEEEEEEHAA

i dreamt of teta ululating to the sky, to the sound of this desperate explosion, something like thunder or a celebration of death, of our unpeopling. she howled with her head tilted back and in her calls i heard the earth split open to make space for our pain. i heard the gaps in generational memory between how hard we had it and how things Were Back Then. i realized that our realities are too painful to process so they require the extravagance of fiction, poetic ruminations about life before occupation and oppression. we need active imaginations in order to survive.

AAAAAUIIIIIIII

how do we express this pain? if we do not discursively exist then are we granted spaces to feel? my baby cousins exchange graphic images of entangled bodies like they are cartoons. they change their profile pictures to martyrs we know. i think of the splinters we used to get in our feet from climbing into fruit trees at jiddo’s house, the jubilee in our captain majid heroic AUUUU’s, an ouch-but-yes, a mix between baba playing umm kulthum and his answer to her voice with “aakkh, aakh”s—those soft recordings of his diasporic pain, and the ecstasy in being chosen to pick the fruits, EHH, YES, AYYY. because if we feel pain, if we feel splinters in our toes than, EH, YES, AUI, AKH, AUUUUIEHHA, at least it means we are living.

ARABNESS, 3RAB, 3AAAAA, YA RUB

it is something like a denial of pain leads us to project it onto others. this pain gets stored in our bodies and passed on to new generations who don’t know what they are carrying until the sound of an explosion or someone asking “where do you hide your weapons” floods it all back. where do i keep my weapons? i wanted to ask the israeli authorities the question back to themselves. they kept asking, “why are you carrying so few bags? arabs usually carry more bags. show us in your bags where you keep your weapons.” listen, a little bit, search in the place between my neck and my shoulders, the spot where i hide my sadness. find them in our wrinkled eyes, teta’s back, her split discs that are revolutionary weapons planted by generations of pain, my mother too tired to walk, measure the geographies of our spines and the way our displacement makes us so lonely, our bags are our bodies are our bombs are our backs carrying the weight of our revolutions and resistance inside of us, so volatile, so vengeful, so awake, still, somehow, alive.

homegirls, hashish, mishmish, and the moon¹

By Aziza Quzeiz

I was rifling through the contents of my bag while receiving eidiahs and decided to dump out the treasures I was about to discard in the trash. I realized how much the contents reflect my restlessness, because I carry this bag with me everywhere I go:

Torn tunisian and jordanian dinars, euro coins and crumpled dollar bills, a ripped visa to the illegal state of israel, a tube of rose water a priest gave me in Beitla7im before calling me beautiful, hijab pins, a passport, a german chocolate wrapper, my vile of white misk that reminds me of my 3mto and how she puts it on her neck before putting on her hijab to go out, a list of Spanish phrases I might need, eyeliner, a condom in the innermost pocket.

I am a product and reaction to colonial modernity, everything before it and around it. Everything that flirted with it just to reject it. Everything that wants it but mocks it in the same breath.

The night Eid started I stayed up until Fajr having an hours long conversation with my brilliant cousin who is doing her masters in Arabic linguistic histories. She is trying to prove that we need new dictionaries for our slang and that all dialects are legitimate and rooted in thousand year old traditions. Our Gehs are just as legitimate as our Kehs as our Ehs as our cadences colored by colonial encounter, the subjugation of others, our experiences with regimes, structures of violence, sexual abuse, internalized cycles of rejection and pain, even as these linguistic patterns change because of the internet and text speech. I thought of learning darija in Tunis from an anarcho-feminist who told me to listen to the rhythms of Imazighen goddesses in the words, the way Tinafigh blended the ends of words together and echoed itself in Tunisian Arabic. He told me, before you learn a language you need to get the beat down. I went with him to watch Sufi performances in the mountains of Kef, dances that people memorized from over four centuries ago, songs that chronicled when the Arab invaders came. Under blue and green stage lights, Sufi dancers chanted, their white robes glowing while mac computers dj'ed a sweet funky bassline in the background. I was always annoyed with myself for being so jealous after watching these performances. What dances do I know? What clothing do I have? Where are my cultural genealogies and generational chronicles? What rhythms do I know to carry on the words and vibrations of my ancestors? I only know how to dance to southern r&b and I never really learned to "bellydance," because the most "ancestral" music I know dates back to 1960 Syrian children's songs.

I thought of my mother who didn't want to wear a white dress to her wedding because it was too colonial and western. But when she asked her elders what they wore before white, no one had the words to tell her, no one knew what we did before, back then. The erasure of that memory was made less violent by the strange finality in accepting that maybe there was no "pure" pre-colonial past but one full of difficult fusion...one where the memory of white wedding dresses was so new (or old? our ours? or theirs?) that it became a part of us.

My cousin said, linguists forget about the new dialects and the new words that emerge from displacement. Her nieces speak a fusion of Syrian and Egyptian dialects not recorded yet, processing new words with new contexts with old roots with old stories. I thought of the other day when my sister was cleaning the kitchen with our aunt and asked her to hand her a Khu'ra. My aunt looked at her and laughed. "What did you say? Do you mean a Fouta? We haven't used that word since Ottoman times." We must have picked up the word from our mother, who was displaced from Syria in the 60's, who heard it from her mother and carried it on in a strange vacuum of sounds untouched by time because of our distance and displacement. Other words, like kharata instead of tanoora, sha7a instead of leika, fetitt hummus instead of tis'iyeh, variance in my family's regional dialects amplified by the oceans that pushed us apart from one another.

¹title is a failed fusion between nizar qabbani bread hashish and moon and sonia sanchez' homegirls and handgrenades

There is something called phylogenetic trees that trace how dialects and words become sisters to one another. We begin to develop different strands of similar languages that then morph into parallel but different spatiotemporal directions. Like our subjectivities, language evolves into vastly fragmented, complex strands of meaning and belonging. I think about the splits in our community and family tree, how we are scattered into different worlds with naïve hopes of returning to our homeland, our roots, once “this” is all over (the regime violence, the revolution, the refugeehood.) I think about how I am named after a tree I have never seen. I am named after a dream I have never lived. I live my life in hopes of returning to a homeland that has never known me.

And when I speak in this tongue that is somehow a part of this mess, my Arabic hiccups and wavers into whispers, manifests into hesitancy and a fear of messing up the intricacies of our fela7ified grammar. I am laughed at for my awkward Americanisms that don’t make sense in translation—my siblings and I speak in 3rabeezy, slinging around our mish-mash of Arabish, soupy slurs of ma3lish inno can you 3atini al jacket taba3i aw nah?

I am so blessed to come from a family of migrating revolutionaries, to come from a people who sacrificed everything for their words. Who were criminalized and terrorized and violently displaced because they chose to write and speak their realities.

But no matter where we go, we cannot be rid of these accents. And I can’t be rid of my restlessness, my inability to focus on one thing without thinking about what my parallel-self, my “over-there” subjectivity, is thinking or doing or writing. I recently facilitated a healing group for Muslim women who were yearning to talk about the splits in our identities, how we feel so fragmented and fused and forgotten.

I wrote down the common themes on a tiny receipt I found in the bottom of my bag:

where is home - where do i feel home - why does home not feel safe - why do i not feel safe in my own body - why doesnt my body feel like home to me - why does my family / community seem to create expectations i do not fit in to - why am i living in doubles/ triples / a million fractured pieces - when will i be whole - when can i learn to love my splits - when will i bridge this world with that - where can i go to be loved - where can i go to be heard - will you hear me - will you hold me - can we love each other wholly - (I think of Qwo-Lo Driskill, in Double Weaving Two Spirit Critiques: “How does our storyteller construct her survival from the threat of losing family love, especially in a context where familial ties hold so much material and emotional security?”)

Can we speak our truths and know that we will still be loved, across these multiple worlds?

I find home in my homegirls, in a few drags of hashish, preferably under the moon and with music playing. I find home in bowls of mishmish and ma’mounia, mashed into a delicious brew. I feel home embrace me somewhere at the tip of my tongue. My mind needs to be in motion to make sense of these things, my mouth laps up quiet soups of clunky morphemes and finds pleasure in the phonetic fusions. I find home in my hybridity. I feel comforted by Gloria Anzaldua when she said, “I am a turtle, wherever I go, I carry home on my back.” But me, I am an Arab woman, wherever I go, I carry home in my bag.

LETTER TO UM YUSUF

By Aziza Quzeiz

"Legbara, your daughter still need plenty healing yet," said Osain with her mouth.

"Body get better, but spirit still bust-up, I think."

"Is okay, Papa Osain, thank you," Ti-Jeanne told him, a little surprised at her own audacity.

"I think you start the healing good already. I could do the rest myself."

—from *Brown Girl in the Ring* by Nalo Hopkinson

Leila told me that they took you while you were sleeping. She said you blamed god and yourself and that you didn't understand what you had done. I always took you for granted, as the auntie immutably fixed in the living room, chopping banya in the shadows. Your right eye would wander and every time I looked up I would find it resting on me. I remember your voice sounded like eggplant roasting in cumin and bharat under high flames—scratchy, layered, deep. When they told me you had been raped in regime prisons, you had just passed away and I could not dislodge the letter from me to you from the back of my throat. I could not even send your daughter a condolence text because our pain was too similar.

I know you are long mornings made of warm bread and Quranic verses, centuries of erosion. You are not a metaphor for our motherland or for the earth or the state but you are inside them all, working to untangle their crusty layers of toxic waste. I will find you in breathless la howa wa la qowa illah bilahs, I will find you when I am stripped to my bed rock trying to remember. I will hear you speak to me when I vomit for hours thinking I am pregnant and you will remind me there is a cocktail of toxicity trying to find its way out of your body and mine. Sometimes I feel the violence of the empire coursing in our veins. I never know about the survivors in our family until they have passed.

I know your real body is made of stars and the rest of you is diffused into different realms of possibility, somewhere between jinn worlds, angel light, our fucked up human shit made from mud and clay. I know your body will remember this pain, your palms will become permanently inscribed into rocks and I will find your imprint everywhere. I felt your pain and it is terrifying, underwater avalanche meets planetary explosion. Your shoulders were never meant to be boulders and none of this was ever your fault, but now that you are here you will find pieces of yourself you thought you lost and when you do,

it will be a beautiful,

seismic,

cosmic,

reunion

and for that

and for you

i am so thankful.



Farid & Tahiya, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 100cm, 2014 (Emergeast Gallery, Dubai)
BY ALI SHAWWA

LISTEN

Such a sky is in me
such story
such ravens - I see them -
their black shines in sky
space and cloud space
the whirr and flap of wings
- my heart

Listen
everything is singing in place
ravens are singing
their crooked song and every
atom whirring in its appointed place
is singing too the song of this world

made whole by grace of sky
of sun
of river
of water anointing my head...
 ...ah I saw where he spoke
 Yuhanna Al-Ma'madan Yahya
 I saw where he died
 near a hill where Samaritans live
 in sight of a citadel
 where a woman danced
 in a small underground chamber
 dusted with white lime
Ash brushed my cheek as we left
as our bus went over bumps -
matab - said the boy in front pointing
 we call them *matab* he said
the boy who laughed and pointed at green
tanks rolling in his land
the boy who spoke loudly after the soldiers left
the one who everyone hushed because
everyone knows what
happens if you speak after soldiers

Listen
 I am singing
and a boy in Gaza speaks of silence
 I am singing
he is a human animal in a cage not of his making
he tears around the edges
he speaks his silence into the bars
he says
 enough
he says
 when
will the song reach him and I say
I don't know dear one
I don't know and
forgive me because I am singing
and I want the song to be yours

SHEBANA COELHO



Dreamer - mixed media - 92x152 cm
by NOUF SEMARI

ISIS DROWNED

–As mother to Horus, the ancient Egyptian god

It's too late to recover the body.
The armies were courteous, left me breathing
through a hollow reed and never noticed
when I turned green as the Nile itself and dissolved.
Fish pissed on my face for centuries,
reeds twisted my arms
until I gave up. I lay silent,
listened to the faithful moan my image
through their distant streets.
What use to loll above their heads in Cairo,
be a local star who's living out of town?
Still I held on till my stink
reached my last connection in heaven, who
powerless, prayed for my corpse, then said,
maybe, she can live without it.

I'm river melt,
older, hotter and less changed
than anyone would care to imagine.
Patient, thin-toed herons
stalk my mud, flies hang
in my days, dot sun,
a blur under water.
It's been so long boatmen
no longer come dipping their
oars through my sides,
yet human shadows fall across me
now and then,
fingertips press delicately
through my waterskin and wait,
for my kisses I suppose.
I roll over, show them
the back of my head.
It's too late to recover the body
and I wouldn't give it if I had it.
I am still fertile but love only myself
now and am jealous.

These people seem to think
my sleep is dreamless,
unimportant, though even they at times
recall my faded relatives.
It's true not much happens at night
but I have perfected my dreams
and they're not like theirs, sand
leaking from a broken bottle.
Mine sway like the soft
yellow underbelly of a cat
picking her way through a palace.
I must say this:
The nights were lovely until now.
But then they threw a girl in
on top of me.
Inspid child, wouldn't speak
except to wail that we are both
far, far from home.
She may be right; it's getting cold.
Her veil covers me like a blanket
as she whispers, You're so old.
I reply, So late, so late,
and we close our four eyes.

CATHERINE GONICK



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 65cm, 2014
(Emergeast Gallery, Dubai)
BY ALI SHAWWA

AT THE HAMMAM

the apartment by the tracks
that I rented from the dwarf
contained no shower
just a bucket of water
hanging in the courtyard
heated only by the sun
so on cloudy days
I frequented the hammam
where wiry cross-eyed Hamid
splashed bowl after bowl
of hot water on my head
worked up a lather
rubbed me with a rough mitt
and fashioned a long snake
from my dead skin
which he held up proudly
as if say see how dirty you were
then walking down my spine
he grabbed both arms and legs
and rocked me back and forth
like a heavy parcel
he was preparing to lift
until he heard a crack
and cried out with satisfaction
sahelik (or to your health)
a warm soak followed
and a wrapping of towels
as snugly as a mummy's linens
they led me away to a room full of
comatose men
lying on mattresses
holding glasses of green tea
fingering their worry beads
sighing with the pleasure of it all

my new flat in the medina
sported a modern shower
and a French douche
small consolations indeed
for the lost comforts
of the hammam

ART HEIFETZ



Breathing, from The Literary Organs Series, mixed media 24" x 16"
BY DEXTER DEADWRITER BETANTOS

The following poems and prose pieces are excerpts
from **LAND OUT LOUD: PALESTINE**
Workshops with Ashtar Theatre performers
July 2014, Ramallah, Palestine

November invades the city from three sides
dragging rusted yellow like an old dress
snoring like an old chimney

The sun is an empty matchbox
it doesn't light

On the fourth side of the city
a woman dunks
sadness in a bowl of soup

SONIA KHADER KASHOU

WHERE

I can count the times I've seen my sea
Their sea...
My sea...
blue and white
waving in silence
no seagulls only sparrows gray
and a lot of concrete
dusty vehicles
dusty pine trees and smiles

Time goes fast when we sit to eat
we do not pray before lunch
never did and never will

Rounded fried sweets
I'd like to call them "Submarines"
painted with a golden crust
my grandmother's best

There is always a sense of waiting
waiting for more money
less shouting
more sleep
less hand gestures
more of nothing
Two houses
one with a garden
and one with a balcony
My mother wanted the balcony
and then she missed the garden.

Gray, green
and candle tales
tea and wine and later dinners

Laughs
Bullets
Giggles
Bullets
Concrete
Silence

ÉMILE ANDRÉ

I live in that neighborhood
near that city, and that other city
busy, noisy
burning all the time
an animal dies at 2 am
sitting in a corner by itself

I wish I can take it to that big green village
near that now black greenish city
where we sit alone
fresh air, quietness, calmness
animals living every day, all day
keeping our company

Maybe it should also shed its skin
and put a new skin on
a more authentic one

LAMIS SHALALDEH

I am from my parents and sister
I am from the corner where I smoke my cigarette
so my parents won't smell the smoke while they're
sleeping
I am from the stage
the wooden floor of the stage, the curtains, the
audience and the play
I am every character that I played
I am every friend that passed by me or stayed
until now
I am from a land that you smell its history
I am from the sea of that land, the mountains
and the olive trees
and above all,
I am from the wind
I want to be the wind.
I'm not until now but I will be
sometime

RANA BURQAN

I am from a land that gets very dry in the summer and scarcely wet in the winter
from an olive branch that taught me to pick and prick.
from a neighborhood that smells like donkey shit, and fed me childhood.

I am the daughter of a strong female lineage that embroidered love and resistance. breast-fed milky-way dairy and
blackened faces of martyrs to feed my people.

I am the happiness of a child playing hide and seek in the dark and a rage of an old woman not able to cross the
road to her village
because the road was hijacked by a settler.

I am the carrier of Canaanite bone and beauty and the daughter of a goddess's sacred marriage.

I am the autumn leaf that keeps dying and resurrecting in all your religions.

IMAN AOUN

LAND FIRST

Two of my favorite pictures from when I was young: one when I must have been one year old, and I was standing
outside our house balcony, my father holding my hand and everything was covered with white snow. Every time my
mother sees this photo, she remembers that she was pregnant with my younger sister, that it snowed seven times
during that winter, and that it had been only a few weeks since I took my first steps.

The other one is four-year old me standing on a rock in the middle of a meadow with my three-year old sister. There
were sheep around us. What strikes me most about that photo is how bright my eyes looked. I must have been so
excited about the sheep. Everyone thinks that the picture is very funny since I was half naked and it looks like I had
my hand inside a sheep's ass, which I was caressing. But, for me, it was the picture when I first knew land and its
creatures and fell in love with it.

LAMIS SHALALDEH

She is seven years old. Her father dresses up like a sailor with his white and blue t-shirt and big belly pointing to the
sea and his long fat fingers pointing to the tiny Lego city behind the coastline where they are standing. They have
just eaten fried calamari and both are yawning as the sea wind kisses their cheeks and caresses their skin. In that
moment, she feels like her father's shadow. She is so small with big eyes and a mouth full of stories and questions. But
the calamari dish she has just eaten puts all her questions and stories to sleep. She is left to dream after her father
points to Jaffa.

"That's our homeland. That's where you are from. You see Jaffa from Larnaca'," her father says. "We are so close." He
bends down and grabs a handful of sand. Then he takes her hand into his. The sand is in between. It is sticky. It glues
their hands together.

Then he walks her into the sea.

"Now we are swimming in the same water as Jaffa," he says.
She says, "The sand melted. It drowned in the sea water."

He laughs like an old captain. "Don't worry, the sand, our sand never drowns, it just travels. One day we will go to Jaffa and you will find the sand waiting for you on the other side."

She swallows the salty seawater as her father swallows his tears. And she keeps thinking about the sand that will arrive in Jaffa before her.

I am 34 years old. I am this girl and Jaffa's sand is still waiting for me.

BAYAN SHBIB

I remember when I was living in Rafeedia a small town next to Nablus where I was born.

I lived there for two years only before moving to Jerusalem because my father was working with the UNRWA in Nablus. My first memory of the land was in our backyard where we grew different green things. I don't recall what they were. We also had rabbits, a lamb and a cat.

My Grandma Anisseh was the one who took care of the rabbits and my older brother of the lamb. I always liked rabbits. That's why I don't eat them.

Our neighbors were Hafitha and Hanifeh - we used to call them Mahfatha and Hanafieh, two sisters who never married. They lived in a small peasant's house and they had their bathroom away from home. I remember we had to shit in the open air and clean our asses with stones whenever we went to visit them, after we left Rafeedia.

The smell of the land, was always of cow shit that they gathered to use for fertilizing. The color of their life was always brown and green - even the walls of their house were green. I never like the color green - it felt to me like a hospital that I hated because I once had to spend forty days in it when I was seven and got typhoid.

The smell and the color green made me hate land for years. I was always unconsciously against any plant at home and unable to raise any living organism - till I went to Santa Fe and encountered Anastasia. Then my longing for the land started to crawl back to me. Today, I feel I want to have my own village.

IMAN AOUN

My first memory of the land wasn't in Palestine. I don't like that it's not in Palestine and so I'm not going to talk about it. But my second memory of the land is in Jerusalem, in my grandma's house. There's a big expanse behind her house, called "Ard Abu A'bdallah," which means the land of Abu Abdallah. There are about ten fig trees on this land. Each day, during the summer that I spent at my grandma's, my sister and I and the dozens of cousins that I have, would go to that land and scatter all over the branches of one of the fig trees and start picking figs.

We knew that what we are doing was wrong: this land is not ours; we can't pick fig from the trees. But that was exactly the most delicious part of it - having to sneak in and eat figs.

Oh the taste of the figs. I still love figs because of that reason. Although going there was a catastrophe for me because I was one of the youngest cousins and I couldn't climb to the highest branches, where the good figs were. I had to settle with the lower ones, and I hated it. I was always the 'Fosto' El Fadi' between them because I was the youngest, "Fosto' El Fadi" means... I don't know how to translate that - you have to be an Arab to understand it.

Anyway, as soon as we heard the voice of my grandma, "wallillah enta w yaha yamsakhmateen sho bte3meloo honak ta3alo ya'demni eyakom," we would start running so fast without thinking of anything except saving our hides from my grandma's wrath. Of course, then, that was the advantage of being on the lowest branch - you could hide faster than anybody else, faster than those cousins on higher branches.

RANA BURQAN



Lost to the news - acrylic on canvas - 100 x 100 cm
by NOUF SEMARI

YA ALBI

By Ula Jaber Higgins

Tata was soft. My grandmother's skin, thin and delicate, laid softly over her fleshy fingers and arms, over the lines and the crinkles at the corner of her eyes. She wore a flimsy cotton dress with a blue faded floral pattern, soft. Like gauze, like air. Her fingers slipped by each wooden worry bead, worn soft by her touch. The white scarf she wore on her head, was ethereal and almost transparent. Curly gray tendrils, escaped the confinement of her scarf—to feel the sun and breeze. I remember her eyes, light like mine, but cloudy. Could she see me? I felt like she knew me through her imagination, like she had seen me in her dreams, the way that she looked at me and held me. Her voice was soft and melodic. It floated up and down quietly and rhythmically, like she was singing me a ballad by Fairuz, a Lebanese folk singer. She spoke to me and I didn't know what she said, but I nodded in agreement. Sitting by Tata's side felt familiar even though it was the first time meeting her, the first time I had ever traveled to my father's homeland.

Maybe it felt familiar because this is what I did with my Babcia, my mother's mother. Babcia spoke only Polish, and would carry on lengthy serious conversations. My sisters would run off and play, leaving me behind to listen. I knew that she was trying to impart some very important wisdom but I could not understand what she said. I didn't want her to be frustrated, so I nodded solemnly and held her hand. I think she knew I was humoring her because she would sigh often and deeply, and say my name and "O mój Boże" (*Oh My God*). I may not have been able to translate what she said, but my heart knew. I think that satisfied her.

My Babcia lived with us for a little while. I remembered her strong and fierce compared to my Tata. She had red hair, and blue eyes, like a cold lake. She had a toughness about her, and no nonsense in her tone and I could tell a reprimand from reminiscence. She asked me to thread her needles for her as she sewed. She asked me to turn on the oven so that she could make soup for me; it was always soup: cabbage, chicken, carrots, celery and sometimes noodles. I was six and I could do these things for her. But Babcia also had a softness about her. She held her rosary beads in her hands and whispered her prayers in Polish as her fingers passed over every bead, clicking as they passed. Then she did it again, and again.

My heart whispered to me: *Tata only wants to hold me, and be close to me, and never have me leave her side.*

Overcome by emotion, as if she heard my heart's whispers, Tata suddenly swayed side to side, and cried out: "Ya albi (*my heart*), Ya Omaree (*my dear*), Ya Ainee (*my eyes*), Ya Hayatee (*my life*)."

The first time she said it, my aunts wailed and my uncles' and father's and mother's eyes welled up with tears. As if her song was her release valve for the years of pent up grief, she lamented: "Ya albi, ya omaree, ya ainee, ya hayatee", this time they reprimanded her after they recognize that my sisters and I were disturbed by this emotional outburst. *Had I done something wrong to upset her? Maybe if I sit closer, she will be consoled?* My grandmother wept as she buried her head in my chest. Pulling back to memorize my face and she pulled me close again. I looked to Dad and he looked away.

After the third round of her anguished song, Amu Hassan took control of the situation. He turned her cries into a playful theatrical rendition dancing around the center of the room and falling to his knees, even grabbing me and sobbing into my shoulder, he let me go with a big wet kiss. We all laughed and laughed. With a collective sigh, the tension dissipated and even Tata smiled, as she watched her youngest son assume his role as family jester. He sang her song with abandon; my cousins tried to translate what was said.

“Ya’lla, let’s go to booza (*ice cream*).” Amu Hassan always knows how to make everyone feel better, even in his broken English. We linked arms, and walked down the long path, under the grapevines, to Amu Muslim’s store to eat our fill of ice cream.

MAPS

A living map,
he never trusted lines
traced on skins
with needle and compass.

The old tracker knew
how fast trees grew
obscuring paths
how riverbeds became
entangled with vines
how trails and clearings disappeared

when violent storms twisted
knotted limbs,
rubber trunks bled unevenly,
refusing to be milked.

He had seen swarms of ants
devour
bite after bite
every flying leaf,
every shred of bark
or bone,
knew the way time buries signs.

Nature doesn’t like scars,
limits or borderlines,
it renews itself,
erasing footsteps,
the outline of a hand,
the echo of a cry,
a breath,
even its memory.

HEDY HABRA

THE MAP OF MEMORY *in the heart of Beirut*

Over the shops where
 damask and silk were sold,
where words of bargaining
 warmed the air,
where a cup of Turkish coffee
 greeted every passerby,

 fleeting clouds pass,
 oblivious of the bustle
and glances
 that once filled
 its winding alleys,
 the ways of the past
throbbing side by side
 with the latest in fashion.

In the Martyrs' Square,
 bronze effigies still stand,
 bullet holes scar arms,
pierce the legs and chests
 of fallen bodies,
speaks of layers of bloodstains,

over which the wings of desire
 haven't swept the dust of destruction,
over which the winds of hope
 have stopped flowing.

Decades later,
 I can no longer find
 my bearings,
 highways crisscross a city
 that was once mine
in the map of memory.

A needed erasure after years
 of madness.

An amnesic reconstruction,
 stripping dreams from stones,

wiping away scars from façades,
 balconies laced with wrought iron,
windows graced with a triple arch,
 doorways heavy with footsteps,
all long gone with the echo of voices.



Nostalgia - acrylic on canvas - 40x120 cm
by NOUF SEMARI

BAHEBEK

By Zvezdana Rashkovich

Every day, at sunrise, he tells her he loves her. The words slip through his lips like honey, still heavy and full with her kisses, the memory of the night before running through his body like those unpredictable flash floods in the Hajar Mountains. I love you. Bahebek. He says it right before the call for prayer makes the sky erupt into a soulful Arabic melody and before it turns into a gently woven Persian carpet, threaded with sun-spun gold.

His hands are brown, her husband, and the fingers long and slender.

He could have been an oud player in another world. Oh, what delicate Rumi poetry, as sweet as ripe dates, flowed from his fingers when he wished it so.

They are also merciless on her skin, his fingers, often leaving his mark, the shape of a contorted flawed heart. He treads his nails across her sandalwood and myrrh-perfumed skin as if she were precious, as if she were possibly his life map. But sometimes, in her mind she is a squirming captured rat, or a veiled dust-covered china figurine like those in the souk. Often, she is confused because she can't seem to remember 'what' she is. The buzzing in her head doesn't stop unless she nestles herself into her children's bodies, entwined within their chubby arms and legs, inhaling their mango juice breath into her lungs. With her hand she traces the magical creation of their noses, eyes, the curve of her babies' ears, the pulsing life-vein in their necks. The fog she walks through lifts only when her sons burst into their baby-toothed gap-riddled laughter.

Every evening, when her husband joins her in bed her skin is oiled and inviting like that of a vengeful snake while a desert storm collects inside her heart like a mighty dervish, like the rage of her female Bedouin ancestors when they ululate in grief. Her hair is perfumed by the finest scents from India, white lotus, jasmine and marigold. It shines like the fine silk veils her husband buys her so she can hide it. Her hands and nails are carefully manicured and polished, massaged and creamed so that they can slide easily into the soft expensive gloves her husband orders her to wear. The baby growing in her belly kicks. She turns away from the bathroom mirror where she has been inspecting her face. It surprises her that she has new lines around her lips and that her eyes look somehow like mout, death.

This baby is the reason. It doesn't quell her anxieties and despair over her marriage like the other two did. This time, the seed that had taken root inside her womb made her retch throughout the day, made her back sore and pelvis heavy. It made her equally depressed and indifferent. The child seemed alien somehow, hostile. She almost didn't mind. Getting upset seemed too strenuous. Lately, she didn't seem able to summon the energy.

Her husband tells her he loves her at dusk as steam rises off the heat-sodden pavements of their desert city, little funnels like a sigh of relief twisting into the sudden black sky.

Bahebek.

Then he orders her to serve him clove and mint tea in gold-embellished teacups, on a gilded tray and with two of those expensive heart-shaped cubes of sugar, stirred into his cup just so. He frets because she has neglected to massage his shoulders, then his feet. *Doesn't she know he is tired and works all day to give her all this?* He tells her this in a low voice but it's where danger usually waits for her and she coils into herself like a worm, and then his face is his no more. A jinni, of the evil sort, has taken home there for now. Her husband's hand swings through the air,

smashing the heart sugar and shattering his perfect gold cup.

"Keep quiet, don't complain, look what you made me do again, you whine, you are such an ungrateful, such a stupid wife."

"Pull the veil over your hair. Everyone will see you."

Bahebek.

She can't quite remember why her cheek stings or why her head pounds. It's better that way. Then she notices that her hands are clenched like claws, her long nails digging into her flesh but she feels no pain. Pomegranate-colored blood oozes slowly into her palms, thick and sticky. It reminds her of the strawberry syrup she puts in her children's milk. It always leaves traces which she then wipes off their plump cheeks and chins with a soft towel.

It's a good thing he insists she wear long black gloves, because he says, her hands are lovely, the color of fragile pearls and he might break them if he wanted to.

The next day is Friday and they are on their way to the new park by the seafront, to take the children on the swings and have tea as they usually do on the weekends. Perhaps this time they might even be content for a while and if not that, then at least sit in silent hatred for an hour. Perhaps she will have that today. But he glances at her over and over as he drives. Inspecting. His eyes bore into her with an intensity that makes her heart jump under her breast.

"Cover your arms, milky and soft like a child's."

"Your legs, they are still long like when I first saw you on that beach, curse the day, I wish I never even met you. You will destroy me, woman." He shakes his head as if talking to the jinni that has surely built a harem in his mind by now.

"Woman, cover your hair. I can see it, right there!" He points his finger accusingly. No matter how much she fortified herself against his words and his ugliness of spirit he still managed to startle her.

In the car mirror, like a madwoman, she searches for that single hair that has escaped the confines of her tightly wound veil. She knows everyone will think her crazy if she told, but she is envious that it's free. The moment lasts a millisecond in her mind and is gone. Then she pushes the strand back under the veil and closes her eyes. This baby she made with her husband one summer night hates her. It's large and pushes its limbs into every nook inside her abdomen. There is a throbbing ache in her pelvis again.

Her sons' voices bring her attention to the streak of azure blue. The sea.

"Look mama." They clap their hands.

She smiles because she loves the sea and its vastness, its endless possibilities. She turns around in her seat, the belt tugs at her belly, and she high-fives the boys. Their hair is slicked back and they look healthy.

"They will grow into handsome, strong men like their father," her mother-in-law often said.

"Can't you control yourself? Don't you know the angels curse a wife who is disobedient? Haven't you learned that it's a sin in front of your God?" He punches the wheel and the children start crying. She turns around in the seat again to placate them with plastic Supermen and boxed juices from the cooler. A trickle of sweat rolls down her back and she feels incredibly thirsty. So thirsty in fact that she seizes the half empty box of juice out of her son's hand and drinks it through the tiny straw in a single breath. The little boy's lip quivers but he doesn't cry.

"It's not my fault I love you and that I'm jealous."

Her husband is pulling into the parking lot and the park is ahead. She can see the milling crowds, the cotton candy and sweet dumpling stalls, the cardamom tea-sellers and the roasted corn vendors. The sound of a thousand happy people reaches her ears and makes her dizzy.

They have stopped and she climbs out of the car, opens the back door. She unhooks the boys' belts and helps them out of their seats. Her husband's face carries a pout and a scowl simultaneously as he grudgingly helps with the picnic bag she had brought along. They make their way towards the small kids play area and the boys are running ahead, their legs pumping, their hair already stuck to their forehead in perspiration.

"What is that look in your eyes? Must you push me to this, look what you made me do now? You bring the devil out in me. I curse you... curse you."

They sit at an empty table at a small café while the boys climb onto the play structures nearby. She is thankful that their table is isolated from other guests. She orders milk chai spiced with cardamom and two fresh-squeezed mango juices for the boys. Her husband orders an espresso and a large bottle of water. She leans back into the plastic chair and exhales. Her back is still damp.

"God, and those pink shorts. Remember them? You were eighteen on that beach in Oregon. What was its name? Cannon Beach, yes. I wish neither one of us had gone to that country. You know why?" he asks. He is facing the sun and his eyes gleam like some night creature.

She shakes her head. No. She doesn't know.

"Because then I wouldn't have married you. I wouldn't have to suffer and keep my eyes on you all the time. I know you still want to wear those pink shorts. I can see it in your eyes, always ready and willing. An adulteress. Have you no shame?"

Tears rise in her throat. She is afraid to vomit in front of him. Her belly seems to have magnified threefold since this morning and her hair is damp with sweat under her veil.

"I will have none of that anymore." He says.

"A handsome man," her sister and cousins used to say about her husband.

She thought of Oregon and the beach and her semester as an exchange student that altered her life. Unlike her husband she didn't regret going to America. She had enjoyed the Americans and their peculiar and often funny ways - even the ones that shocked her at first. Without her family watching her every move she reveled in her newly savored independence. She bought her first pair of shorts. Pink and bold like those of American girls. After that fated pink-shorts day at Cannon Beach she had spent almost every day with her soon-to-be husband. He used to make her laugh then. They found solace in their joint homesickness for their shared desert homeland in the Persian Gulf and for their cuisine. How they both missed their grandmothers' date syrup dumplings and minced beef stew!

It's all because Bahebek.

She pulls the smooth garment tighter around her neck and adjusts her scarf and gloves.

Everyone will see you, can't you hear me?

"The gold necklace around your neck, the new car parked in the shade of palm trees and jasmine bushes at the house, you like them?" he asks.

"Yes, I do."

"So pull the veil over your hair then. Ungrateful wife. Your curls and those wet eyes are as disobedient as you. And your pink lips." He flails his arms in the air. "Curse you, woman."

The children amble over to the table. She gives each a biscuit with a teddy bear face engraved into it. They drink their fill of mango juice and point out the park attractions to her one by one. The list is long and she hopes they leave before their father becomes annoyed but it's too late.

He looks at the boys under thick furrowed brows. "Didn't we come to the park so you two can play?" he asks.

"They are going. See, they were just thirsty." Quickly, she takes the boys by their hands and yanks them towards the play area. She kisses each on the head before letting go. They smell of desert and sea and mango-scented breath. The park is bustling and busy. Fathers pushing children on swings and tricycles, throwing bright-colored balls into the air and one who is running alongside his daughter, who shrieks on the spinning wheel, long braids and yellow ribbons bouncing behind her. The portly father is out of breath but his face is aglow with something like rapture because he is in love with his angelic-faced youngling.

Her husband is not to be ignored however, even in these rare moments of beauty. He waits for her to sit down before continuing his litany.

"You know what." He says. He is shaking his head as if in disbelief.

She knows it's not a question and remains silent. However, her disobedient wife ears strain to hear the seagulls

call and the splash of waves from that vast sea.

"I never should have married you. Look at you. Because of you, my end will be eternal hellfire." He doesn't stop, he can't. His anger picks up momentum like a speeding train with no brakes downhill through the Grand Canyon on a course that she knows will culminate within the four walls of their bedroom. He is agitated and his lips are a thin line. Gone is the soft curve left by the ingratiating kisses she left on them last night.

Her eyes wander to the children rolling on the grass. Carefully, before he speaks again she sips the tea brought over by the waiter. The café is pleasant and simple, a place for tired parents. The sky is cloudy this December afternoon and the sea is choppy, its waves the color of smoke. Something like winter has arrived in this desert country and she hopes for rain. Soon.

"Your large villa with high iron gates and crystal chandeliers, the cars and the servants and everything else I have given? The bangles and rings that you so boldly use to adorn those pearl-like hands."

Her husband's voice reminds her of preachers on TV and their incessant histrionics. She wishes she could turn him off just like those on TV. With a press of a button. Click. Instead, she listens. She doesn't want to irritate him further.

"Yes, they're lovely. Thank you." She says.

"Well, then hide those sinful curves, those insolent soft breasts." He says.

She looks at his profile against the light and his carefully trimmed goatee and sideburns. He is immaculately dressed and groomed as always. People take notice when he enters a room. He is tall and has a wide smile when he is not sulking or punching her in the back. But all she has seen for a long time is a husk of a man she used to laugh with and now just abhors.

"Draw the wings of that black caftan around your body, so abnormally misshapen with this third child. My brothers' wives don't look so ugly when pregnant. What's wrong with you? I pray every morning that at least it will be another boy. God willing."

His voice seems far away now. His face is a blob outlined by the sea the sky and the swaying palms trees. She places her gloved hand on her stomach. Something is different. Whatever it is it has snapped inside her heart and is now uncontainable. She feels the warmth in her stomach and chest, the tingling in her arms, even feet. As if her womb had broken open and let the warm contents spill within her. For a minute she can't see. The sky sways into smoke and mirrors and the trees bend all the way to the ground like crones on a stick. Maybe a jinni has possessed her too just now, because she finally remembers what she is.

She is a princess of a red-hued desert, a warrior Bedouin riding a golden horse. Like the soaring falcon she rises ululating a victorious song. She is a maiden of Arabia and mother of all sons... she is her father and her mother. She stirs a melody from a thousand sand dunes with her heartbeat and then she weeps. She is the breath of a million

breaths, a sand grain among a million sand grains. She is a desert storm and a sea storm.

She rises from the chair then, rattling her cup of tea, pushing the chair backwards until it topples. Her breath rushes in and out of her nose and mouth in gulps and she is terrified he will stop her because she is swollen like a damn blowfish and he is taller and faster. But she marches quickly down the path as adrenaline rushes through her sluggish veins and stirs her Bedouin blood. As she walks she is already snatching the veil off her head and neck, pulling the gloves off ... dropping them on the grass. She hears her husband's cursing and the shuffle of his slippers as he stands up but she doesn't turn to look.

She makes way to her children on the seesaw, laughing at their gummy smiles and sandy feet. She laughs harder when the breeze reaches into her long hair like the hands of impatient ladies-in-waiting, setting it delightfully... wickedly free.

She likes that her tresses are shiny and now billow like a brand new flag on Independence Day in America.

"*Bahebak*, that's why," she whispers.





Confessions in the red room - acrylic on canvas - 100x100 cm
by NOUF SEMARI

LOVE, CHILDHOOD AND THE ARAB SPRING: an interview with Dubai-based, Irish poet, Frank Dullaghan

BY REWA ZEINATI

RZ: You have three poetry collections, two haiku collections, you also co-founded the *Essex Poetry Festival* and edited *Seam Poetry Magazine*. You are a poetry judge for the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature in Dubai. You've written award-winning screenplays and short stage plays, and are a regular book reviewer for the Dubai *Eye Talking of Books* radio programme. You are an Irish poet, born and raised, who is living and writing and publishing in and from Dubai. How did that happen? Why the Arab world?

Frank Dullaghan: It happened slowly and over a long period of time. I've been involved with poetry for decades. One can achieve a lot in that time if one works hard. I also think it's important to give back to the poetry community for the gift of poetry; to encourage and foster others on their own poetic journey. Hence my involvement with the EAFL and their outreach programmes and the various writing workshops I've run.

With regards to why Dubai, my story is much the same as many ex-pats: I came here with my job and have stayed because Dubai offers good work opportunities. However, being here has opened a door into Arab culture and has given me wonderful opportunities to be part of a nascent and fast growing art scene.

RZ: Your latest collection of poetry *The Same Roads Back* (Cinnamon Press, 2014) is replete with loss, war, rebellion, and memory. You write poems about what is happening in Syria, in Egypt, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates. You write poems about your childhood and school years in Ireland, to your wife you write movingly, "what else do we need but the surprise of each other?" You write about your children. You write poems dedicated to Lebanese and Palestinian writer friends. I get the sense that the collection, really, is about 'family,' and/or 'home' in the literal and figurative sense. Is that true? And what does the title mean?

FD: I think most writers have certain themes or preoccupations which infest all that they write. Certainly family friends, and 'home' are important to me. I'm less interested in place than I am in people. What is the human condition? What makes us who we are? Why do we love? Where have we come from? What do we want? How can there be so much love in the world and also so much hate? I think poetry is a way of reaching out to find accommodation with the strange times and places we live in; it's a way of celebrating the impact others have on our lives, and a way of sharing our understandings. I have made some strong and wonderful friendships since I moved to Dubai. These have been connections which have impacted my life. So I think my latest book also acknowledges and confirms this wonder.

Regarding the title, I think it points to a number of things – the act of continually revisiting our preoccupations; our need to investigate our roots, looking for reasons to who and where we are; the desire to reach some safe or final destination we call 'home'; the completion of the circle, the path that takes us back to the beginning. I tend to go for titles that have a metaphorical quality, one that somehow feels right for the collection.

RZ: From your poem entitled "Dirty Poem" the lines, "there are children with dead eyes/ in the garden, women gone beyond grief./ There are men growing into wolves,/ picking at their teeth. There are bombs." These gorgeous, heartbreaking lines pretty much sum up what has been happening in the Arab world of late. Has living in the Arab region shaped or influenced your craft?

FD: I don't think it is possible to live so close to the countries of the Arab Spring and not deal with this in poetry. And I do find it all so heartbreaking. How can anyone watch the massacre in Gaza and not despair of human goodness? How do we manage to live in a world like this? There is so much pain. We must seek out the small, often personal, moments of peace and love. We must hold tight to our friends. Poetry is one way of surviving.

However, I always tend to come at these big themes from the individual point of view. I'm not trying to be some sort of public poet making grand gestures to a future generation. I think my work is quieter than that. But, hopefully, it is powerful nonetheless.

RZ: Has living in the Arab region influenced your perception of this conflict-driven space? What were your preconceptions about the region, if any, prior to living in Dubai?

FD: I think I was probably less aware when I lived outside of Dubai. Proximity does make a difference and friendships with people impacted makes it personal. But I don't think my sensibilities have changed. They are just better informed.

RZ: What makes a good poem?

FD: Oh there are so many things – clarity of thought and communication, accessibility whilst maintaining depth (multiple layers of meaning), surprise, freshness, the ability to show emotional complexity etc. Of course, what makes a good poem is also a personal thing. I prefer poems that deal with human relationships rather than abstracts, I'd rather have sharp images over clever wordplay. I like the lyrical, a narrative arc, poems with a message that is delivered cleanly and with impact. I dislike poems that have too many classical references, that show off their learning, that are lazy (tired language, cliché, repetition without craft, shock words without thought), or that try to appear cool, have street cred, etc. but lack any kind of originality or substance.

RZ: Describe your writing ritual (if you have one!).

FD: Because I have always had a day job and one, moreover, that has always demanded a lot of my time, I tend to write in short bursts whenever I have the inclination/opportunity. I always have a notebook with me, so you will often find me in a mall coffee shop, writing. When I can, I try to do a little writing first thing in the morning. That will generally only last for a few weeks before the world sabotages it. But, surprisingly, it often results in some of my best and most sustained writing.

RZ: What are you working on now?

FD: I seem to be writing memory poems again about my childhood and early adult life. And I've just completed a pamphlet length set of poems about a missing girl.

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

FD: They are very important. They can be a standard of contemporary excellence. They can introduce you to new voices and fresh approaches. They can act as an affirmation of the quality of one's own work. I believe, one absolutely must have published in literary journals before attempting to launch their own collection. If you want to write well, you need to read, and you need to listen to the choir of new voices as well as the established soloists. Not all journals will suit all people. But there are many quality journals out there, Sukoon being one, and local too, that it is always possible to find some you like. Support for poetry starts with literary journals and small presses. They are the lifeblood. They are what sustains the art.

RZ: What do you think is the role of literature and art in a region that burns with strife and fragmentation?

FD: To remind us of beauty. To affirm our humanity. To touch the creative, the human, the positive. To provide a counter-narrative to the small-minded dogmas and hatred of political and religious bigotry.

RZ: You were commissioned to provide the final translations of the poems by His Highness, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai. Tell us a little about that.

FD: Yes, that was an unexpected honour at the end of last year. The way it worked was that I was provided with literal translations (I don't read Arabic) and I worked on those to try and provide a poetic translation that would work for the western ear. The Nabati poetry written by His Highness is a traditional poetic form from the Gulf couched in the dialect of the Bedouin. In Arabic, it is very complex in its rhythm and rhyming patterns. I did not attempt to reproduce this in the English translations but rather tried to convey the essential message and images of the poems. I was assisted in this by various experts who provided feedback on particular phrases. That said, it is also important to remember that the work includes praise poems for leaders and religious poems which will seem strange to western ears (though, historically, we wrote similar poems). I hope that my efforts captured the essence of the poems. Translation is always only an approximation. However, I believe that the results will be of interest to many and will, hopefully, provide some insight into the poetic works of Sheikh Mohammed. The resultant book 'Flashes of Verse' was published by Explorer Publishing in a beautiful book and can now be purchased locally.

RZ: What advice would you give emerging writers?

FD: Read, read, read. Read quality and demanding work that challenges your craft. Look for critical feedback not the praise of close friends who believe your work is wonderful. It's not wonderful. It may be brilliant for the stage you are at in your growth as a writer, but it can always be better. We only grow as writers when we, momentarily, set aside our egos for the sake of improving our craft. There is much to learn. Always. Every day. You never stop. Nor should you.



FOUR POEMS OF THE ARAB SPRING

i) *Day of the Dogs*
Syria 2012

The dogs are loose on the street,
they have loaded guns and they shoot.

They snarl, they bark, they bite. They would
gauge out your soul if they could.

See how they circle and strike,
pulling one from the crowd whom they kick

and beat bloody with the butt of a gun,
a pretty girl maybe, or one

whose smell they know and have sought
for some time to lay low. They ought

to be locked in their kennels but,
in these unusual times, they've been cut

from their leashes, sent out to savage and rend.
They rip softness from women, restraint from the men.

iii) *The Blue Spoon of the Sky*
Syria 2012

Under the blue spoon of the sky the voice of a boy
is calling on his father to get up from the road.
Now the air explodes into noise. A tattle tattle
of bullet cases bounce onto your lap like the loss
of hope in the heart for a pause, for a way out.
And above, where blue has now fled behind smoke,
some god or other, yours or theirs (who cares?),
is laughing his broken laugh like a cough. It's enough
to wreck your mind. You are edging on mad.
Even the dogs have fled leaving you to your hate, to
your dead, to your day after day of killing, to the
smell of your own sweat, to this addiction you have
to the rolling dice of your life, where fear becomes
something forbidden you taste in your mouth
but keep coming back to like a tongue to the loss
of a tooth. Take your gun and go out. Take your chance
in your dance with death. Go on. Blow everything up.

iv) *Their Bonfire-Brightened Nights*
Egypt 2013

Those young men from their bonfire-brightened nights,
how can they sleep with so much changed for the worse?
They reach out with love but are ignored.

Their women and their children on the road
are hardly recognisable as themselves, they suffer
the blood-washed squares; their inner noise of grief;
the dead, who cannot leave these broken streets.

The dead who cannot leave these broken streets,
the blood-washed squares, their inner noise of grief,
are hardly recognisable as themselves. They suffer
their women and their children on the road.

They reach out with love but are ignored.
How can they sleep with so much changed for the worse:
those young men from their bonfire-brightened nights?

FRANK DULLAGHAN

NAMING THE STARS

Syria 2012

I must learn to forgive the sun
its thirst for the dark:
it drinks the night down.

I would stay beneath night's cold
blanket. Not to be safe
but to be blind. Who wants to see

the body of a young girl on the street,
her eyes whitening; the wall
ripped from a neighbour's house

the wind reading his books,
spilling his memories onto the street;
faces of soldiers, a thousand years old,

who have stopped
counting their killings, who breathe
through their guns? Leave me the dark.

I will name the stars I can see
through the smoke, escapees, souls
who have been blown into the sky.

Leave me with all this death
as if it were a kind of love. Do not
let the sun see my face.

FRANK DULLAGHAN

BACK IN THE USSR

for Fergus

I was born in Ireland too late
for Beatle mania. Yet they opened a door
in our town and the small desires of the Fifties –
formica kitchens, labour saving appliances –
went out while less easy ones stepped in. *Freedom*
was the word we used for this but never understood.
The big girl next door said the Beatles were the thing
and so they were. We learned the words and sung
the tunes like anthems of a revolution
against domestic obedience, an expectant Church.
We talked excitedly of *Hari Krishna* and LSD, and although
a long way from the daily pain of Vietnam, we wanted
Peace to have its chance. It was a sort of education.
I stacked shelves in *Dunne's Stores* to buy *Sargent Pepper*
clothes. My elder brother listened to them
on his new transistor radio, the same one
on which he heard, he said, real-time
Radio Free Prague crashed into silence. He said
he heard the jackboots on the stairs, the studio door
bashed in. He became a local celebrity of sorts,
an authority on East European politics, for a while.
But everything goes back to those who fuck
the rest, those with wealth and power or who
have stepped up to the plate and grabbed a handful.
Yet these words of *Freedom, Love* and *Peace*
are like a fever. The virus lives on, there's been
an unexpected outbreak in the *Arab Spring*.
I listen to my son who's strumming *Back to the USSR*
on his guitar, as if there's no redemption in the past,
as if everything that's won is somehow lost.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Dirty Mind, from The Literary Organs Series, mixed media 24" x 16"
BY DEXTER DEADWRITER BETANTOS

A Notice Posted on the Apartheid Wall in Bethlehem

Dear friends,

I am sorry to inform you
that today the check-points will be
closed. No entry
will be possible
by car or by foot.

Armed guards will be
posted for your convenience,
though you will not see
them over the Wall
and its iron door.

During this time, I would
like to inform you that the gate
between the cattle shoot
and the metal turn-style will
be locked for your protection,

and please do not worry
about the bus drivers that anticipate
your arrival through security.

Someone will eventually tell them
that you will not be traveling
at this time.

CHAUN BALLARD

Arabic

"The only language of loss
left in the world is Arabic—"
– Agha Shahid Ali

"There was a time when the people here spoke only in Arabic,"
said to me by a man who spoke only in Arabic.

A time before Amichai composed his psalms in mandated sands,
and Darwish lamented his odes from the fleeting throes of Arabic.

I listened as the doves broke into an elegy and asked,
"Does the olive tree weep in English, Hebrew, or Arabic?"

From her father's grove, a woman debates with soldiers.
"I'm not yelling," she says, "I'm only speaking to you in Arabic."

In a land of tug and war, I ask, "What language does one dream in?"
"Mostly English," the children say, "But our ancestors respond only in Arabic."

Inside the market of merchants, I inquire, "What is the name for this fruit?"
"Fruit of the dead—in Greek. Grenade—in Hebrew. Bloodshed," he said in Arabic.

Outside—young boys gather whole villages and hurl them into the sun,
hoping that fire might descend on those who do not speak Arabic.

In response, men build bombs in English, package them in Hebrew,
and, from the sun, drop them onto whole villages of those who speak Arabic.

In the desert, they say, "Forgiveness is not found in as-shems." [the sun]
So I tell you, you must howl at the repentant moon in Arabic.

The earth is ripe as a cocktail bomb. All one needs is a torn cloth,
a bottle spiked, and a spark from a grievous tongue—to ignite flames in Arabic.

The city of peace is an impervious stone. Dare I ask:
"Is there a place here for those who pray in Arabic?"

"Inshallah, my dear Chaun, though Jerusalem still slumbers. [If God wills it]
Until she wakes, the streets will lie bare of Arabic."

CHAUN BALLARD



Dubai, Photography
BY HAITHAM MEDHAT EL ATTAR

COMING HOME TO KUWAIT

By EC Buck

Not many people know about Mina Saud. I even knew some Kuwaitis that had difficulty finding it on the map. Sometimes it's called *Mina az-Zour*. It's a small Chevron-owned compound for expatriates (both Saudi and American) located in the southern end of Kuwait. This wasn't my first time living in the Middle East, a place many of my relatives referred to as "Over There." I lived in Dahrán, Saudi Arabia until I was six, but I don't remember it much. When we weren't globetrotting, my family changed states every couple of years. When people asked why, as they often did, I would reply, "My dad's a geophysicist." I was an oil kid.

The prospect of moving to Kuwait seemed like a good premise for a fresh start, at the time. No one there would know about the crazy awkward things I had done when I was eleven. Maybe being in a new group of people would be good for me. Perhaps – should I even dare to think it? – I could even be *popular*. Even the vague promise of popularity seemed a poor consolation for leaving my friends in Houston. And the orchestra. And my school's Latin Club. And things like deciduous trees. But as I was going to live there whether I wanted to or not, it was probably best if I at least attempted to find something to hope for.

I still remember the first time I stepped out of the chilled, sterile airport air and into the hot Kuwaiti night. A wall of heat met me on the sidewalk along with our ride to Mina Saud. I took a full, deep breath, letting the humidity sink into her skin and hair, allowing it into the deepest recesses of her lungs. As my father helped the driver pack our luggage into the trunk of the car, a distant muezzin took up the call to prayer.

Others joined him and soon I was surrounded by the haunting song of *Allahu Akbar* sung by at least a dozen voices. Tired as I was from the journey, I wanted to just sit and listen to the beauty of it. I did not want my parents to ask me questions about whether I had all my things in the car. And I certainly did not want to have to talk to Rhonda, our American mentor.

She had come with the driver to tell us all about everything there was to know about Mina Saud, and the school I would be attending with my siblings. As soon as we were all buckled in, she rattled off a list of sports teams I could join.

"I'm not really into sports," I confessed. "But I was the vice-president of the Latin club at my old school."

Rhonda's smile faltered. "Oh." I detected just the tiniest pause. "So you're more of an *academic*." The way she said it, like an insult, in one moment blew away all my fragile dreams.

How foolish I was to think that this move wouldn't be like the last *three*! I looked out the car window, noticing the vehicle's changing shadow as it traveled along the highway through the orange circles of light. The car moved forward, but the pattern remained the same. It repeated itself over, and over, and over again. I wasn't going to be popular. I wasn't going to have friends. I was going to have to wear a mask to disguise my true self, if I wanted to keep myself from living with constant ridicule. And for what? I wasn't a necrophiliac or autistic or ugly-looking, or even gay. I was just me. Awkward, latin-declension-loving, cello-playing, academic *me*. And sitting there, in the car, I knew it wasn't going to be enough if I was going to get by. Was it ever?

I shivered, and let the adults continue their conversation without me. The air in the car was over-conditioned, and I found myself wishing I had a sweater.

The car turned left on Six Mile Road. I sat up a little straighter, hoping to get glimpses of the village at Khiran and the security gates. We stopped briefly at the security checkpoint long enough for the guard to determine that we weren't going to make the car explode, then waved us through.

We stopped at House 20. Kuwait once again greeted me with her warm embrace when I disembarked. Here, the air at once fresh and salty, and tainted with something else; a bitter tang of sulfur, the by product of both the oil tanks and a water desalinization plant.

The house welcomed us. I chose my room, already furnished, my bed already made up with cheap cotton sheets. The air was too cold, again. Why does that always happen? People tend to cool buildings to an excessive degree in Houston, too. If the air conditioner was on, it was on much too high. I opened my window, and I could hear the waters of the Persian Gulf crash against the sandy beach. That was the last sound I heard before I fell asleep.

The next day, a few of the other expat American kids came to introduce themselves. I was sure to put my mask on, for their benefit.

"It's so nice to meet you," they said. "Tell us about yourself! You're going to really love it here." That's what they said. But I could tell that we weren't going to get along. It was written all over them clearer than actual words: their body language, the way their eyes lingered on my unassuming garb of jeans and a Junior Classical League t-shirt, their fake smiles when I told them my actual interests (in addition to Latin: reading, writing, Celtic music, an obscure thing called tatted lace.) I had let them know too much. We might be cordial to one another, but never friends. Severe introversion and Mormon to boot? They would never invite me to their parties.

When they left, I told my mom that I was going to go out for a walk. I made a beeline for the beach, eager for my first glimpse. I had been to beaches before, of course. But *this* beach, *this* ocean, took my breath away. The water was a sparkling turquoise, and the sky a clear, optimistic blue. The rhythm of the crashing waves filled my ears, and all my whole soul. I knew I could scream here, sing at the top of my lungs, and still be completely, comfortably, alone. No need to wear a mask. I could be myself.

My life wasn't going to be easy here. But the Persian Gulf whispered to me its secret: I was home.

"You know," I thought to myself. "Latin *is* a dead language. Maybe I'll learn Arabic instead."



With Love From Tehran, Now Let Me Say: Goodbye

I sent Siba a Michael Jackson poster
but she never got it. The censors,
she wrote, probably took it. She would
have loved a stack of American magazines.
She told me not to bother.
They'd take those, too.
The envelope is still so white.

When I close my eyes I can remember
parting it with the letter opener, carefully,
anticipating Siba's neat script in dark ink
on the thin, sky blue air mail paper.
This time, though, the tears came fast.

We'd been writing as pen pals for months,
Siba already in college.
She encouraged me to study hard.

"I love going to school. Of course it is difficult
and you should try hard. Geuthe Institute
where I was studying German is closed
while the war is so hard. Everything in our life
is affected by war."

400,000 dead, 750,000 wounded.
Babies blown up, blistered by mustard gas.
Neighborhoods evaporated by missiles,
the War of Cities raging on and on.

I climbed the old fir tree in the pasture,
to the highest place I could reach, hidden
in the branches, where I could feel the wind
bending the trunk. I didn't come down until it got dark
and someone yelled for me to come inside.
"You wanted a family picture," she wrote.
"I'll send one as soon as possible."
The British sold Sadaam masks and
suits. Americans sold recipes for chemical weapons,
Russian scuds raining down all night long.

Postmark: Tehran, 1985.

The green and purple stamps
depict two bearded, turbaned men. My
name on the front, addressed to our rural route
so far away in Oregon.
"I'm sorry that I have not write so long.
In fact I had a bad time and have now.
We are not in normal situation. I'm talking
about war. Many people has been killed and I
don't know whether I'm alive tonight. But if I'm
alive, I am always here and can receive your letters."
Generations of brothers missing.
25,000 dead in one day.
Desert trenches filled with the stench of hate.
Motherless children left to die in the street.
I never heard from her again, still feel the ache
sometimes, of wondering.
She wrote out her alphabet
and some words in Persian – "love" and "hello"
and "your friend" along with the translation.
In English she continued,
"I hope you always live in peace and health,
your perpetual friend, Siba.
Now let me say: خدا حافظ"

GINA WILLIAMS



Dubai, Photography
BY HAITHAM MEDHAT EL ATTAR

“INSHALLAH, HABIBI”
By Haitham Alsarraf

“Inshallah, habibi.”

This is the reply I get in Arabic from my floor manager. I request a three-day vacation and all I get back is inshallah habibi. Not just any inshallah, either. It is the third and most ridiculous one. One being the true religious term, God-willing, which is said with the most seriousness. The second means a careless and ambiguous maybe. This third one, though, is the most potent.

It is the least sincere, given without direct eye contact, combed onto a nonchalant smirk and hand-gestured with dramatic semi-pleading palms. It means there is no way in hell you will get what you request. It is just wishful thinking. Take your pathetic pleading somewhere else. Leave my sight.

It is used to courteously dilute any fore tension. Sugarcoated yet diplomatic; all used by heisting Allah’s name to protect any violent reprisals. And, it is used as an intended paradox, kneaded with habibi, my love, divided by a comma to project diplomacy. Duplicity. Rubbing it intensely in is the point. It is much like the social norm the country weaves itself in on a constant basis.

The forex markets have been slow all day across the Japanese and Australian opens, but they pick up a little later during the early European hours. Gold and oil futures are trading around \$275 and \$20, respectively. Not much action to go long or short on most instruments. Not much profit to foresee.

I start to flirt with the secretary. She is wearing a black tank top cleverly tucked behind a formal blouse. The top holds a firm set of well-rounded breasts, with a cleavage beckoning for adoration. The blouse is just yielding to professionalism. The tank top is begging for invitation. I ask her which flowers to get her should she come out on a date with me.

"White carnations." She says.

"They represent friendship and peace," I reply.

"Precisely."

"Precisely?"

"Precisely!" She reiterates with a half naked smile while the seductive liquid eyeliner on her upper eyelid tries to pull and push me at the same time.

"You can do better than that, can't you?" I affirm.

She just giggles, yanking my chain, trying to take me on a whirlwind to test how sincere my intentions are. So, I continue to shower her ego.

"Pink carnations seem to suit you, Lubna."

"Pink? Why pink?"

"They represent potential. Half red, half white. Not friends. Not lovers. Somewhere in between."

"I haven't seen pink carnations in Kuwait before."

"That should show you how special you are to receive one."

"You're sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"Very!" I grin back.

"Inshallah, habibi," she says, stretching and torturing out the inshallah bit.

As soon I hear that, I see what looks like a plane hit the Twin Towers in New York City on the television above her. I peer in.

Soon after, another plane hits.

I yell, "Sell 50 S&P contracts!" I get them. All 50 short positions. Wait it out, and soon the news goes berserk. More traders start showing up to herd in front of the TVs. The markets soon pause thereafter. I leave the hoopla.

I head to the glass bridge. It is the smoking room. It is the haven for distressed, crazed out traders. The air-conditioning blows arctic air while each smoking trader struggles to hold onto sanity. One peers out to the cemetery beneath. Another inhales orgasmically staring into the brilliant cloudless sky. One more bites his nails.

The tea boy does his usual rounds of picking up glasses and cups. Ghostly zigzagging in and out of rooms. Invisibly blowing in and out of people's lives.

I stare out of the large windows, into the heavy cranes and cement mixers, on all four sides of our trading floor. It is the same every morning. I watch brick and mortar. I scrutinize steel and iron ore. Every week and every month and year, I witness machines side-by-side, pumping and thumping, radically changing. Ghettoizing Kuwait's landscape. Tightening Kuwait's already concrete concentration camp.

Beautifully architectural commercial buildings to incompetent bland structures stretch skyward like mosque minarets, struggling to reach God. Like the clunk and clunk sounds of oil rigs pounding and squeezing black gold out of mother nature's bellied desert for hefty foreign consumption, foreign workers are being abused to erect structures

alien to them. This is due to the desert-oiled money, which is connivingly financing Kuwait. Sucking out earth's oil in order to oil artificial structures, artificial futures. Built by imitation. By a substitute nationality.

I then gaze into the tiny Jewish cemetery that is tightly closed in. It rests invisibly. It tries to cling on to life in the midst of a new breed of brick and mortar, which is shadowing its presence, its influence.

After the meditative smoke, I think of how to proceed after the US markets shut down for about a week. My short positions wait. So do I, with little patience.

Hysteria follows. Some of the Jordanian and Lebanese traders are ecstatic that the US has finally gotten what they deserve from the Arab and Muslim world. Bin Laden becomes an instant hero. With his constipated face and fringed beard. In the name of Islam. And, all.

At the back office, my boss just stands and stares at the daily events, calculating how much he will lose in commissions. A stream of profane words in the Lebanese tongue is the closest politeness that he musters.

Propaganda ensues. The markets take a big shit in the proceeding weeks. Few of the traders fall victim to the chain emails circulating. Mostly conspiracy theories. Perhaps, conspiracy facts.

I make a huge profit for one of my clients. And, for myself. I review my trades for the week with my supervisor. He sees I made a killing. Gives me an impressed frown. I ask if I can cash my commissions today. He returns with, "Inshallah, habibi."

The first definition of inshallah.





Antony, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 50cm, 2014 (Emergeast Gallery, Dubai)
BY ALI SHAWWA

ENOUGH

By Jennifer Zeynab Maccani

I email my cousins in Damascus. They tell me about the weather and their homework. Then they tell me about the shelling. I ask my cousin Ahmed how they do it. Do what? he asks. Go on living, I say. He tells me about Um Zeyna. She has an udder infection, he says. They used to make a fragrant cheese called *halloumi* from her milk but there won't be any this month. I say I think Um Zeyna was my grandmother's goat, a long time ago. I tell Ahmed I hope she feels better. Who? he asks, the goat or my grandmother? I tell him both.

Later on my question is still burrowing in my brain so I go to my father and ask him how he does it. Does what? he asks. Go on living, I say. He beats me and sends me to the basement. I can hear him cracking pistachios in the kitchen over my head.

I go to my mother later, when he's asleep. She's making *kibbeh* for the next day. I ask her how she does it. She thinks I mean the *kibbeh*. With my hands, she says, and that's all. But when that's not enough? I press. Surely sometimes it's not enough to use your hands. It's enough, she says. She punches down the dough, wets her fingers. The lamb and onions and bulgur go deep into the dough, into the hole she makes with her thumb. I wait until she's done and then, while she washes her hands, I pop one into my mouth, raw. The lamb tastes like an iron cross and the bulgur cracks like glass under my teeth. I'd thought it would be warm, like a fresh sacrifice. It's not. It's cold.

I write my grandmother to ask her how she goes on living in the face of so much pain. I ask her about the shelling and the explosion outside of the *masjid* in their neighborhood. I ask her about Um Zeyna. She writes back and the paper smells like cumin. Her handwriting is all capital letters. She tells me the weather has been cool. She tells me three young women and their children were torn to pieces by the explosion on their way to worship. She asks me if my mother gave me the prayer rug she sent me for my birthday last month. I say out loud that she did, that it's in my room, under my bed. Then I remember she can't hear me. The lettering gets shaky, hard to read. She tells me there are bad people in the world, mostly bad men. There are bad men in Syria and bad men in America just the same, even though she's never been to America. She tells me maybe I should try to imagine all the bad men in the world like goats, so they'll be harmless. She tells me that in the Bible, the People of the Book put all their sins into a goat and drove it out of town. She tells me that after they drove out the goat they were cleansed of temptation. I ask her: What happened to the goat?

The next day I talk to my friend Håkonen. His family is from Norway. I ask him how they go on living in Norway. He says they wear thick coats with fur hoods in the wintertime and sometimes they go to Spain in January when the *Hardangervidda* is frozen over. What if they can't get out? I ask. He tells me about a twelve-year-old girl he saw on the news. Her family left Syria and made the crossing into Lebanon to live in a refugee camp. Her parents lost everything they had, he said. They couldn't eat. Then her family married her off to a much older man, Lebanese, who claimed he would help them get out of the camp. He took the girl and never came back. Håkonen asks me what I think about that. I tell him I don't know. I tell him maybe I would die if I were her. Die? he asks. I tell him I can't imagine doing anything else. There are all kinds of pain, he tells me. People feel all kinds of things. On my way home I think about the things the refugee girl must have felt. Then I try to picture the old Lebanese man as a goat. I call him the goat-faced man. I picture the refugees chasing him out of the camp with pitchforks.

I write my grandmother again to ask her how she is. I ask her if Um Zeyna's udders are still inflamed. I don't hear from her for a month. When she writes back, the paper smells like char. She tells me they're shelling the slums daily now, that she doesn't know who's doing the shelling anymore. Then she tells me Um Zeyna is gone, that some men came with guns and took her the night before last. There are no more goats in Syria, she tells me, just bad men.

I put the letter away. I eat dinner with my mother and father. The *kibbeh* is warm now but the lamb tastes flat and all the life is gone out of it. After dinner my father watches the news about the refugees in Lebanon and cracks pistachios. I wonder which one on the television is the goat-faced man. In the kitchen my mother asks me if I've heard from my grandmother. She asks me how Um Zeyna is. I tell her there are no more goats in Syria. She asks me how they'll do it from now on. Do what? I ask her. Make goat cheese, she says. I tell her I don't know.



Running through the red room - acrylic on canvas - 100x100 cm
by NOUF SEMARI

EL GHURFEH - ROOM NUMBER 12

By Susan P. Blevins

When I first saw the room, I thought it was adequate, though certainly less than comfortable, and far from luxurious. Its two narrow beds, with thin, hard mattresses would not protect skinny hipbones turning restlessly in the night. They were covered with graying white sheets, and a pillow so hard it could have been used for the foundation of a building. So I chose one to sleep on and the other to hold my two suitcases.

The windows were shuttered and too close to the building across the street. The dirtiest lace curtains covered the windows and I felt sure that they had never been washed since the two Italian sisters set up the establishment in the early 20th century, when people from Europe were still going on the "grand tour."

Looking out of the window, I saw the traffic in the street below, and the noise of vendors rose up to me on the second floor. The smell of spicy food also assailed my nostrils from time to time. A little to my right, the hotel sheets were hanging out to dry. No wonder the sheets on my bed were grey! Dried outside in the heavy noxious pollution that plagues Cairo most days no doubt. The occasional sparrow landed on the outside windowsill, and this was a source of comfort to me in an otherwise squalid and lifeless landscape.

My room was adjacent to a mosque, so five times a day I heard the magical call to prayer of the muezzin; in this case, a human voice and not a recording, as was the case in many other mosques around the city. Regardless, I reveled in these exotic smells and sounds and felt, strangely, at home.

A basic wardrobe in the room housed my "Muslim wardrobe" of long skirts, loose, floppy blouses, and scarves to drape over any part of my anatomy, which might still indicate that there was a woman inside the flapping fabric. There was also a table and a chair, which proved convenient for my written assignments during my stay in Cairo studying Arabic at a nearby school. At my request, management provided me with a broken piece of mirror, which was now propped on top of bookshelves against the wall facing the window, bringing in some much-needed light to help dispel the dinginess of the room.

There was a bathroom attached, which I made a point of cleaning myself, and there was hot water, which was a relief. Walking into my bedroom after taking a shower, however, was a little tricky, because the floor was made of small parquet pieces, which long ago had lost their moorings, so whenever I walked on them with damp feet they stuck to me like jigsaw pieces. I eventually learned never to walk barefoot anywhere, and my bedroom sandals at the end of two months, having only been worn inside my room, were as black as coal. It was abundantly clear why Muslims wash their feet five times a day before prayer.

There was a small table between the two beds, with a reading lamp and room for my bits and pieces. One evening I knocked my earrings to the ground and they rolled under my bed. I took the bedside lamp in my hand and got on hands and knees to retrieve them. Bad move! When I looked under my bed, the earrings were nestled cozily in thick dust that had built up over many years. I retrieved them, washed them thoroughly, and vowed never to drop anything in the future.

The next day, Mustafa came to clean my floor. I imagined that there would be a vacuum cleaner, but instead, he used a mop with long, filthy strands. He dragged it over the parquet and over the carpet and back over the parquet until floor and carpet were worse than before. I realized that nothing was going to change, and that I myself would just have to adapt to the local conditions.

Unfortunately, when I had been there just a couple of days, I developed a mouth ulcer, and happened to mention this to another guest, Susanna from Slovenia, who said she had just the thing to clear that up: Grapefruit Seed Extract (GSE). So I applied it to the offending ulcer that night when I went to bed, but little did I know how strong the solution was. I proceeded to pass a night from hell, as the whole inside of my mouth was burned away by the acid of the GSE. I lost all control of my mouth and could not even spit, just drool endlessly until I filled almost an entire bottle with my own saliva. My throat started to swell and I was terribly afraid I was going to choke to death as the paralysis spread slowly but surely down my throat. Sitting up all night on that hard bed, drooling, mouth on fire, weeping hot tears, I felt sure I was going to die, alone and unknown, in the most miserable room I had ever inhabited.

But I survived the nocturnal ordeal, though I could not eat for several days afterwards, and that night proved to be an initiation into the rigorous complexities of living in Cairo. Things improved: I cleaned the room myself, bought some flowers to put on the table, was able to listen to music on my laptop, and got to know some of the other guests, mostly from the Middle East. Room Number 12 became an integral part of the colorful tapestry of my stay in Cairo.



Oman, Photography
BY HAITHAM MEDHAT EL ATTAR

REGRET AND OTHER PLEASURES

jennifer jazz

"So you want to learn Arabic," Muna said while we sipped from paper cups. "Well, you know, it's a classical language," I said putting my foot, instead of more tea, in my mouth, because it would've been easier to just learn some of the laid back dialect she spoke when her phone rang. I was working again. My lessons were squeezed into lunch breaks. She wanted me to begin with writing the alphabet. My hands were too unsteady. Not that the notebook and pen on the table between us mattered once we started spilling our souls. She was no spring chicken. In Cairo, she had almost gotten married.

"This is him. He was a liar." She said showing me his photo. She rented a room in Brooklyn from an old woman from her hometown who spied on her comings and goings. She traveled to random public places across the five boroughs, meeting students who had read her tutoring ad, most of them doing a few lessons and quitting or never showing up at all. I don't know who sighed more as we'd occupy the table for two we'd gravitate towards, at a Starbucks with the seedy lighting of a pub.

"Why don't you dye your gray hair?" She asked as if Prince Charming were only a few rinses away. As if I would make room on my twin mattress and single pillow for anyone but a dying millionaire with my name on his will. I'd give her the face palm. She'd swat my hand and insist, then before a full hour had passed, I'd grab my tote and pass her two twenties from my purse.

"I can't charge you to just talk. I feel bad. Next time you must learn something" she'd say.

She had been working for a translation company that offered to sponsor her, but the friend filling in for her while her immigration papers were being processed was refusing to vacate her desk she told me when she showed up in a haunted kind of mood on one particular occasion.

"Human resources won't intervene. I'm 36. I have no career, no husband. Nothing." She said. So I called Mohammed who used to row the meat slicer at a market near my office. During a phase when I needed a voice to occupy the excess space of a house larger than I was used to, I'd vacuum and load clothes into my dryer with his voice in the receiver pressed to my ear. Quite the storyteller, he'd reminisce about growing up in Egypt under Sadat as well as the stunning Libyan widow he had tried to win over with expensive gifts until her family suddenly decided she should marry her deceased husband's brother instead. The stress of courtship had left him resentful, but I had recently received email pics of him and his new bride cutting their wedding cake, and as soon as I asked him for advice on Muna, he brought up his middle-aged bachelor buddy Ahmed.

"I can tell by how Ahmed looks at me," Muna said with a dopey smile. "It's love." By this time she had a stable full-time job and had given a housewarming party at her new apartment in Queens where she served *kunefah* that Zeinab, a jaded neighbor with a rug she rolled out and performed her prayers on while the rest of us talked in another room, said was overbaked.

Muna wasn't only larger than life physically. Her exotic green eyes and glittery pinky ring hypnotized everyone around her into feeling better. Unfortunately, she couldn't entirely cheer up Ahmed. He had overstayed a visa decades ago. Couldn't fly to Egypt to meet her family because he would never get back into the United States if he left. The "M" word gave him cold feet. Her ultimatums triggered a series of suspenseful breakups. I was at her kitchen table, she was buzzing in another friend when a panic came over her as she told me her relationship with Ahmed was between us and asked me not to mention him.

I didn't have fast enough reflexes to keep up with their action packed romance. I was selling electronic resources to librarians for a company where I had to close sales to make a living wage. Had to keep dialing and emailing or get on planes and fly to the states where buyers were based because sometimes this was really the best way to get them to write checks. There was also my mother's older sister, Aunt M. 77 years old, recently wheelchair bound but all by herself. Life's unpredictability would have had a field day with her if I didn't cook, deliver and serve her meals. I would have found little relief in anything but sitting next to my son bathed in the rainbow of our TV if Muna's number didn't regularly light up my phone.

"You need help. Where does your aunt live? I can bring her food and clean for her sometimes inshallah." She'd offer, though I knew she didn't mean it.

"Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the lord my soul to keep and if I die before I wake..." I'd say at bedtime when I was a kid. I was supposed to just ask God to bless my parents, siblings and relatives but would include stray animals, victims of crimes I'd seen on the news, etcetera because I was the same way.

It started with a call to prayer that bent skyward like the most unusual flower prying itself loose from vines. Being African-American and raised Catholic had always been awkward. But it was at a point where everything old echoed. I didn't need the Goth architecture, handbags and matching shoes. Just a quiet frame I could share with others who believed in doing things the way you're supposed to that I found in the storefronts and renovated office spaces of New York where Muslims pray. I was given a heavy gold embossed Quran in one. In another, a Senegalese woman with tribally stained toe nails showed me how to ritually cleanse, as I ran wet fingers over my face, an innocent portrait of me in my first communion veil appearing in the sink water that gathered.

But years had passed since then and I was a fledgling convert only occasionally fasting the Ramadan Muna called out of the blue. We made plans to meet at a masjid over a Turkish restaurant in Midtown East. She was a heaving mass of warmth and good memories. It was right after work. We lined up with other women with our palms lifted in midair, then crossed them against our chests. We leaned forward with our hands on our knees like runners catching their breath. I was seated on the floor mat, staring just past my lap – we were done when, "Nothing has changed." Muna began as if she couldn't keep it inside another second. "He won't pick up the phone and speak to my parents. It's time to follow through. He earns very little. I would have to pay for almost everything if we got married, but..." She paused and for that moment, her eyes lost their usual glow.

My son's father had been a musician who had studied painting, had the vocabulary of an art critic and expected me to afford him all the comforts of a wife without any strings attached. Shoveling snow, hauling heavy bags of groceries and clothes back and forth from the laundromat all by myself, my fundamentalist interpretation

of feminism prevented me from realizing I was single. Born in 1960, I had come of age during the most liberal era in America. Casual arrangements with men were normal for women of my generation. I would have been acting if I had pretended to find Muna's relationship with Ahmed unheard of. She was thinking out loud. I was eavesdropping when the curtain that separated the men's and women's sections parted, and the imam entered with milk and a tray of food. A woman in a kaftan embroidered with a scribbly pattern helped herself first. Then, the imam left, and a tide of heavy voices briefly washed across the smooth gray matting where we began eating our first meal since dawn. Tearing a fig from my teeth, I recalled being lost in a mosque on 116th Street and mistakenly crossing the men's section without any of them even noticing I was there.

"How is Ousmane?" Muna asked.

"It doesn't matter." I said, stunned to hear his name. He was a man I never got to know, had only brought up once.

"Why not? Why not?" she teased pounding her fist on my leg.

"I need to feel like I'm taking a risk when I fall in love." I said. "He's too safe." She gave me the same clueless stare I probably gave her when she talked about Ahmed. A woman in a veil so long it hid her feet, sat between us. The three of us forming a semi-circle. It was late and I had a commute ahead of me. My bag was a history lesson. Plunging my hand in to make room for some dates wrapped in a napkin that I planned to eat during my bus ride home, I touched a vial of blood pressure pills, faded supermarket receipts, loose cough drops, even the spiral notebook I had used before I realized that all I wanted was another woman to share a heart to heart with from time to time, not Arabic lessons.





Princess of Jaipur, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 140cm, 2014
(Emergeast Gallery, Dubai)
BY ALI SHAWWA

ORPHANED

A Palestinian Girl

Her look is a knife
that can peel

away skin

and morning
will open

its sharp sun

reddening
the wide horizon

while the rest
of the world

stays eyeless
in Gaza

and the dead
sing

like
lemon trees.

DAVID RADAVIDCH

GAZA REDUX

This time invasion
may work.

Bombing, certainly.

We can't allow ourselves
to be victimized.

You can't complain
we shouldn't assassinate
your leaders.

We have declared you
terrorists.

We define you.
We can kill if we choose.

Don't blame us
for the consequences.

All blood is
not created equal.

DAVID RADAVIDCH

EGYPTIAN STRAND

Here
is the sun

that cuts away
all time

and leaves
life

clean
and brave.

A stark blue

sand white
as shadows

fanned
on open shore.

I sit
without trees

without
a body

water touching
geometry.

DAVID RADAVIDCH

INNARDS

*Lodeve,
France, 19/07/2014*

A turn of his freshly brewed face
peach tongue, sea eyes, snow teeth
I stare
I do not live here and
I do not read maps easily but tonight
they were setting up an Arab concert in the French southern heat
his braless plain French mother looks for a seat
they had invited a musician to honor sound
he brought his sad jazz from my Lebanon
-maybe his wars were hid in yet another hotel room-
they had invited me to speak
-words reek-
and I, I fled the music
I, who brought along no tears

I, who did not gift salt
when Gaza was bombed last week
then another week
weak shoulders concrete
all this knowledge oblique
chokes in these crippled sentences
and I smoke much tobacco in the deep south of France
I shut my mouth
I learn, too late, to drink coffee black

I ask many questions of the trees

*What sort of baggage allowance does one pay for a heavy heart?
How many kilos worth are these nightmares?
How did the plane land safely with all this sorrow?
To whom does it matter whether I speak?*

All here is flamboyant cheese
delicious pork, Pastis
all evergreen sun lightness
compliments glances embraces that tease,
interruptions, interpretations
*Are you Jordanian?
No, I'm Palestinian*

my home is
transliteration debris, invented mosaic
of rubble news-loops, piled to
circumnavigate hearts reeling
at death tolls surging
the names of too-small shrouds, corpses greying

tempting worms salivating
and no reprieve.

But here, here
everything deep red history
cobblestone and understanding
poetry lynched on the trees, in my
languages resplendent-*trinities*-
I discover the desire to cry in other tongues
I read long lines for Syria and
wise French elders gift me their
grimace, hand wrap me their fears. I say thank you often, and
also, please
please.

I learn that Marwan's poet *bluegreen* eyes from the Galilee
will always be ode to a fictive family
-will always waft in Yasmine-
and that Palestinian poets have the wildest ones
-eyes like wells-
I learn that I am a spell to many
-that lust is the bastard love child of language-
that anguish requires no translation
everyone is kind to a Palestinian poet hiding tears.

I tell Maya *-who carries Jerusalem-* that
her cathedral-chanted poem about her ignorance of revolutions
has me caged in that French garden, stomach
the weight of lavender,
feet rooted in her words Arabic
heavy as the stoop of willows weep
forever bent, back cracking
Maya with her waterfall of
mourning and her
her unintentional Palestinian joy unsheathed,
her past, a cauldron bubbling- *her own children constantly painted
into hands of unease-*
Maya, with her laughter bucking
riding upwards to ward off the war in our teeth
whimpering, stop please stop
my children stand in the killing- *spines cracked-*
please-

Is the color purple a good balm for the childless heart?
The trees are simply mute trees.

I pray to the lavender
and in my old home,
they upload beheadings.
Our women pack pockets with fear,
ask if the weight of their world can be measured in lavender

as his freshly brewed feet jolt towards me
t-shirt boldly reads
HAPPINESS JOY CHEER SMILES
slogans for a different time, a different woman
another peace.

Earlier, my sister had whispered- *she who rises the moon in her face,
and listens to me in other continents
body whole, eyes serene
away from the blood letting-* she says, maybe
I should not tell you of what I read
maybe I should not, she repeats.

I gave her a look...
what could be worse, it asks
what could be new, it pleads.

A man in Gaza looks for the body parts of his two-year old son, collects
them in blown up bits off the street
in his feet, Palestinian heat-

-see, maybe I should not have told you, she thinks-
my lungs flung from chest, beaten, beat.

Stomp them, a stampede in the cathedral, black
they pop like poison candy, blood
blue and purple, here and there an occasional green
no one sees the freshly dug cavity, and
no one, no one
hears how I tumble-think an abyss, how
distance tricks,
how all geography lies,
how I stare at the perfect t-shirt poster child whose joy
leaps and leaps
while the crippled man in Gaza stumbles nowhere,
in his hand a cheap plastic bag filled son's ventricles
filled bits of hair, maybe
chips of baby teeth
he will forever stumble nowhere, he will forever seek.

I learn too late
- I, with no child to keep-
I learn too late to drink coffee black

I still smoke too many cigarettes in the South of France
for what will kill you, these years?

and nothing anymore
nothing
ever speaks.

HIND SHOUFANI

TIMELESS GROUNDS

Atop the Gulf of Aqaba on a stone-hot morning, the borderline hides in sandy mud between hillocks and chain links. A Syrian Serin chirps, flits, and flutters through fig branches, of course on the Jordanian side. He is a he (brighter plumage), but is he bright enough to sense the conflict? Ghosting through the shimmer in the air, an Israeli Jeep languidly drives the beach, its Uzi-toting teenaged soldiers paying no attention to the foreign birders, one crab-stepping west toward the Israeli side, the other striding forward, hard on the fence, mud slurping as her shoes lift, step, and repeat.

The Green Line glows jagged during the Intifada, fortunately far from the concrete-block schoolhouse on a gravel road at the edge of East Jerusalem. Children's laughter at the slapstick touring performance crackles off the walls and cement floor, stirring up dust that tastes of the desert and leaves a fine residue on the glass of sweet mint tea that the visitor has carried from the principal's office.

At the outdoor café just behind the Damascus Gate, the sweet and acrid Arab coffee is less liquid than solid. At the bottom of the cup is coffee sludge, its bitterness not angry but vibrant as it rolls down the throat. The drink leaves a damp powder on the tongue, earthy and eternal.

KIM PETER KOVAC

BLUE RHINO

Afternoon in Amman, April 2004, and the normally active and friendly streets soon empty of most civilians as soldiers wearing sunglasses, machine guns and the dark blue camouflage uniforms of the security forces move quickly into place, lurking at what seems to be every intersection and rooftop. A Palestinian leader has been assassinated in the West Bank, and a few hundred kilometers east, Iraq has gone to hell in a date-palm hand-basket with new waves of extreme violence.

The next morning, it's calm atop Mount Nebo and the view west is much as Moses had: the River Jordan, Jericho, and Jerusalem. The African visitor softly reveals that as a young Christian from a tiny Zambian village, he never imagined seeing the holy land. His smooth skin is so dark it's almost blue, the color of the mythic rhino charging down the mountain that would inhabit the poem he's already composing in his head.

KIM PETER KOVAC

NEWSWORTHY

I.
before you can see
we'll need to adjust the lens
we find that natural light can be
unforgiving,
all those lines and jagged edges
glaring,
beads of sweat shimmering on the brow
scarlet of a fresh wound
unfurling across a body
might overwhelm
we'll need to calibrate

before you react
before you assign any labels to what you see
(like injustice)
before you identify any emotions stirring in you
(like anger or shame)
we'll need to fine-tune
It's so complicated, this cycle
what appears so obvious
cannot be named
to maximize clarity
find a signature for the moment
we'll need to select an image
layer the right sounds on top of it
we assemble a collage of now
so you can understand what's at stake
so you can understand what you think you are seeing
the information that is
being sent from your eyeballs to your brain
is just raw data
and must be processed for you

This is called *Context*.

II.

see for example the brown-skinned boy
slender limbs running across the street
a rock in his hand
focus on the rock
if you feel a bit unsettled by the chaos unfolding on his street
the smoke billowing from fires all around him
the tank pouring out armed soldiers
at the vanishing point where he aims
steady yourself with the thought
of the damage that the rock could conceivably do
and here it would be illuminating to note
that we have soldiers too
our boys sent across the globe
and don't we love our boys?
and don't we want them to come home safe?
see? A tank isn't necessarily a bad thing a semi-automatic
weapon aimed at a child maybe isn't
what it appears to be
now hold these feelings in front of your eyes
as you look at that brown boy with the rock in his hand

This is called *Nuance*.

III.

now it gets trickier
you'll need to remain vigilant
now that rock-throwing boy
wounds still fresh on his face
eyes half open to the sky
re-appears in the foreground swaddled in a flag piled onto a stretcher
and beneath him a teeming sea of people
swells in what was the street they are lifting what's left of him overhead
let us now turn up the volume for you
let's pan out resist the urge to look too long at
any one face
here a wide camera angle will do best

what are all these people saying?

focus on the totality of the sounds
why aren't they softer? shouldn't sorrow
be soft modest relatable?

focus on the *Allahu akbar*
who else says that? what have you learned to feel about those words?

This is called *Critical Thinking*.

IV.

if you find yourself distracted
caught by the anguish on the mother's
face in the crowd
focus instead on her veil
notice how many women in the crowd are veiled
how do you feel about that?

let the question fall slowly
between you and the mother
whose son's limbs have been
collected for burial
if you find your stomach
tightening at the sight of her pain
if you find yourself measuring
the miniscule space her son's
corpse takes up on the stretcher
if your eyes find others in the crowd
focus
focus again on the sound that floats up
the words you don't speak
you do not know these people

why are they so angry?

tune into how their grief is loud
and disarrayed and confusing
and threatens to make you feel bad
stay with these feelings
now hold these feelings in front of your eyes
to filter the images you are seeing.

This is called *Balance*.

LENA K TUFFAHA

BLUE MORNING MUSIC

In the coffee house
proudly independent serving
free-trade shade-grown organic
coffee, offered in chipped
ceramic mugs as badges of honor—
we are not tree-killers here,
no land-fillers here, no polluters.
In this coffee house
a slender man plays piano.

Icons are everywhere,
some of them plastic
but several carved from stone,
or etched in wood.
The gods of all the believers
convene

a peace conference
here at the counter.
Borders are for the spiritually-obtuse,
history is for the imaginatively-inhibited,
they seem to say.

Incense burns demurely in the corner
and crystals glisten bright-eyed
in the window reaching out for the soft light of September.

The sky is awash in the false comfort of blue,
pure as a blank page.
For now the clouds are only memories
or the distant threat of the fall.

The slender man coaxes such
tender notes from the keys.
They bend languorously
beneath paper lamp shades.
The notes are familiar in the way
the face of a first childhood love might be,
dappled dream-like snapshot of a boy
on the edge of a schoolyard,
that person vanished forever
transformed by time
a receding hairline and
life's disappointments
into someone you would have
dreaded in childhood
or found insufferably boring.

The music pools in the corners,
casts a net over the patrons of the coffee house,
who sip in practiced silence on this
blue September morning, these
motions just habits of adulthood.

The tears are implicit
kept at bay by the
weight of the days ahead.

Everyone heard the president's speech
last night, everyone knows
or does not care to know
what comes next.

The music crescendos to searing,
its delicate trace
on the rim of heartbreak
is fire on the spine,
its taciturn September blue
too large for this little coffee house
with its inexplicably hopeful icons
and well-intentioned patrons
and ardent rainbow prayers.

What happens
in the inevitable moments
ahead of us
resonating in the hollow of every note,
what happens when the slender man
is done with the piano?
What happens when the keys fall silent
and the music stops?

LENA K TUFFAHA



Sufi Sama, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 100cm, 2014 (Emergeast Gallery, Dubai)
BY ALI SHAWWA

EAST-WEST-EAST

Refined ceramic bowls, vases, and decorative plates of all sizes trace a history of the Middle Ages that spans the Mongolian invasion of Iran

and wars raging throughout those centuries, yet the Mamelukes in Syria and Cairo sponsored exquisite tiled mosques, and Anatolia commissioned

beautifully crafted monuments. What remains from surges of populations on the move and changes of Caliphs are ceramic plates where birds

fly in place and religions are juxtaposed
on tiles; the six pointed star of David
and the eight pointed star
with a lotus flower, tiles of Mary and Joseph

created during the Ottoman Empire,
while multicolored tiles with inscriptions
were fashioned for the entrance
of Hagia Sophia. These precious works

were fired and glazed with the care
in which illuminated manuscripts
were crafted, and traveled quietly
without us realizing that cultures

have no borders, that ceramicists
from Venice and France came to study
Islamic art with its intricacy
and the fluency of pulsing flowers,

branches, radiating deep purples,
greens, yellows and blues,
drawing us in and leaving
behind centuries of discord.

MARGUERITE G. BOUVARD

Heads Without Rests

On a night like this where trees grab at your unsolicited junk mail
and brush the petals off your groundcover like silvery hairs

Where children's trikes ride on their own into a scuffed fence
and spiders cling to the entrails of a marsh crane fly

On a night like this, in Palestine, the trees would be the arms of men
panning for pencils and keyboards, dishes and doors

When you set for your car in the sun's shrewd stripes, there'll be coins
printed in soil and two holes where you head weighs

And shifts and waits

PRISCILLA WASHINGTON

A BRIDE FOR TWO CAMELS

Jennifer Nelson

Three days into our trip to Morocco, my daughter Emily begs to go home. She stops in an alleyway in Fez's medina, refusing to follow our tour.

"Mom, I don't like it here," says Emily, 18. "It smells. I want to go home."

I glance at Emily's flushed face, pearls of sweat trickling down her cheeks. "But, we just arrived. What's wrong?"

"It's not fun," she says.

All she's thinking about is her discomfort in her too-tight espadrille wedges and a too-long dress that drags. She hates the odors from stalls selling camel meat, spices and fish. She's also turned off by street children urging her to buy cheap wallets and jewelry.

"It's not that bad," I say, wishing she'd stop whining.

"I'm hot and tired," she says. "This isn't a good vacation."

I explain that I like Morocco, where I'd lived as a child. She should see how growing up abroad shaped me into a person with a world perspective. Certainly, she likes the five-star hotels and our fellow travelers. To ease her discomfort, I offer her my shoes.

She looks at my broken-in sandals. "Those aren't going to help."

It's useless arguing with a disgruntled teenager. Obviously, she can't fly home. Only a medical emergency will warrant leaving early.

"Let's just go a bit farther," I say. "Khalid will have a place for us to rest. He's promised to take us to a leather shop. Maybe there will be a surprise there for us."

She trudges along sullenly, silent, a few paces ahead of me. We catch up with the group in a *medersa*. She doesn't want to hear about the Islamic school's fancy tile work or stained glass windows. History lessons are boring. *Couldn't our guide entertain us with tales of intrigue and romance, not facts about prayer halls?*

Emily usually loves being photographed, so I ask a fellow traveler to take pictures of us near a dry fountain. She smiles as I put my arms around her. The camera clicks, and she moves away from me. "Morocco isn't that bad," I say. "We can buy something at the leather store." She returns to her glum state. *Can't she lighten up so she won't ruin my trip?*

Our next stop is the air-conditioned leather store. Khalid approaches us. "Is everything okay with you, Emily?"

She says nothing. "She's finding the excursion tiring," I answer.

"It's culture shock," says Khalid. "Many visitors experience it. It's too different from what you are used to. It's too much in a day."

Trust Khalid to know what to say.

"If you like, I can arrange for my assistant to take her back to the hotel," he says. "He'll find her a cab. She can rest there."

"You can cool off in the pool," I suggest.

But Emily refuses to leave the group. She's afraid they'll gossip about her dislike of Fez's medina.

We rest on soft cushions. I don't tell her to look out the window where she can see how the leather is cured. The smells will revolt her. Instead, I point out colored slippers tucked in shelves behind us. She doesn't even look at the slippers. I let her be.

A young, slim Berber approaches her, grinning broadly. *What does he want from my Emily?*

"You have beautiful face," he says. "You marry me. I give a camel for you."

At first, Emily is taken aback, an expression of disbelief on her face. *This never happens in America.* Another better looking man joins the conversation. "I will take her for two camels," he says.

Emily relaxes, as if this is a comedy. Then she giggles. "Mom, they both want to marry me."

"You're very cute. No wonder they want you."

"They're fighting over me."

"But I won't give you away for even a hundred camels,"

"Oh, mom."

The spell of despair is broken. Emily can't wait to brag to her brothers about how two Moroccans wanted to marry her. They'll be surprised as if Emily isn't attractive enough for suitors. I'm just glad that she's back to her cheerful self. Finally, she sees Morocco's hidden charms, the heat no longer oppressive, the smells now fragrant, and the trip saved by the magic of two men.



Lost to the news - acrylic on canvas - 100x100 cm
by NOUF SEMARI

Cairo, January 2014

A pigeon coos on Taha Hussein Street.
It is Coptic Christmas Day, and I am missing
the polar vortex back home.

Satellite dishes worship a hidden sungod on every roof.
Where I stand, on my friend's balcony,
a child calls out for their mother. Below, in the courtyard,
the trees in Zamelek are green and
abundant. They line the streets and alleyways,
abandoned shopping plazas. The leaves on each
tree are ornaments from a celebration years ago,
long forgotten and now left to collect dust.

The dust inhabits all things
except the stars at night,
backlit and dimming by the haze.

It rained in Cairo today.
I awoke in the middle of the night—
the call to prayer from a distance lulls me
to sleep in the day just as rides home from
grade school in my father's Jeep did.
Quranic messages faced me in the passenger seat,
stickered on the glove compartment, a holographic glitter.
I am asleep and awake at inopportune times.

There were clashes in Nasr City yesterday.
Everyone blames bad weather in Cairo, even Morsi.
As grey crows fly, a child barks.

SHAHEEN QURESHI

Treasures

When the boy was 15, they left Habiba, the mother of his father.

They piled their favorite books in front of her
and the treasures they couldn't take and their linens and candles. With a shrug of their shoulders
they hid gifts in her closets

under her table by her back door.

They grasped their new worth in a suitcase and boarded a plane.

They traveled through clouds
and arrived in a place with no fruit market or river no goats at the door.

They swore they had forgotten, would forget.

His mother made *kitchri* with butter and he practiced his English

a young man with hair dark as walnut and *zaatar*.

New words marched in his mouth without lament without defense new words he collected under
the new table by the back door.

LAUREN CAMP



A Way with Words

My earliest memory is of conversation,
my mother standing by the gate and talking
to a neighbor. I was astonished
by its give and take, wondered how
one went about it. I was maybe
two years old, the wrought-iron gate
higher than my head. I looked through
its bars at our neighbour's little girl and
said something. She was evidently as enveloped
in this great happening as I and
gave me back a tiny tumble of words.
And so we pitched and caught
small handfuls of what we knew
without much sense or continuity
until we quickly ran out of things to say
and stood defeated, our mothers still
going strong. I remember a wave
of such disappointment and then a high regard
for my mother who had a bucketful of words
and could tip them out all day.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Ruins at Cyrrus

Lament for Syria

Take me to the ruins at Cyrrhus
where Linda drove over the lintel
of the Roman house deep in debris,
covered by puddles she saw too late,
its door closed to us forever.

Take me to the coins
ancient or recently manufactured
and buried to grow patina
for the ragamuffins to hawk.

They must be born from the stones
of every ruined garrison village.

Take me to St. Simeon
where the benighted saint
perched on a pillar to prove
his devotion to God.

Take me to love and not love,
those twins of the heart,
right ventricle, left ventricle,
same blood pulsing through both.

Take me to the Lost Arc of the Covenant,
to the old world and the new, which is no better.

Take me to the sunsets of sorrow,
tears of grapes in the arbor,
tears of water in the old Middle Sea,
to war and revenge, that rotten apple,
and the white sheep of forgiveness.

Take me out of myself
Take me to your garden at Latakia
where we will sit at the table
that was once the acanthus leaf capital
of the broken pillar still lying there,
and we will eat flat bread, yogurt, and olives
and watch the sea coming in steady
and peaceful.

ANN STRUTHERS

Kaboos
"a growing nightmare"
mixed media
40x120 cm
by NOUF SEMARI



Artists' /Writers' bios:

HAITHAM AL SARRAF is the author of *Invasion Occupation Awakening*. He holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in English literature and he has been teaching English at Kuwait University since 1997. Haitham was the founder and editor of the Kuwait University literary magazine, *Perceptions*, and the online literary magazine, *Kaleidoscope*. His creative work, which is part of the novel he is now working on, has been featured in the *Ofi press Magazine*.

CHAUN BALLARD was raised in California. For the past four years, he and his wife lived and taught in the Middle East. He spent two years in the West Bank and two years in the Gulf. He is an MFA student with the University of Alaska Anchorage.

DEXTER DEADWRITER BETANTOS works with both traditional and digital art. His love for the arts began at a young age, as an illustrator inspired by comic books. He later on explored watercolor, charcoal, and acrylic painting in high school. In college he took up Architecture, and kept a sketchbook with him at all times. Aside from painting, he also moonlights as an RJ for an online Filipino FM radio. He also writes and looks forward to publishing his first book of poetry. His influences range from visual, literary, monistic spiritual views.

SUSAN P. BLEVINS was born in England, lived twenty-six years in Italy, and has travelled extensively in the Mediterranean region. Her love of the Middle East is visceral and inexplicable, but she was aware of it from the first moment she set foot in Egypt in 1972 on her honeymoon. It was love at first sight for her, and this love has only grown. She longs to return to the area to live there.

MARGUERITE G. BOUVARD is the author of *The Invisible Wounds of War: Coming Home from Iraq and Afghanistan* (July 2012) and 8 books of poetry and 12 non-fiction books on human rights, politics and psychology.

EC BUCK lived in the Middle East for almost nine years. She has a husband, three children, a black belt in Karate, and a BA in Middle Eastern Studies.

LAUREN CAMP is the author of two collections, most recently *The Dailiness*, winner of the National Federation of Press Women 2014 Poetry Book Prize and a World Literature Today "Editor's Pick." Her third book of poems, *One Hundred Hungers*, was selected by David Wojahn for the Dorset Prize, and is forthcoming from Tupelo Press. The book is a work of imagination, research and myth about her father's childhood in Baghdad, and her interaction with the rituals and language of his culture. Lauren hosts "Audio Saucepan," a global music/poetry program on Santa Fe Public Radio. Her website: www.laurencamp.com

SHEBANA COELHO is a writer, filmmaker and facilitator of creativity workshops. She received a CEC Arts Link Project award to collaborate with Ashtar Theater in Ramallah for the multimedia project Land Out Loud. She was born in India and lives in New Mexico. Her website is shebanacoelho.com

FRANK DULLAGHAN lives in Dubai. He holds an MA with Distinction in Writing from the University of South Wales. Whilst in the UK he co-founded the *Essex Poetry Festival* and edited *Seam Poetry Magazine*. Frank has three poetry collections and two haiku collections to his name. He is a poetry judge for the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature and regularly reads with the *Poeticians* and *Punch* spoken word collectives. A number of his short scripts and plays have been performed or screened. He is currently working on a number of writing projects, including a short documentary film script, a feature length screenplay and a novel. He is a regular book reviewer for the Dubai Eye *Talking of Books* radio programme.

HAITHAM MEDHAT EL ATTAR majored in advertising and graphic design in Egypt, and has been living in Dubai since his graduation, in 2000. Photography became his passion in the last six years, shooting landscapes, beaches and sunsets; but he is especially drawn to the desert, telling a story through each shot.

HEDY HABRA Hedy Habra is the author of a poetry collection, *Tea in Heliopolis*, winner of the 2014 USA Best Book Awards and finalist for the International Poetry Book Award; a story collection, *Flying Carpets*, winner of the 2013 Arab American National Book Award's Honorable Mention and finalist for the 2014 USA Best Book Awards and the Eric Hoffer Book Award. She is a recipient of the Nazim Hikmet Poetry Award. Her multilingual work has appeared in more than forty journals and fifteen anthologies, including *Connotation Press*, *Poetic Diversity*, *Verse Daily*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Nimrod*, *New York Quarterly*, *Levure Littéraire*, *Drunken Boat*, *Diode*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Cider Press Review* and *Poet Lore*. Her new collection of poetry, *Under Brushstrokes*, is forthcoming from Press 53. Her website is HedyHabra.com

ART HEIFETZ teaches ESL to Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Richmond, Virginia. He taught English for four years in Tunisia and Iran. These poems are about Tunisia, where he met his first wife. He has had 125 poems published in 11 countries. See polishedbrasspoems.com

ULA JABER HIGGINS is a Lebanese/Polish American currently living in the United States. She spent most of her childhood in the Middle East. She returned to the United States to attend the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she graduated with a degree in Fine Arts. She is working on a novel based on stories of her Lebanese ancestors. Through her writing and art she tries to construct bridges between her father's culture and religion and her mother's, between living in the Middle East and in the US, between the life she may have been expected to live and the one she is living. *Ya Albi* is her first published piece.

CATHERINE GONICK's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *Pivot*, *Crack the Spine*, *Ginosko*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Word Riot*, *Soul-Lit*, *Forge* and *Jet Fuel Review*. She attended the University of California, Berkeley, as an undergraduate, where she was awarded the Ina Coolbrith Memorial Prize for Poetry, and completed an MA in creative writing at the City University of New York. She is the author of produced plays and was finalist in the National Ten-Minute Play Contest with the Actors Theatre of Louisville. As part of a startup company that turns organic waste into energy through green technology, she divides her time between New York and California.

JENNIFER JAZZ is a New York memoirist. Her writing has recently appeared in *Warscapes*, *Sensitive Skin*, and *Afropunk*. Follow her serial comic "Offline" at jenniferjazz.com

JENNIFER ZAYNAB MACCANI is a Syrian-American freelance writer and biomedical research scientist living in the greater Hershey, Pennsylvania area. Her short story, "The Believer," was recently published in the *Canton Writes 2014 Anthology*.

JENNIFER NELSON has an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts (2012). French high school teacher since 2005. Former journalist. Daughter of a former diplomat. Lived in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia. Studied Arabic in Egypt and Tunisia.

KIM PETER KOVAC works nationally and internationally in theater for young audiences with an emphasis on new play development and networking. He tells stories on stages as producer of new plays, and tells stories in writing with lineated poems, prose poems, creative non-fiction, flash fiction, haiku, microfiction, and three-line poems, with work appearing in print and on-line in journals including *Elsewhere*, *Frogpond*, *Mudlark*, *Glint*, and *Crunchable*. He is fond of avant-garde jazz, murder mysteries, contemporary poetry, and travel, and lives in Alexandria, VA, with his bride, two Maine Coon cats, and a Tibetan Terrier named Finn. www.kimpeterkovac.tumblr.com

PHILIP METRES is the author and translator of a number of books and chapbooks, including *Sand Opera* (2015), *A Concordance of Leaves* (2013), *abu ghraib arias* (2011), and *To See the Earth* (2008). His work has garnered two NEA fellowships, the Watson Fellowship, five Ohio Arts Council Grants, the Beatrice Hawley Award, two Arab American Book Awards, the Creative Workforce Fellowship, the Cleveland Arts Prize and the PEN/Heim Translation Fund grant. He is professor of English at John Carroll University in Cleveland. <http://www.philipmetres.com>

DAVID RADAVICH's recent poetry collections are *America Bound: An Epic for Our Time* (2007), *Canonicals: Love's Hours* (2009), and *Middle-East Mezze* (2011). His plays have been performed across the U.S., including six off-Off-Broadway, and in Europe. His step-daughter is half Palestinian, and his son-in-law is Moroccan. His newest book is *The Countries We Live* (2014). www.davidradavich.org

ZVEZDANA RASHKOVICH is an American writer, columnist and interpreter born in the former Yugoslavia and raised in the Sudan. Her essays, articles, poetry and short stories can be found in literary journals and anthologies in multiple countries.

NOUF SEMARI is a Saudi artist who grew up and studied in the East province of Saudi Arabia. She graduated from KFU Marketing and business and is a self-taught artist who learned by practicing, researching and being open to learning by following colors and ideas wherever they exist. She exhibited in Khobar, Jeddah, Riyadh, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and participated in the Beirut art fair. She also writes a column about art in Hayat Newspaper.

ALI SHAWWA is a Palestinian-Kuwaiti artist who's lived in the Middle East, Europe and the US. Using a range of mediums from pencil to acrylic, Ali relates his experiences, memories, culture, and emotions through his artwork. His art is one of his most cherished creative outlets and after years spent observing, experimenting and evolving, Ali has developed his own unique style that led to a series of widely successful paintings. His latest series, *CEiconic*, focuses mainly on pop culture. With a degree in Environmental Design, he is currently the creative director for a niche book publishing company, called Rimal Publications. Ali's artwork has been acquired internationally by art enthusiasts in sixteen different cities. He lives and works in Dubai.

Born in Lebanon and raised in Amman, Beirut and Damascus, **HIND SHOUFANI** is a Palestinian published writer, editor and filmmaker with an M.F.A. from the Tisch School for Arts, in New York. She currently resides between Dubai and Beirut. Her feature documentary *Trip Along Exodus*, an intimate family journey with her father Dr. Elias Shoufani, about the secular PLO Fateh factions and the failure of the leftist Palestinian revolution, premiered in the Dubai International Film Festival in 2014. In 2007, she founded the poetry collective, Poeticians, a growing poetry collective holding monthly readings between Dubai and Beirut.

ANN STRUTHERS' poems have appeared in numerous journals including *The American Scholar*, *Poetry International*, *The North American Review*, *The Iowa Review*, and others. Ann has two collections and three chapbooks.

LENA K. TUFFAHA is a poet and translator. Most recently, she translated the screenplay for the multi-award winning film *When I Saw You* written and directed by Annemarie Jacir. The film was Palestine's submission to the Academy Awards for 2012. She is currently translating a collection of poems by Iraqi Kurdish poet Faiza Sultan. The poems included in *Sukoon* are from her forthcoming collection, *Water & Salt*. Several poems from the collections have been published in and online and print journals in the US, the UK and Turkey, including *Human*, *the Lake for Poetry*, *The Monarch Review*, *Magnolia* and *Vox Populisphere*. In 2014, her poem "Immigrant" was nominated for a Pushcart prize. Her poem, "Running Orders" will appear in the forthcoming *Letters to Palestine* and anthology edited by Vijay Prashad and published by Verso in February, 2015.

SHAHEEN QURESHI graduated from Bard College in 2012 with a BA in Written Arts and Middle Eastern studies. Her undergraduate thesis was a collection of poems exploring language, religion, and her multicultural heritage. Presently, she is managing editor of *Tadween Publishing*. She lives in Washington, DC.

AZIZA QUZEIZ is a budding ethnic and gender studies scholar, poet/writer, jewelry-maker, mango-eater, and earth-shaker who hails from the southern U.S. and Southwest Asian/North African fusions. Her main focus is trying to thrive and survive in a hyper-militarized white supremacist heteropatriarchal imperialist capitalist system without losing the things and people that are dear to her. She values sister-friend-love, deep commitments to caring for marginalized and vulnerable people, justice, and celestial stuff like sunsets and summertime. She spends most days imagining better and more vibrant futures and theorizing on the collective experiences and aesthetics that emerge from navigating multiple worlds simultaneously.

PRISCILLA WASHINGTON is a Palestinian-American poet, mother and freelance editor. She holds a M.A. in Arab Studies from Georgetown University and a B.A. in Elementary Education from Wheaton College. Her work has previously appeared in *Rosebud Magazine*, *The Baltimore Review* and *Mizna*. She lives in San Francisco and can be found most days chasing her children through sand and forest.

GINA WILLIAMS is a writer and artist in Portland, Oregon, USA. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming most recently in *Carve*, *The Sun*, *Fugue*, *Palooka*, *Great Weather for Media*, *Black Box Gallery*, *theNewerYork*, and *Gallery 360*, among others.

ASHTAR THEATRE performers and students created these pieces in creativity workshops led by Shebana Coelho for Land Out Loud, which excavates creative expressions about land in different mediums. The workshops took place in Ramallah in July 2014. Land Out Loud: Palestine is made possible in part with funds from CEC ArtsLink.
www.landoutloud.com

ASHTAR Theatre is a non-profit NGO, founded in 1991 in Jerusalem, with a scope of work that covers the West Bank and Gaza Strip. ASHTAR looks at theatre as a tool to free our society, ignite awareness, create internal individual freedom, and invest in culture as a generator for social change and political liberation. For more information, visit www.ashtar-theatre.org

IMAN AOUN is an award-winning actress, producer and co-founder and Artistic Director of ASHTAR Theatre, Ramallah, Palestine. She is also an internationally known theatre trainer specializing in Theatre of the Oppressed, and creator/producer of numerous international projects including 2010's "The Gaza Mono-Logues," a global project to raise the voices of youth in Gaza. www.ashtar-theatre.org www.thegazamonologues.com

RANA BURQAN is an actress and a drama trainer at ASHTAR theater. She graduated from ASHTAR theatre's drama training program in 2011 and recently graduated with a BA in Journalism and a minor in sociology from Birzeit University.

SONIA KHADER is a Palestinian poet and writer. Her books include *لشموس خبأتها* . For Suns that I hide and *معطرة امضي اليه*: perfumed I went to him. She has served on the board of Ashtar Theatre and was part of the organizational team for their 2007 Theatre of the Oppressed festival.

LAMIS SHALALDEH is the Projects' Coordinator at ASHTAR Theatre. She finished her BA from Birzeit University-Palestine with a degree in English Literature/ Minor Translation. She co-coordinated the second ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival (ATiYF) and is currently coordinating their 2015 Theatre of The Oppressed Festival.

BAYAN SHBIB is Palestinian director, theatre and television actress, and since 2006, a drama trainer at ASHTAR Theatre. She won the best actress prize at the 2006 Cairo International Experimental Theatre Festival. She is currently a PHD candidate in Fredrich Schiller University in Germany studying political theatre in Palestine.

REWA ZEINATI is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Sukoon* magazine, and the author of the creative non-fiction book, *Nietzsche's Camel Must Die: An Invitation to Say 'No'* (xanadu*, 2013), as well as the poetry chapbook, *Bullets & Orchids* (Corrupt Press, 2013). She studied English Literature at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, where she is originally from, and earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, USA (where she is not originally from.) Several of her poems, essays and translations have been published in various literary journals and anthologies based in the USA, UK, levant region and online. She lives and works between Beirut and Dubai.



