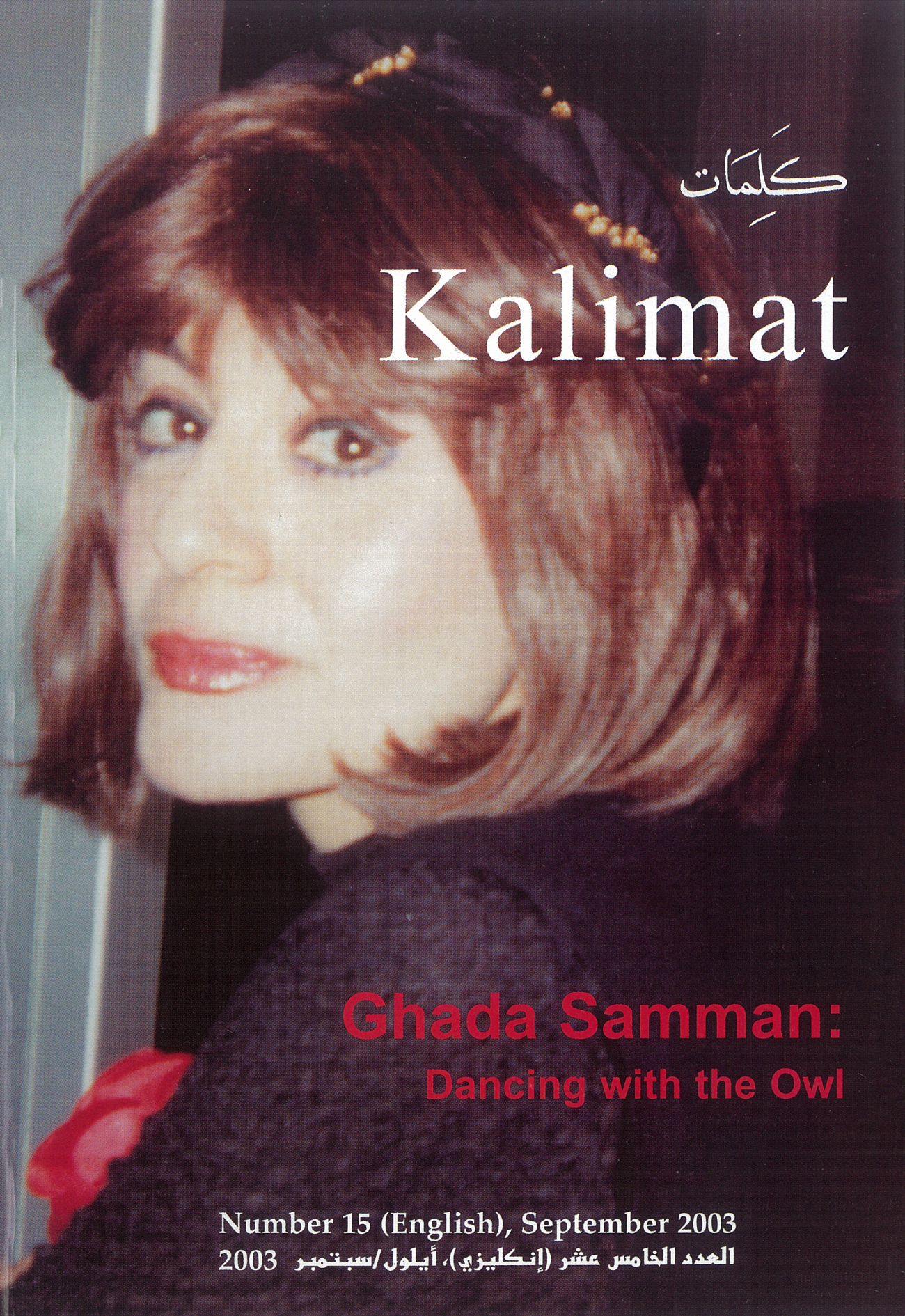

كلمات

Kalimat

Ghada Samman:
Dancing with the Owl

Number 15 (English), September 2003
العدد الخامس عشر (إنكليزي)، أيلول/سبتمبر 2003

كلمات

Kalimat

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Better and Better

Thank you for *Kalimat 13*. It may sound repetitious, for you must have heard it many times already, but let me say it once more: unbelievably, it gets better and better each time. Your translation of The Citadel has revealed to me one of the most beautiful poems I've ever read and the story on A.M.Younes, with translated extracts of his work, is simply fascinating. These days, when extremism, distrust, fear and violence seem to have taken hold of the world, Kalimat offers not only a bridge, but a window that allows us to see through the eyes of "the other", thereby making us aware of the humanity that binds us all. Also, thanks to *Kalimat* I have discovered the pleasures of reading Arabic literature, the beauty of its poetry and richness of its prose.

Marisa Cano, Writer & Translator, Sydney.

A Bright Bunch

Thank you for *Kalimat 13*. I have read most of it, despite that nowadays one spends most of the time glued to television, and you can imagine my feelings about the ugliness of the war in Iraq- a situation that reminds me of Penelope and her suitors forcing themselves on her. The fertile, rich land of Iraq has always been the cherished dreams of many people throughout history. Why should this country suffer for the richness of its land?

Yet, I find a kind of an oasis in reading *Kalimat*. Number 13 is really excellent. I read with interest your account of your visit to Jableh and your meeting with Dr. M. A. Younes. You made me feel as if I were joining you in an unexpected adventure. Thank you for introducing Dr. Younes to us. His writings about *The One Thousand and One Nights* are indeed an eye-opener. I have already informed a friend working on a Ph.D. about these valuable articles.

"Friday & Sunday" is full of colour and flavour, like everything you tackle. "In Scarlet Letters" throws light on the change of moral values in modern societies and the intricacy of social relations in all aspects of life. "The Long Journey" is a highly

sensitive account of the life and pleasures of children in a mining town which I have never been to.

As for poetry, the bunch of poems is brighter in this issue: no faded flowers. "Questions for an Indian pen Friend" is deeply moving. "The Unwanted" is lifting to a higher degree of awareness. Tala Fakhoury's poems are exquisite. Abou Afash's poem, "The Citadel", is perhaps his most popular. He himself can be described as a citadel of modern Syrian poetry. I read with great interest and seriousness your translation of this poem, and others, in order to enjoy them and gain more knowledge at the same time.

I notice the prominence of "nature" in the writings of Australian poets. This is an element that is becoming rarer in modern Arabic poetry. Perhaps when our life is full of peace again, we will be able to revisit and relish nature. I really hope so.

There is a lot to tell about *Kalimat 13*. Your choices, translations and presentations are indeed glorious. Thank you for all what you are doing for writers and literature. I feel proud to have my poetry appear on the pages of *Kalimat*.

I end by a heart-felt hope for peace to prevail on earth.

6th April 2003

Daad Taweel-Kanawati, Writer,Poet & Critic, Homs, Syria.

The Pleasure is Ours

We are always glad to receive feedback such as the one echoed by Mrs. Cano and Mrs. Kanawati above. Indeed they are a "bright bunch" all those writers, artists, advisers, sponsors and many more who have been promoting *Kalimat*.

The present issue carries increased number of translations of Arabic short stories, thanks to writers such as Dr. Ali Azeriah who provides us with variety and quality. We are particularly privileged that his selection focuses on Arab women writers, because we believe that there is a wealth of energy and mountains of creativity among many women in the Arab world.

We are very honoured, an It gives us particular pleasure that Mrs. Ghada Samman, one of the leading Arab writers and perhaps the greatest woman writer in the history of Syria, features in our Landmark article in the present issue.

If this is the shortest "Snowflakes" so far, the reason is simply that this issue is full. This is a source of satisfaction to us as *Kalimat*'s fourth year approaches its end. Until we meet the readers of the English issue again, we would like to share the wishes of Mrs. Kanawati above, for a more peaceful world.

The Editor

BARBARA FERN

Song of the Bulbul

Little brown minstrel with bright red cheeks,
Sing your song to the rhythm of the spade.
Scrape-and-fall, scrape-and-fall, drop the heavy clods.
Marvel at the melon-bed that Yussif has made!

'Kin-ka-jou! Kin-ka-jou!' calls the father bird
To mother bird, as she pecks a grape.
'Beware! That little boy is aiming his sling-shot!
Fly from the garden, and make your escape!'

Says Um Cassim, as she strokes her son's bright hair,
While beside the vine, the boy pulls out a weed.
'Marvel at this sweet song-bird that Allah has made,
For such great beauty soothes the sad heart's need.'

Together, they watch the birds feeding their four chicks
Inside a tiny nest high in a tree.
The family of people, and the family of birds
Live side-by-side in Nature's harmony.

Now the peace is shattered - battle is at hand!
War-planes bomb the houses all around.
Cassim's house now lies in rubble! All the trees lie flat:
Cassim calls his mother: She cannot be found.

The rubble-heaps are silent, except for wailing cries
Of folk who mourn for people whom they love.
Not a tree stands waiting for flying, feathered tenants.
Where are the grape-vines? Where the orange-grove?

The Spring sunshine falls on rubble that was walls.
The rain falls on earth, once a garden.
Will the village rise again? Will it be reborn?
Without hope or justice, the people's hearts will harden.

Come back, little bulbul, then we'll know that war is over!
The villagers once more may till the soil
Which their ancestors tended, far back in history.
Bulbul, share your music. Help to calm the wild turmoil.

بربارة فيرن

Barbara Fern lives in Hammondville, NSW, Australia. In her letter sent with the above poem she wrote: 'I have recently read a book entitled "When the Bulbul Stopped Singing", which is Raja Shehadeh's diary of Ramallah under siege... I felt inspired to write a poem, which might be set to music, about the time *before* the bulbul stopped singing, and the siege which cut short its song... I wanted to put the *sounds* of a *garden*, and the *sounds* of *birds*, together, to establish a mood.'

RAGHID NAHHAS

Ghada Samman: Dancing with the Owl

Have you ever seen an owl displayed in a circus?
It is a difficult creature to domesticate
it refuses emotional supplication and the logic behind exhibitionist games...
Have you ever seen an owl trying to make someone laugh,
or drag him to amuse it as does a pet-dog wagging its tail?
Have you ever seen an owl locked in a cage singing its disgrace?
Has anyone offered to sell you an owl in the supermarket of domestic creatures?
The owl is not for sale!
It flies to whatever it likes and to whoever it loves.
Don't you love it?

These were Samman's opening lines in her recent book "Dancing with the Owl".[1] This does not only represent, in my opinion, the best review of that book, but also summarises Samman's ideals and life-long strife for intellectual integrity, liberation, democracy and freedom. I am using this book as my window into Samman, the writer and the human, but I am fully aware that whatever I present here is only a glimpse of what Samman is.

Samman's life-journey has been one of perpetual migration, starting within her own Syrian environment in Damascus, her hometown, when in the sixties she emerged as a pioneering advocate of female values and rights in a predominantly male society. She, however, has had a balanced view of life focusing on human values in general regardless of gender. She might have been a woman supreme, but never a typical feminist. Her writings deal with men and women on equal terms. She actually associates the plight of women with that of two thirds of humanity, particularly the proletariat.[2]

Samman is far beyond any boundaries, and her association with the "owl" is a confirmation of a non-ceasing desire for flight even during the night when Samman seems to 'see clearer' as she tells me. It is difficult to distinguish Samman from the owl

[1] *Ar-Raqss ma'el Boom* (in Arabic), Ghada Samman Publications, Beirut 2003. (A review -in Arabic- of this book, by R. Nahhas was published in *Kalimat 14*, under the Section "Readings".)

[2] Paola di Capua 1992 (in Arabic, translated by Noura Samman Winckle). Rebellion and Commitment in the Literature of Ghada Samma. At-Tali'a, Beirut.

she is dancing with. The Syrian artist Hassan Idlibi mirrored this "oneness" in his masterly accomplishment of the book cover in which we see the owl reflected in Samman's eyes whilst she raises her hands in celebration of this owl perching happily on her forefingers.

My answer to her question about the owl, 'Don't you love it?' is unreservedly 'YES!' for all of the above reasons, and because I have my own special association with the owl when it started a few years ago finding myself swimming with it! It is my habit to have a daily swim in our Sydney backyard pool when I return from work. One day, as I was doing a backstroke allowing me to contemplate the beauty of the palm trees surrounding the pool, I saw an unfamiliar bird on one of the branches. It was different from any of the dozen species of birds that frequent our garden. An instant feeling of awe struck me. I thought it was an owl, but unlike anything I have seen before and this was the first time I see it outside a zoo. Later I found that it was the "Frogmouth Tawny Owl", a native Australian species.

Distracted by the new backyard visitor, my swimming time lasted longer than usual. My wife's voice echoed, penetrating my deep preoccupation with my discovery. When she asked me what I was doing, meaning why I was late for dinner, I answered childishly: 'I am swimming with the owl... swimming with the owl...' With astonishment covering all her facial expressions, she advanced with a clear inquisitive look. I pointed my finger toward the owl, keeping my eyes on her face. Astonishment was now augmented by alarm.

Since then, I have always welcomed our new visitor who chose to take its rest in our garden, or perhaps it is its garden and we are the trespassers. It disappears for a few days and returns for a few others. Nevertheless, a friendship of sorts developed between us. Every morning I greet it before leaving for work and when I return in the evening I often watch it as it starts its usual nocturnal activity.

When I received Samman's "Dancing with the Owl", it was one of the nicest events that could occur to me. The owl became a mutual lover, albeit by dancing with Samman and swimming with me. Samman and I have a lot in common. We both come from the same city, Damascus. We both lived a significant part of our lives in Beirut, and graduated from the same university- The American University of Beirut. We both chose

to live away from our homes, she in Paris[3] and I in Sydney. I knew some of these facts before, but when I read "Dancing with the Owl", I rediscovered the amazing similarity of the humane and intellectual experience, most importantly, the feeling that you can be in a perpetual exile regardless of your geographical or cultural location.

I am one of many who share this experience. This is what makes Samman's writing relevant. This is what makes me feel I want to identify with her work. It is very easy for me to read chapters of my life and thoughts as I read some of Samman's writings.

What I call the "perpetual migrants", of whom I believe Samman is one, exist in the orbits of exile, yet despite their physical detachment from their homelands they still harbour a major part of their cultural heritage that constitutes part of their being; a being beyond the ordinary. In reference to some of the motives that led the owl to leave, and perhaps to continue her flight, Samman writes in "A Tormented Owl at Home and in Exile":

In exile, my friend, you are no more than a seat in a public park.
They will sit on you, rest, feel happy, thank you and go.
At home, you are no more than a seat in the Sultan's garden
he alone sits on you, rests, feels happy, but does not thank you and never leaves!

Her attitude about the rules of the games as dictated to her in her homeland changed as well. She writes in "The Uncommitted Owl":

I spent my life carrying
the pen in one hand and the shroud in the other
the Kalashnikov in one hand and the rose in the other
my passport and memory in one hand and my air ticket and wishes in the other.
Now, I want to throw all of that in the sea
and hold you with both hands.

She is very cynical and critical in the "Owl of Belonging":

I belong to the tribe of clatter, dust, murkiness and chatter.
Nothing is solid around me, except the beards of the grandfathers,
with which we hold and dangle like metallic bats
in the night space of the third millennium!

In "An Owl Who Escaped to Paris" she says:

The partisans want me to sign petitions in defence of their freedom, yet with their shoes they tread on my freedom- both as a woman and citizen.
Poets want me to give birth to their children, flirt with their poems and live on delusions and extinct alphabets.

This is why the owl flies away from this hell inflicted with so many layers and

[3] She also frequents Geneva and Beirut.

accents…

to oblivion in Paris, and love and freedom in Paris
its motto: seek freedom even in exile!

Freedom is the focal point around which Samman writes. Her freedom is about dignity and pride in humanity and femininity simultaneously. This is why we see her flying high to dance with the owl, to remain the deserved holder of wisdom forever. From this stance, the subjects of the book vary to include a pessimistic owl, an owl writing about her lover with light, with darkness, a hallucinating owl, a cajoling owl, an owl writing a life-story, an owl skiing over the third millennium, an owl reincarnated in a mare, an owl befriending her death, an owl consoling a poet, an owl who loves the lies of poets, an owl in love, an envious owl, an anxious owl, a rebellious owl and many more- an owl for every aspect of human behaviour and characteristics.

There is also the wisdom of the owl. For example we read in "An Owl Writing a Life-Story" a cynical summary of the "I" of the human condition biased to its personal being and/or class status and/or gender:

Wandering in the forest, I saw a frog…
I kissed the frog; it became a prince…
When he opened his eyes, he scornfully said to me:
'Who are you frog?'

Similar paradox is present in many other writings. In "An Owl Celebrating the Shepherd who Tells Half-Truths" we read:

I read your poem in which you falsely claim that you love me…
and I went ecstatic.
Haven't I told you: 'Lovers tell the truth even when they lie'?[4]

I find that the climax of such paradox is in "Woman, Virility and the Owl":

The owl said to me: 'What a great paradox!
Have you noticed, my lady, how similar is a woman to virility?
Man only celebrates it after he loses it.'

The owl here storms the man's lair so that the female becomes all of his virility that he realises only too late. More importantly, virility, supposedly the opposite of female passiveness as men would wish you think, is in fact a response to femininity so to speak. We read between the lines much more than a simple cynicism regarding how man conceives of his virility; there is an emphasis on the proactive presence of the female as part of this virility, which loses its meaning without her.

The book is full of social and political implications, direct and indirect, concerning the society the owl left. We read in "An Owl Telling the Story of the Big Ape":

[4] This is based on the Koranic verse 'Fortune tellers are liars even if they tell you the truth.'

He talks nineteen to the dozen and
believes that his nonsense talk is wisdom, proverbs, poetry and novels.
He lies and she believes him,
she lies and he believes her admiration of him.
Is mutual falsehood a historical love story?

We read in "The Secrets of an Ancient Owl":

You are an aeon of "mannish guile",
a culture of wiliness in your own right,
and "womanly guile" is
a rumour you spread!

The price of freedom the owl seems to pay is very clear from the moans of her exile and detachment from her original home in both time and space. This is why we feel in "An Owl in the Airship of the Third Millennium" her torment even at the times of her leisure:

O my French lover how we flew over a cloud of laughter...
But instead of seeing Paris from above, I saw on the ground
the map of my wounds and the landscapes of my homeland...
I fell in space off the balloon of memory and
the parachute of forgetfulness did not open to save me.
If you see my head bleeding on the edge of a French pavement
leave it to cry out its pain under the rain, and don't
pick it up, embalm it and hang it on the wall of your room!

Her strong relationship with her homeland is paradoxically the reason for her continued flight, as is clarified when we read deep into what she says in "The Damascene Bedouin Owl":

I am the bedouin who forgot the red lines of the nomads...
and travelled too far to the north.
There are perfumes in the gardens of
my childhood's Damascene homes
hallucinating with life's madness
and the curiosity of the summer "Sauna" nights.
Is it a crime that I obeyed their voices,
and answered to the calls of freedom?

Yes! Samman exceeded all demarcation lines in her faraway travel to the north, but the journey is not simply geographical. It is a journey through aeons and a flight exploring the cosmos through the psychological and biological constituents of human beings who are the result of millions of years of evolution.

It is a journey that coincides with the positive celebration of love, where the owl is

detached from the flock, abandoning the profession of fake modesty, expressing her feelings as a human being and confirming them as befits the sublime meanings of life. This is why love in her mind is akin to freedom. We read in "The Owl and the Poet":

The young lover said: Whenever
I hear the word "freedom"
I open the windows of my heart to
the sparrows, the moonlight and the wind.

Thus her celebration of love becomes cosmic. In "An Owl Revealing the Secret of Valentine's Day", we read:

I know that the Earth does not revolve around the Sun...
It revolves around you.
But I can swear it stood still in its orbit,
the night you, for the first time, told me:
I love you!

In "An Owl Remembering Her Future with You", we read:

The splendour I, "once upon a time", shared with you,
is worth a future life, light-years-long, on another planet.

It is not strange after all this flight beyond space and time that this owl has her own symphony of love. Even the act of playing music becomes "owling". We read in "Solo Owling on the Night's Lute":

I flirt with my owl and it tells me the secrets of summer lovers. It also tells me the secret of the four seasons, and I discover they are five! The secret season is called "the love season".

This cosmic magnificence does not mean that our owl has lost its attachment to the earth that gave her its wings of flight. Here she is, like your average person, trying her luck and becoming "A Gambling Owl":

I played lotto with fate
and won the first prize:
your love!

She has no problem dealing with "The Narcissist Lover of an Owl" adding some humour to her flirtation as she speaks of a particular human affair in a simple way:

You say to me: 'speak to me about my greatness,
no other subject interests me.'
I say to you: 'I love you, O my magnificent legend.'
You say to me: 'I fully agree with you, I also love me!'

But no matter how mundane her experience is, she is always "cosmic" in her love. Indeed her love is a cosmic happiness. We read in "The Love of the Owl is a Cosmic

Jubilation":

When I declare my love to you,
when I deviate off the orbits of sorrow
to meet you in the starry night and on Valentine's day,
the laws of the universe diverge a little for the sake of a love affair:
and cascades fall from bottom to top...

After listing some other changes, she says:

To tell lies in the age of mutual consent is true love!
It is a legitimate magic... so tell me that you love me too
even if your magic turns me from an owl into a woman!

In her love, she seeks to preserve her privacy and independence. We read in "An Owl that Hates the Lights":

I am the owl who befriended darkness
so that the light fails to arrest me
and send me guarded to the exhibitions of vulgarity.
I only master nudity in the darkness of your veins,
and I do not need a witness for my radiance except your secrecy.

There are disappointments in the life of our owl. Nevertheless, the glow of thought and literature never dwindles in Samman's expressions as we read in "Another Owl with a Secret Life":

Only when I sleep, I ride the flying carpet,
and my real life begins
when I escape the nightmares of wakefulness,
and from my disappointment in the one I loved.
I do not write these words with ink,
I truly write them with my blue tears!

Despite these disappointments, the owl is determined to continue her rebellion, and somehow avenge her fellow women. We read in "Emotional Owling":

Generations of buried-alive women wail in my blood,
but I insist on loving you under the sun
and before the spears of the tribe.

It is not surprising with all the wisdom of the owl to see flashes of philosophy radiating between the lines. It is the philosophy of realism mixed with the creativity of a passionate artist. In "An Owl who Admires Zero", we read:

The zero flirted with me and said it was
the most important of all numbers.
I said to it: 'You are nothing without another number.'

It replied: 'I am the perpetual lover...
good for nothing without my beloved
this is why I am the greatest and most important number!'

In "A Spying Owl", we read a unique unexpected usage of the fragrance roses emit. It seems that it takes the wisdom of the owl to discover the other side of our inherited "truths":

Only the owl knows
that the scent is the rose's way
of expressing its loneliness!

I would like to describe the above as "elegant" or "radiant", because I believe that even her "loneliness" here (or we could translate it as "estrangement") takes some elitist intellectual dimensions. After all we are dealing with the wisdom of the owl that we keep encountering. In "Summer Owling", we read:

I have always declared my wisdom, and confirmed that
I will never confuse the letter with the postman.

In "A Journalist Talking to the Owl of Freedom", we read:

In the night I secretly live my real life...
and I hunt for astonishment, joy and secrets.
Every stab in my back assures me I am still at the front!
- Why are you comfortable in the shade?
- Because I am the owl onto which the lamp burned,
instead of myself being burned like a crispy butterfly.

These philosophical tendencies are devoted in "A Dialogue of a Pessimist with an Optimistic Owl" in exploring some human aspects:

When I die, they will invent some good traits for me as they often do with their dead, because they fear their own coming death and the unveiling of their vice!

We reach some philosophical climax in "A Jealous Owl":

You presented me with a statue you sculpted of me...
It made me feel jealous.
The statue has wings longer than mine,
eyes wider than mine,
there are no wrinkles in its marble,
it does not catch cold,
and does not secretly cry in the dark,
it does not moan when flying at night
in search for a true love.
It does not close its eyes when kissing!

In "Owl Discovering the Secret of the Pearl", we read:

Are shells the diary books of the drowned?
Is this why pearls grow in some shells?

Pearls grow in every verse Samman wrote. Her writing is tormenting with its tonality and beauty, full with humane themes, adopting an exalted style that tells me a lot about its creator.

Despite her unique literary marks in modern Arabic literature, I see in Samman's writing a breath of internationalism, both in style and content. It is a culture of thinking unbound by landscapes, yet very clearly delving into their details. It is the owl longing for perpetuating freedom by elevation, yet having the sharp vision not to neglect the view beneath the sky.

Samman writes optimistically, not the norm for Arab writers. This is not merely the result of western contact or any one particular education. It is, in my opinion, her ability to conceive of the totality of the human experience, and to devote her cultural heritage and life experiences in igniting a light, as large as the galaxies, of her ambition and her feeling of freedom in the nightly space where she chose to dance with her owl. The glowing emotional state she finds herself in leads with the dance to a revolving step reaching the orbits of the universe so that it becomes difficult to distinguish the dancers.

Perhaps one dance is not enough, and perhaps one dance would make one wanting to dance forever with such an owl of creativity and wisdom. With every dance, one is assured of discovering much more about this distinguished owl.

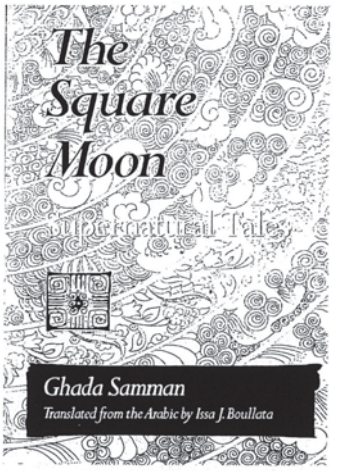
Samman's other recent work is a novel titled "A Masquerade for the Dead". Colette Marshalian reviewd this book and said, 'This is not the first novel of Samman's written with the rhythm of a passionate rebellious heart and a lush imagination. It is the true confrontation of Samman with Beirut after the war.[5] Samman's memory is abundant with details of the city's past, not surprising given that she, along with a group of writers and artists founded and shaped Beirut's cultural face in the sixties.'[6]

The novel is about a group of seven Lebanese migrants who return from France to Beirut to spend a holiday as the twenty first century is about to take off. They are accompanied by a French doctor who was convinced by one of them to spend her vacation there. There, they have a close experience with the contradictions and conflicts of the city; the past, the present, dreams, reality, ghosts, the dead and the living become entangled. For example, the ghosts that haunt them are actually fragments of their imagination, brought on by the confusion about how they see their city after years of exile. This is a city they grew to know through the screens of French television as a theatre of war and destruction. Their feelings, however, still hovered around the

[5] The Lebanese civil war started in 1975.
[6] *Al-Mustaqbal* 09/12/2002, Beirut, Lebanon.

peaceful city some of them left in their early teens. Now, each is about to discover or rediscover this city in his or her own way.

After the long civil war, Samman depicts other undeclared wars challenging each character in the book. These characters seek freedom, love and success, but some of them are driven to crime and others to death as a result of some complicated circumstances. They are haunted by the ghosts of the dead who come to avenge their demise during the civil war.



Samman has authored over thirty five books with exquisite titles such as "I Declared Love on You", "Your Eyes are my Fate", "The Square Moon", "Exile Below Zero", "A Lover in an Inkpot", "The Body is a Suitcase", "Swimming in the Devil's Lake", "The Arrest of a Fleeting Moment", "A Citizen Caught Reading" and "The Sea Puts a Fish on Trial".

Some of her novels and stories have been translated to Spanish, German, Albanian, English, Farsi, Italian, Bulgarian, Polish, Russian, Romanian, Chinese and French. Some of these translations were undertaken by distinguished scholars such as Professor Issa Boullata who translated her book "Square Moon" into English. A "reading" of this book, by Hunada Hosari, was published in *Kalimat 9*, pp112-114.

Pauline Homsi Vinson wrote a feature article about Samman in *Al Jadid*[7] last year. The title of the feature described Samman as "A Writer of Many Layers." Then it went on to say, 'Whether in her relatively early romanticist writings or in the more socially engaged fiction such as "Beirut 75" and thereafter, Samman's work exhibits a boldness that defies restrictions.' The article is an excellent concise overview of Samman the writer and the human.

It is not my intention here to address the same issues dealt with by Homsi-Vinson, but it is worth mentioning that many articles and books have been written about Samman, including academic dissertations. This is the result of both the literary elegance of Samman's work and its social and political importance. For example, Wafiq Gharizi addressed "sex" in Samman's work.[8] In his introduction to his book he explains his reasons for tackling this subject: 'Ghada Samman is a unique literary phenomenon, whose fame has exceeded the boundaries of the Arab World into internationalism, because by her literature she unveiled taboos and prohibitions inherited from the dark

[7] Al Jadid Magazine, Spring 2002, pp14-17. Al Jadid is edited by Elie Chalala and published in Los Angeles. It is "A Review and Record of Arab Culture & Arts". www.aljadid.com.

[8] Gharizi, Wafiq 1994 (in Arabic). Sex in the Literature of Ghada Samman. Dar at-Tali'a, Beirut.

ages to chain human freedom, paralyse human social, intellectual and behavioural dynamics... The importance of Ghada Samman and her creative, daring literary writings attracted many researchers and critics... but the issue of sex that occupies a large proportion of Samman's work has remained neglected by both men and women researchers. This what prompted me to delve deeply into this subject... There is no doubt that "Samman was a surprise to her generation of men and women, because she presented a new pattern to a conservative Arab life; intellectually and in its style. Her literary creativity was thus different to the prevailing norm and values of the Arab World"[9].'

In her book "The Tribe Interrogates the Slain Woman", Samman says: 'True love is not complete without sexual intercourse. Theoretical love is nice in the beginning, similar to appetisers, but allowing the two bodies to meet is the true crowning of any mature relationship between a man and a woman, and it is actually the test of how sincere their love is... Sex is a subject I neither avoid nor deliberately write about... I am not troubled by it so that I try to escape it or immerse myself in it. Sex is one of our life's realities. It is not the only reality, and I deal with it accordingly. In the same way I talk about and stand against suppressing the Arabs intellectually, politically and economically, I stand against their sexual oppression which leads to the loss of individual energies.'

Gharizi sums it up in one sentence: 'Sex in Samman's literature is a symbol of what is larger than the flesh.'[10] In his comprehensive work he skilfully selects some of Samman's writings to reveal to us her exquisite combination of sensuality and creativity. From her "I Declared Love on You", we read:

Before your eyes, I had no history
I have no path except your lightning
No home, but your flesh
No timing, but your pulse
No bread, but the wheat of your hands

I lay my body ready for you
and like a spike surrendering to the sickle
I offer it to you

I shall declare my surrender to you
and shoot you with my love... love... love.

Najala' Nassib al-Ikhtiar wrote her successful Master thesis (in French) about women liberation through the works of Simmone de Beauvoir and Ghada Samman between

[9] Ilham Ghali (quoted by ibid) 1986. Ghada Samman, Love and War (in Arabic), Dar at-Tali'a, Beirut.
[10] See 5.

1965 and 1986. She then translated her work and published it in a book in Arabic.[11] In this work, the creativity of two women liberation giants, one French and one Syrian is compared. The author chose the period starting in 1965 because it was a period during which the world witnessed a boom in women movements. Simmone de Beauvoir died in 1986, the year selected to end that period of study. This work is one of many witnesses on Samman's international relevance and appeal. Like de Beauvoir, Samman criticised capitalism and the bourgeois class (she herself belonged to a bourgeoise family). Samman 'severely criticised the hypocrisy of the more traditional sectors- a hypocrisy of harmful effects on the Arabic Islamic culture, because it conveys a negative inferior message about it, whereas Samman considers this culture a valuable heritage that must be protected, and it should not be utilised as a hurdle to progress.'[12]

Another work about Samman is the Italian Paola di Capua's "Rebellion and Commitment in the Literature of Ghada Samman". This work is also translated into Arabic.[13] In her introduction to the book, the Italian Professor Isabella Camera D'Afflitto expressed her personal particular attraction to Samman's writings, and that it was almost like 'love at first sight'. She also expressed her disappointment that the west only discovers important Arab or eastern writers after someone wins a major prize such as what happened to Naguib Mahfouz. She feels that translating Samman's work is not easy due to the richness and elaborate design behind her writings. This is why she also feels that Samman's work is 'better translated by someone who shares with her the major part of her feelings, because she seems to say what everyone of us would like to say, but unable to or never dare or know how to say it.'

The professor then ascribes the great interest in Samman's work to her being first and foremost 'a free woman'. 'Her work "Beirut Nightmares" for example, sold tens of thousands of copies in Russia and Poland... but some of her books, considered too scandalous, were banned in some Arab countries.'

Di Capua considers that the rebellion and social commitment that are evident in all of Samman's works are two aspects of one attitude that provides Samman with a major factor in her uniqueness.

When di Capua asked Samman how she would like to introduce herself to the Italian reader, Samman said: 'I do not exactly know how to introduce myself to the Italian reader. Shall I tell him what I told the Arab reader- that I am a 2000 years old Arabian, they tried unsuccessfully to bury me alive in the desert. They killed me many times, but I always arose from the ashes to fly... and write... Do I introduce myself in that way, or do I use a simpler formula: I am a writer, a working woman, a wife and a

[11] Najla' Nassib al-Ikhtiar 1991 (in Arabic). Women Liberation in the Works of Simmone de Beauvoir and Ghada Samman. Dar at-Tali'a, Beirut.

[12] Paola di Capua 1992 (in Arabic, translated by Noura Samman Winckle). Rebellion and Commitment in the Literature of Ghada Samma. At-Tali'a, Beirut.

[13] Ibid.

mother. I strive day and night to accomplish my tasks and live my many lives... Rebellion in my opinion is not a total elimination of the past and an absolute detachment from one's heritage, rather it is about reconsidering the heap of inherited ideas and mummified values breaking the back of the human Arab, particularly women... I think that woman liberation is not a mission restricted to women, but also it is the mission of enlightened men...'

When di Capua asked her why she wrote, Samman said: 'I write because I am going to die. I write because I am brimming with life. I write in order to forget. I write so that I remember. I write so that I bear the solitude and the exile inside my prison body. I write to communicate with people. I write to tolerate this world. I write to change it! I write because I am a woman. I write because I am a human. I write so that I meet my true friends in all countries of this planet of mine. The rituals of my writing have changed with time, but the essence remains the same.'

Samman's mother, Salma Ruwayha, was a litterateur and a school-teacher of French. She died before Samman was able to know her. Samman's father, Ahmad Samman, was a professor at Damascus University, a Dean of its Law School and eventually the university's President. Later he was appointed the Minister for Education in Syria. The father contributed greatly in shaping his daughter's strong will and determination. He wanted his daughter to study medicine, but despite her scientific high school certificate, Samman defied her father and chose English Literature. After graduating from Damascus University, she joined the American University of Beirut in 1964 to pursue a Master Degree in English Literature. Her thesis was about "The Theatre of the Absurd". She then travelled to London for her Ph.D., but this was abandoned in favour of travelling around Europe.

Samman's work experience include lecturing at Damascus University, officer at the Press Office at the Presidential Palace in Syria, actor at the BBC in London, the Director of Translations at the Syrian Organisation for Extensive Projects, a writer of radio serials, radio program broadcaster, literary translator and a columnist.

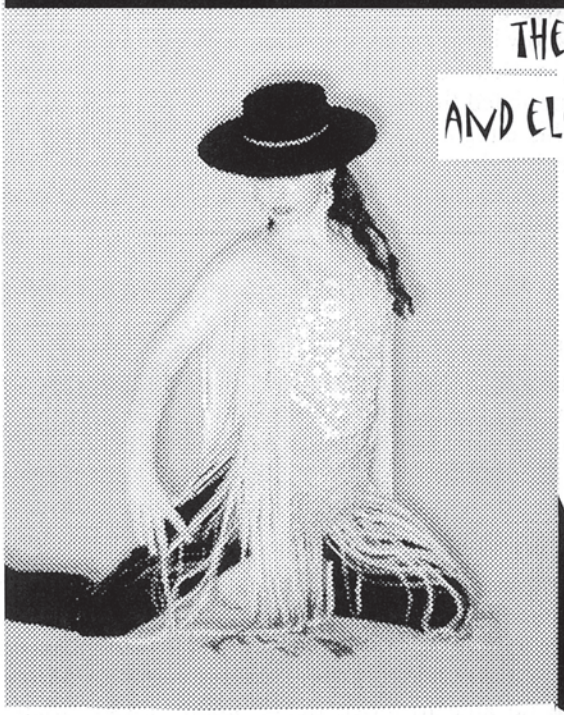
Samman established "Ghada Samman Publishing" in 1977 with the owl as its logo. The main reason for this move was to feel free from the pressures of other publishers when deciding on what, how and when to publish.

If one asks whether a book such as "Dancing with the Owl" is a book of poetry or prose, we might provide a technical answer that does not change the creativity of the work. To Samman, I believe, it does not matter how a critic classifies her work, because she does not believe that there are boundaries between the different forms of art, and that a creative artist or writer should be able to move freely among these different forms. This is one reason why I chose this book as a good overview of Samman as a writer, poet, thinker, reformist and a human being. The "landmark" is here speaking for itself, as Samman continues to pursue her cosmic dance in the company of the owl.

Lady, may I have this dance?

Sensación Olé

EXPERIENCE
THE COLOUR, THE PASSION
AND ELEGANCE...



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EILEEN MARSHALL

My Room

My room is small, jam-packed with friends:
my chair, my desk, pictures on the wall.
Buddha is in the Ajunta Caves and I'm
in the congregation listening to his discourses.
Not always. I sometimes ride in a boat on a
glossy-glass sea or in a jaunting cart across
Ireland, while Hildegaard sings about God's
breath, or an Italian of a man's love.

Three birds dangle from the ceiling
on a bead string; stuffed-plump cloth
sparrows – ochre, crimson, purple –
twist-twirl round and round. Books
chatter and laugh in their shelves, a few
cry or moan. The papers on my desk
are silent - they have gravitas.

Outside my window is the "other" world.
My friends shelter me from its strangeness.
Can they shield me from mine?
Are parts of my *self* unknown to me?
Groddeck, who spotted das Id before
Freud, says a lot of *me is* submerged
in murk. Foul creatures live in this mess –
goblins, demons maybe even Belial.

These "sages" say the key is lost and looking
for it - perilous. They offer to unpick the lock.
Don't want to be in their thrall. I once went
questing for this cipher and fell
down and down till I almost drowned.
Where angels be, then also, there be demons.
Do I dare to dive that deep again? Will
satori come with trilling carolling angel choirs
or will monsters rear up from the ooze?

The walls close in - I explode outwards. My room
is the universe and I'm dancing with Nataraj
his dance of creation: whirling darting spinning
in and out, in and out of the great emptiness
that creates life in the world that expels life
into the world as words that dance dazzle and sing.
All the words in the universe past, present and to be
come out and dance, dazzle and sing.

Imploding to the comfort of my familiars I
watch the pattern of light on the wall,
hear the sound of my breath, feel cosy
with my persona. Perhaps Groddeck was wrong?
Maybe there is no quiddity unknown to me.
Surely I can vouch for all – they've long been
my friends - they fill my great emptiness.
There are hobbits, elves and cherubim. No
Lucifer or Sauruman, just a few spiteful imps.

There are some who always dwell with me;
others who just pass through. Gollum came
he was looking for his *Preciousss*. He said
he'd show me how to answer my enigma
if I helped him to interpret his riddle:
to find yourself you lose your self.
Couldn't solve it. His riddle doesn't make
sense; I'm not sure what *self* is.

It's twilight - the weird time - suspended
between day and night. Outside an obscuring
mantle, inside a shade moving across the wall.
Is it my dark side? Can the *It* be seen in a
peep show of my psyche or in the kaleidoscope
of my dreams? I've sometimes glimpsed
my 'shadow', never seen it full on.
I don't have the courage to face it.

My room is fast shrinking to an infinitesimal.[1]

[1] The word infinitesimal is used as a noun, 'a number like no other. It is smaller than anything except zero, but it is not zero. It makes no logical sense, but it has endless uses' (*New Scientist*, Jan 26, 2002).

If it distends again, will there be some
I dare not meet? Those who will turn *me*
to stone? I'll go helter skelter somewhere,
anywhere. They will not find me here.
Often, like John of the Cross,
within my self I do not dwell I entered
I know not where.

A small light struggles through the tar-black
fog, the glow pools on my desk.
You can reach and touch the navy-blue
vault. I leap out and tiptoe across the heavens
on gleaming twinkling chunks of light,
pebbles ancients used for stepping into
Eternity. Jumping, skipping, hopping
but where to?

Crawling back through, I almost don't fit;
there are bits of me hanging out,
have to squeeze them through. Still,
I'm glad my room is tiny, I revel in its
constriction, am comforted by constraint.
Freedom is a burden. There is terror without
camaraderie from cronies. They are all here:
can see them; hear them; touch them.

For an instant, outside and inside are one.
I can smell harmony, touch peace, taste joy
hear unity as the words connect, see Self
as the many selves merge and separate
separate and merge. Then day bursts through
night; a fragment breaks off from the sun and
fractures into brilliance. The gleaming is
all around *me* and my *I* dissolves in light.

آيلين مارشال

Eileen Marshall writes essays, novels, short stories and poetry. Her work has been commended on several occasions. She lives in Newcastle, Australia.

JOHN STUART

At Delphi

Soft,
it is still,
breathing, feeling free,
the birds sound sharp and clear,
the hillsides are covered
with greyish mossy stone,
glowing within,
amidst clusters of grass,
yellow dandelions, flowering poppies,
and small patches of purple.
At the site,
bounded by hills and stark cliffs,
walking upwards, increasingly steep,
along colonnades,
on steps of rough marble,
passing broken columns,
temples and shrines,
and elegant statues, gods in human form,
through layers of ruins, symbolic, forlorn,
further figures of females,
snakes and dolphins,
creatures of myth, legends abounding,
and at the top, the main temple,
a theatre and stadium,
simply outstanding.

What was this place?
The Centre of the World,
the navel, feeding from the source,
where, in the presence of Apollo,
the God of Light and Wisdom,
all was revealed, all that lies
beneath, below and behind the mind,
intuition, innate intelligence,
from which springs forth
renewal, regeneration.
It was here
where Kings were humbled,
where Cities and States paid homage,
where Nations and Empires
sought guidance,
all seeking answers for all the questions,
then and forever.

The Oracles,
accepting tributes with submissions,
granting audiences and transmissions,
becoming a reservoir of knowledge,
a library of information,
developing a sense
of the politics of power,
the way things work, how it happens,
able to give advice
and influence events,
the flow of fortune.

It was here they came,
seeking a definable truth,
those who wanted to know,
where they came from,
where they were going,
an eternal present,
where records were carved in living stone,
where the tribal heart was still beating,

touching the past,
where anything and
everything was possible,
where destiny was determined,
the dice were loaded
and fate ordained.
It was here they found
what they needed to know,
the fruits of their labour,
what they were looking for,
what they always knew,
it was here they found,
themselves.

جون ستيوارت

John Stuart is a published author of secondary school texts, numerous articles on English literature, and more recently, various poetry and prose.

J. K. MURPHY

The Visit

You cycle with measured pedals to your home country,
The clotted city left behind, a young stream
Bordering the incensed grounds, the grass taking first green.
You dismount beside your kin, dead in these parts,

And retrieve the aroma of pines
Spilling generously over the near surrounds
And buffing the locally-hewn stones
Of your kin heading off weather

And whatever else town-talk brings.
The headstones are chafed by wind and sleet,
And where her head would be, you kiss the ground,
Hauling up for a moment her favourite, Hello, dear.

Some would try to rise you for such sentiment,
Saying the earth has her route of peace; leave it alone –
But fearing they in turn will lose a loved one
Whose like has never left you.

ج. ك. ميرفي

J. K. Murphy lives in Melbourne, Australia. His first book of verse was *Mottled Shallows*.

MILOUD LOUKAH

Two Poems

Translated by ***Noel Abdulahad***

A Question

Between one moment and another
it takes my fancy to open the shutter
for my heart to see
what the eyes can't:
an endless fancy dream

But alas!
in the midst of my dream
a question persisted:
What goodness for the heart to see
what the eyes can't?

A Waiter

What would you like to drink?
Perhaps tea?
My mum's style.
Tea of a heavenly aroma-
enriched with mint
and the joy of a maid
in her bridal gown.
O son, my dear son!
matchless is the mother's craft
and priceless is her skilfulness.

ميلود لقاح

Miloud Loukah is a Moroccan teacher of Arabic language. He has published his poetry in many Arabic journals, since the middle of the 1980's. He is currently preparing a Ph.D. about contemporary Moroccan poetry. The original Arabic of the above poems was published in *Kalimat 14*, June 2003.

نويل عبد الأحد

Noel Abdulahad is a writer, critic and translator, living in USA. He is renowned for his translation of Gibran's *The Prophet*, considered the best. He is an adviser to *Kalimat*.

ISSAM TARSHAHANI

A Poem

Translated by **Noel Abdulahad**

Drowsiness

So lucent is the shadow of my sleep
it almost caught the clouds
and swam in heaven's bouquet
My drowsiness is lightsome
like the fragrance of prayers
and the radiance of sparkling water
it made a quick appearance
like a dream that vanished as it began
My drowsiness is like a damsel's locks
bedewed with the rosy hue
of most lissom women's looks
My drowsiness is a soft swishing
mostly desired
for the wine of heavens.

عصام ترشحاني

Issam Tarshahani is a Syrian poet who lives in Aleppo. He has sixteen poetry collections to his credit. The above poem appeared in its original Arabic in *Kalimat 14*, June 2003.

HASHIM SHAFIQ

Two Trees
Translated by ***Raghid Nahhas***

The Walnut Tree

The walnut trees in our village
still pervade their scent to us
through the air,
still the women find
in the walnuts
a dye for the lips
and some village women
grind the walnut pith to colour
the maidens' hair
and to prepare ointments for impotence
and for arousing desires.
The walnut tree
is growing into a giant inside us
deep within our souls
and in the spaces of our villages.

The walnut tree was
our childhood home in the heat
and the flung-opened window
to the world.

The Apricot Tree

An apricot tree is by my side
blocking my window,
suspending its drapes
over the balcony's frieze,
pouring its scent to
deluge my horizon
with memories.

هاشم شفيق

Hashim Shafiq is an Iraqi poet living in London. He has published eleven books of poetry, and a few other books. His poetry has been translated into several languages. The above poems were published in their original Arabic in an-Nahar Literary Supplement 23/02/03, Beirut.

SUSAN BEINART

Bicultural Fiction and the Post-Colonial

The closing chapter of the 1991 Australian novel, *Bitter Bloom*, written by an ex-South African who shares some of my national characteristics, can only be described as *bitter*. In it, a group of writers gather in a restaurant. One, an ex-South African, Pia, says she came to Australia to write freely; South Africa oppressed writers like herself who challenged its [then] political system. An Australian writer at the table tells Pia no one in Australia cares about South African politics; she must therefore get into Australian issues. Pia says this would destroy the depth in her writing because Australian people and things are still foreign to her. Pia receives a hostile reaction. Someone accuses her of trivialising Australian issues; she is seen as a snob. Soon afterwards, the narrator tells us, the disillusioned Pia departs Australia.[1] When I read this recently, I empathised with Pia and wondered how I, or anyone else who finds oneself to be on the outside in our *post-colonial* world, could ever overcome this barrier. I have subsequently concluded that bicultural writers like Pia and myself will do well if we borrow strategies from the post-colonialists.

The beliefs and practices of post-colonial literary critics such as Edward Said, and post-colonial writers like Salman Rushdie and J.M. Coetzee, are a great example for bicultural fiction writers to keep in mind. They deal with common contemporary narratives such as *disconnectedness* and *hegemony*, and by so doing, render their own issues and stories universally relevant.

The following is a part-definition of the complex term post-colonial:

> The dismantling of structures of colonial control, beginning in earnest in the late 1950s and reaching its high point in the 1960s, constituted a remarkable historical moment, as country after country gained independence from the colonizing powers. That so many millions now live in the world formed by decolonisation is one justification for the use of the term post-colonial.[2]

When considering local post-colonialism, it is natural to think of it in terms of Australia as a British ex-colony. However, in order to explore the immigrant writer, which I intend to do, it is necessary to look also at our *internal* post-colonial issues. Amongst

[1] Stewart, A. 1991. *Bitter Bloom*, William Heinemann, Port Melbourne, Australia, pp.275-276.
[2] Childs, P. and P. Williams 1997. *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theory*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey, p.1.

others, Childs and Williams give the following ("notorious") definition: 'We use the term "post-colonial"... to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day' (Ashcroft et al. in Childs and Williams 1997, p.3). To the question, 'Who is the post-colonial?' they respond inter alia with this: 'The Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of post-war migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*'.[3]

In this internal post-colonial vein, I would like to address the concept of disconnectedness. For twenty-five years, I have been straddling both my worlds. That is, I am an Australian of non/Anglo background, the kind of person who Roberts[4] calls a 'cultural schizophrenic'. Although I have lived in South Africa and Australia for equal lengths of time, South Africa framed my formative years and I was steeped in its various cultures. I am, in fact, a typical product of post-colonialism, in that my grandparents fled then-Russian Lithuania for then-British South Africa. I carried on this tradition by leaving post-colonial South Africa for post-colonial Australia. If you consider that by 1914, 'Europe held a grand total of 85% of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions and commonwealths,'[5] it is not hard to understand why our contemporary world is full of people with splintered pasts.

Whenever I write fiction, a question that backgrounds my words is: from which of my two realities shall I approach this text? Will I make my country-of-origin viewpoint paramount, or will I approach my language, characters and ideas from my Australian mindset? Both South Africa and Australia are ex-colonies and use English as their official language, but there are differences. South African English has been influenced by the norms of Holland and by the black cultures of its African location. As well as the powerful Anglo background it shares with South Africa, Australia has an Aboriginal heritage, a convict past, an Asia-Pacific location and a history of European and Asian migration. To complicate matters, being of East-European extraction, I was never really part of the Anglo culture back home.

Expatriate Australian writer Beth Yahp put the cultural schizophrenia dilemma this way:

> At my current desk, looking out my current window, I write as a Malaysian-born half-Chinese, quarter-Thai, possibly quarter-Eurasian, em/im-migrant of Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, Katoomba, Paris, feminist of the anti-doormat school, English-speaking "Eastern", right-handed, dairy-allergic woman – who can't tango... [6]

Writers with complex heritages like Yahp and myself can face a range of difficulties

[3] Homi Bhabha in (see 2), p.13.
[4] Roberts, A. 1993. *The Novel From its Origins to the Present Day*. Bloomsbury, London, p.263.
[5] See 2, p.10.
[6] Yahp, B. 2001. This Writing Life: Tales From the Trenches. *Australian Author*, vol.33, No. 2, pp.16-19.

caused by disconnectedness to Australia's ruling Anglo culture. Like an out-of-control clock, this disconnectedness ticks wildly if we attempt fiction, which comes from the imagination, where cultural experiences reside. In general I would argue that bicultural fiction writers, as well as writers from other alienated subgroups such as Queer – although I will not be tackling subgroups other than non/Anglo immigrants in the present article – have to grapple to a greater or lesser degree with the dilemma of disconnectedness.

This is strongly so for immigrants in Australia at least partly because, as Jean Martin argued:

> The predominance of assimilationist constructs in Australia up to the mid-sixties... meant that questions about how Australian institutions had responded to an in-flux of people of non-Anglo-Saxon origin simply did not come to the surface. There was no decision to rule such questions out of order. They did not arise; they were not confronted.[7]

Confronted or not, culture differences are problematic and Martin underlines this by drawing on Max Weber's "Webs of Meaning" construct. She says people attach meanings to objects such as ideas in the form of values, norms, attitudes, aspirations and beliefs. The resulting webs of knowledge, some shared group knowledge, characterise culture.[8] Concluding from Martin that disconnectedness is a minority response to a dominant culture's webs of knowledge, I would argue that even today, when Australian institutions make stronger attempts than they did in the 1970s to recognise other cultures – an example of this being the provision of multicultural television – immigrants from non-Anglo countries still face alienation.

It can also be argued that "multiculturalism" in general, and, specifically, multicultural television, do not go far enough. Multiculturalism as policy, Sestito[9] has maintained, limits ethnic inclusion as it encourages politicians to pander to the often-outdated "ethnic vote". In my opinion, "multiculturalism" in the media may have been a useful first move, but the next logical step is to increase ethnic inclusion by representing minority cultures on mainstream television in an authentic manner rather than by segregating them on a channel such as SBS.

The other issue I will explore is hegemony. According to Culler,[10] '*hegemony* is an arrangement of domination accepted by those who are dominated. Ruling groups dominate not by pure force but through a structure of consent, and culture is part of this structure that legitimises current social arrangements'. Hegemony has Marxist origins and Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci coined the concept. Culler also says the theory of post-colonialism, established by cultural theorists such as Edward Said, addresses

[7] Martin, J. 1978. *The Migrant Presence*. Allen and Unwin, Australia, p.21.
[8] Ibid, p.20.
[9] Sestito, Raymond 1982. *The Politics of Multiculturalism*. The Centre for Independent Studies, St. Leonards.
[10] Culler, J. 1997. *Literary Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.52.

questions 'about the relation between the hegemony of Western discourses and the possibility of resistance.'[11]

Hegemony inside Australia does not usually benefit first-generation non/Anglo immigrants. Australian institutions represent the views of the Anglo ruling class and our bureaucracies deny access to those who do not share the same webs of knowledge. As Martin[12] says, 'Immigration has... provided a readily manipulated industrial reserve army. This army has made possible the emergence of an Australian labour aristocracy 'who see themselves as benefiting from migrant exploitation' and are upwardly mobile at the expense of migrant workers'. Martin goes on to say that migrants are 'firmly embraced within the system'. (Note: although I use the term "Anglo" to describe the Australian ruling class, I am aware it is a label and not always representative of all it purports to be.)

Edward Said[13] calls his version of "Orientalism" a *discourse*. By regarding it as such, he says, we can understand how European culture has managed to manage the Orient. He tells us he is using Foucault's version of "discourse". According to Roberts,[14] discourse is the name Foucault gave 'to the systems of linguistic representations through which power sustains itself'. Hall[15] refers to one of Laclau and Mouffe's examples: the round leather object that you kick, they say, is a physical object – a ball. But it only becomes a "football" within the context of the rules of the game, which are socially constructed. My interpretation of this is that in the same way that "football", a social construct, is a discourse, so is Said's version of "Orientalism". Like "football" with its rules that players and club-members must obey, "Orientalism" has its own rules, and these rules have kept the East under Western control.

Said[16] says European culture, particularly British and French since the late 18th century, as well as American since World War Two, has used the power produced by the construct of "Orientalism", to elevate them. He says "Orientalism" is based on our, rather than the east's, view of their world, and that pre twentieth-century writers such as Dickens help us, through their racism and imperialism, to understand the cultures of their times. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said limits his study to the Anglo, French and American representations of Islamic Arabs, but in the later *Culture and Imperialism*, Said[17] widens his argument to include 'the modern metropolitan west and its overseas territories'. He includes Africa and identifies the British discourse towards its (former)

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[11] Ibid, p.31.
[12] See 7, p.192.
[13] Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. Random House, New York, p.3.
[14] See 4, p.133.
[15] Hall, S. 1997. The Work of Representation. In: Hall, S. (ed) *Representation, Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications, London, p.45.
[16] See 13, pp.3-12.
[17] Said, E. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. Chatto and Windus, London, p.xi.

colony, Australia.

Leaving aside for a moment Said's broader "Orientalism", and looking again at Australia's internal situation, we find there is a history of xenophobia towards immigrants, including "Orientals" that can be traced back to the 1800s. Sherington[18] says that 'a great fear had been laid in the Australian psyche' by the Chinese in the gold-rush period. Today, this xenophobic strain can be seen in the Tampa affair of September 2001 when the Howard government would not allow Middle-Eastern asylum seekers to land on Australian soil. Many applauded, others saw it as an echo of the earlier, supposedly defunct White Australia Policy.[19] While not specifically discussed in the present article, common negative "white" attitudes towards Aborigines in Australia can also be seen as a discourse.

As a western-educated Palestinian-American, Said[20] has always felt "Oriental". He calls an Arab-Palestinian's life in America 'disheartening' because of racism, and claims an 'absence of any cultural position making it possible... to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam'. Recently, this attitude can be seen in reactions to the events of September 11, 2001, particularly when considering America's own provocative foreign policies. Fellow Americans rebuked Susan Sontag who asked for clear-headedness towards the causes of the twin-tower disaster. Anderson[21] wrote, 'Sontag used merely to be famous; since September 24, 2001, she has also been notorious'. Bolstered by the 2002 Bali bombing, racist incidents have also been directed at Muslims in Australia. Crichton and Stevenson,[22] in commenting on Sydney's 2002 spate of Muslim rapes of 'Australian' girls, state that community coverage of these rapes was highly sympathetic to the victims, and punitive towards the perpetrators. They say this is part of the "ethnic other" syndrome.

Said[23] maintains that culture and politics should not be separated. Literary works, as representations of culture, must be examined politically. For example, in Dickens's 1860-61 *Great Expectations*, Magwitch, the condemned convict, reforms in Australia and then secretly bankrolls Pip's gentlemanly life back in Britain. Magwitch is finally rehabilitated, but never accepted back into the British fold.[24] The political point here is that Dickens believed Magwitch's brush with the colony, Australia, tainted him. It is also easy to suspect that Australian novelist Peter Carey set out to remedy this attitude in his 1997 novel, *Jack Maggs*.[25] Carey makes Maggs (Dickens's Magwitch) the centre

[18] Sherington, G. 1982 *Australia's Immigrants*. Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, Australia, p.67.
[19] Hyland, T. 2001. Echo of White Australia. *The Age*, September 5, p.17.
[20] See 13, pp.25-27.
[21] Anderson, D. 2002. The Style of a Radical. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 2-3, p.10.
[22] Chrichton, S. and A. Stevenson 2002. Crime & Prejudice. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sep. 14-15, p.31.
[23] See 13, pp.9-15.
[24] See 17, p.xv.
[25] Carey, P. 1997. *Jack Maggs*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.

of the novel, thereby redeeming him in the reader's eyes.

It is not hard for me to identify with Said's view of hegemony. Although my English-speaking background has helped me to experience reasonable life chances in Australia, my inherent disconnectedness to Australian institutions has made me sensitive to the plight of more vulnerable immigrants. When approaching fiction writing, these issues influence me. For example, I find it challenging to represent non-Anglos because I do not wish to denigrate them *à la* "Orientalism". In other words, because of my own awareness of painful immigrant issues, my writing is political.

Recently, I wrote a short story with an Anglo/Australian narrator. Some questions I found difficult to answer were: How will my narrator think? What kind of background will she come from? What kind of house will she live in? What kind of language will she use? What about her beliefs? And so on. I am often unsure of these cultural webs. Research can help, but nothing replaces innate knowledge. However, when I use a South African-background narrator, I am familiar with most of the answers to these questions.

In this particular short story, *Blood Red Gravy* (unpublished), Jenny, an Anglo/Australian single mother, teaches English to adult migrants. One Sunday, Jenny and her socially withdrawn son, Oscar, visit a student's home. Mercedes, her husband Pedro and son Jacques are warm hosts. On subsequent visits to Mercedes's home, Jenny notices Oscar is thriving from his contact with the Spanish family. He is becoming more self-assured. On Jenny and Oscar's fourth visit, Pedro upsets Jenny by killing and then cooking his pet rooster, Biérrrdy. Jenny is unable to exert authority over her less-educated host. She condemns the Spaniards as savages. Later, when Jenny and Oscar arrive home, Jenny tries to return to her earlier view of her hosts: as propagators of good family values and warm saviours to fatherless Oscar.

When I wrote this story, I found Jenny challenging to portray. Through my past work teaching English to adult migrants, I had gained access to Anglo/Australian teachers and had gauged their generally benevolent attitudes towards their multicultural students. In portraying Jenny as a single parent who valued the welfare of her son, I was copying teachers with whom I had worked. Some of them encouraged their own children's contact with their European and Asian students, and relished the warmth they found for their children amongst these generally more traditional family units. However, sometimes I found an ethnocentric vein in these relationships. The general feeling amongst the teachers was that some of the students came from backward cultures, and they felt compelled to help them. A few of these teachers, for example, were feminists, and encouraged migrant women from traditional cultures to be more independent, regardless of domestic consequences. At one stage in *Blood Red Gravy*, as Jenny watches Mercedes pour vinaigrette over a salad, she feels Mercedes is allowing Pedro to quench her spirit. Also, when Jenny is trying to persuade Pedro not to kill his pet rooster, we are told she likes to be in charge of her migrant students. What I was

trying to express here is that Jenny has an underlying agenda of control. At one stage, when Pedro is preparing to kill the rooster, the narrative goes like this:

> Jenny tried not to think beyond Oscar's happiness. She tried not to focus on the savagery around him that was altering her feelings for Mercedes. But she turned away from Oscar, back towards Mercedes, and felt a sliver of anger rise in her and stab weakly at her so cruel, so foreign, rebellious friend. (Beinart, p.8, unpublished manuscript)

However, Jenny is at heart a generous person who acknowledges her son's need for contact with this warm European family, and she eventually forgives their unwillingness to obey.

Although I found Jenny's character challenging to develop, it was the "foreigners" I found hardest to represent. I was keen not to stereotype them and yet the conflict in the story had to come, I felt, from the culture clashes that occurred between the two groups. If I had only acquainted myself with the post-colonialists before I wrote this story, how much easier would my task have been! I could have asked myself the following question: am I, like Conrad did in his 1902 novel, *Heart of Darkness*, still arguing 'that the source of the world's significant action and life is in the West.'[26] Or, in my case, because my story is set in Australia and deals with Anglo versus non/Anglo issues, am I arguing that in Australia the Anglos are the significant group? When I wrote about Mercedes and her family, I had not yet framed this question. All I knew, because of my own disconnectedness, was that I was unwilling to cast the "foreigners" in a negative light. What I had not then grasped was that I should not *misrepresent* them. A factor to consider, of course, is Said's view that you can never be totally authentic, that our personal characteristics will get in the way when we try to represent others. For this reason, Said encourages us to know ourselves well. As Gramsci said, 'it is imperative at the outset [of a critical elaboration] to compile such an inventory.'[27]

By using Said's ideas as a background against which to explore hegemony in *Blood Red Gravy*, I hope I am not, as Fox[28] suggests of others, acting as one of Said's 'fellow travellers'. I am, as I have said, looking at a form of internal post-colonialism, which, I believe, shares Said's concerns.

In his discussion of Lane's 1836 book, *An account of Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, Said[29] argues that in using a variety of "special effects", Lane presents an "Orientalist" view of the Egyptians of his time. By exaggerating, Lane produces shallow Egyptians. For example, he invents over-cruel judges and licentiously religious Muslims.

I hope I do not, as Lane does, exaggerate the immigrants in *Blood Red Gravy*.

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[26] See 17, p.xxi.
[27] Gramsci in Said 1978 (see 13), p.25.
[28] Fox, R. 1992. East of Said. In: Sprinker, M. (ed) *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell, London, p.144.
[29] See 17, pp.159-62.

Mercedes is presented as exotic when she is in Jenny's classroom. However, when in the presence of her family, she wears long, plain cotton dresses and defers to her husband, Pedro. Pedro, master of his modest home, uses his poor English to his advantage when he refuses to accept Jenny's order not to kill the rooster. Generally, I tried to balance Anglo and immigrant equally, even if the Anglo has more power in the Australian setting. For example, the Anglo notices the immigrant woman is repressed; the immigrants help the fatherless Anglo boy to feel worthwhile. I also wanted the reader to assume Pedro would not be so powerful away from home. Hopefully I did not stereotype either group too badly.

However reasonably I think I might have handled the hegemony in *Blood Red Gravy*, there is, I feel, something else missing. The story does not excite me. Perhaps if I had put more of myself into it, rather than rely on my construct of Jenny, who I thought would be more interesting for Australian readers, the piece might feel less flat. In earlier stories, when I involved a South African narrator, I usually ignored my origins. Instead, I produced a pale version of a South-African Australian.

How does a bicultural writer write authentically? As Culler[30] says, 'post-colonial theory and writing has become an attempt to intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, and for intellectuals who come from post-colonial societies, to write their way back into a history others have written'. Post-colonial writers such as Salman Rushdie and J.M. Coetzee have, I believe, written themselves into their histories. Their works are passionate and they belong to a group of writers who have struck a deep chord in our post-colonial world.

Rushdie's postmodernist novel, *Midnight's Children*,[31] a Booker Prize-winner, 'draws on a vast range of Hindu, Islamic and Western, classical and modern, "serious" and "popular" traditions to produce a highly original collage.'[32] This collage is the *Bombay Talkie*, India's highly eclectic film genre, which Rushdie uses as a central metaphor in the novel. In my opinion, this device of hybridity bridges the gap between Rushdie's two worlds. Hybridity, as seen in "Calypso" cricket, a West Indian form of the game where the locals changed the rules, can be a powerful resisting force to colonialism. Rushdie belongs to the group of post-colonial writers who have left behind an ex-colony, in his case, India, to live and write in Britain.

The eclecticism that Rushdie uses so brilliantly to bridge his post-colonial gap, relates to later postmodernism, which began in the 1970s. It was 'an ever wider dispersal and dissemination of artistic practices all working out of the ruins of the modernist edifice, raiding it for ideas, plundering its vocabulary, and supplementing it

[30] See 10, p.131.
[31] Rushdie, S. 1981. *Midnight's Children*, Jonathan Cape, London.
[32] See 4, p.265.

with randomly chosen images and motifs from postmodern and non-modern cultures as well as from contemporary mass culture.'[33]

In one of his essays, Rushdie talks about the positive aspects of being a writer in exile. Rushdie[34] says that when expatriate Indian writers like himself look back, 'physical alienation from India... means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will... create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind'. Rushdie goes on to say (pp.10-12) that this fragmented world can be valuable. It has enriched his writing. For example, in *Midnight's Children*, 'the shards of memory acquired... greater resonance; ...fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols'. Exiled writers, he says, pick up on core characteristics and can therefore comment in a concrete manner on universally significant subjects. Rushdie (p.15) insists too that the community of Indian writers in England, like any other post-diaspora community, has the right 'to draw on its roots for its art'.

Unlike Rushdie, J.M. Coetzee has stayed on in a British ex-colony, in his case South Africa, which, despite having ended apartheid in 1992, still labours under many of its constructs. His novel, *Disgrace*,[35] another Booker Prize-winner, describes how a "white" professor, accustomed to the luxuries of apartheid, seduces one of his "non-white" students. Ostracised for this behaviour in the *new* South Africa, he goes on a pilgrimage to his daughter's farm. There, as a result of his daughter's rape by black itinerants and her resultant pregnancy with a half-black child, he faces South Africa's future, one where blacks will, by whatever means, re-possess their land. Coetzee and other white South African writers like Nadine Gordimer are not blindfolded to the realities of life in post-colonial South Africa.

Having discussed masters such as Said, Rushdie and Coetzee, I will return to the struggling bicultural writer. How does a writer who continues to experience, to a greater or lesser degree, twinges of culture shock, make a *personal* story universally appealing?

Soon after the Bali bombing, when Australians were still shocked and angry, I was a guest in my favourite Canberra hotel. During past visits I had stored my suitcase behind the reception desk on the mornings I departed, but this time the desk clerk refused. I tried gentle persuasion but she would not budge. 'I have a right,' she said, looking at me suspiciously, 'not to endanger myself'. I stood there, speechless, suddenly aware of my olive skin. For the first time in years, I felt like an "ethnic other".

How could I, a bicultural fiction writer, write this experience into a narrative that holds more than "ethnic" appeal? One way would be to introduce an extra hotel guest into my story. This guest could represent a different "other", such as an Aborigine. The

[33] See 4, p.265.
[34] Rushdie, S. 1991. *Imaginary Homelands*. Granta Books, London, p.10.
[35] Coetzee, J.M. 1999. *Disgrace*. Secker & Warburg, London.

story could, inter alia, explore how a particular Aborigine might react to the desk clerk's refusal. It might also involve a theme important to both South Africans and Australians, such as land rights – my characters might be attending a conference on that theme. In these ways, as well as writing myself into my story, I could universalise my experience and make my writing come alive.

سوزان باینارت

Susan Beinart was born in South Africa. She spent her first 20 years in Australia teaching migrants and refugees. Since then she has published stories and articles in literary magazines and newspapers, and is presently working on a second novel. Susan is still editing the short story discussed in this article (Blood Red Gravy). She will be satisfied when she feels her characters have come alive.

JENI ALLENBY

Symbolic Defiance:
Palestinian Costume and Embroidery Since 1948

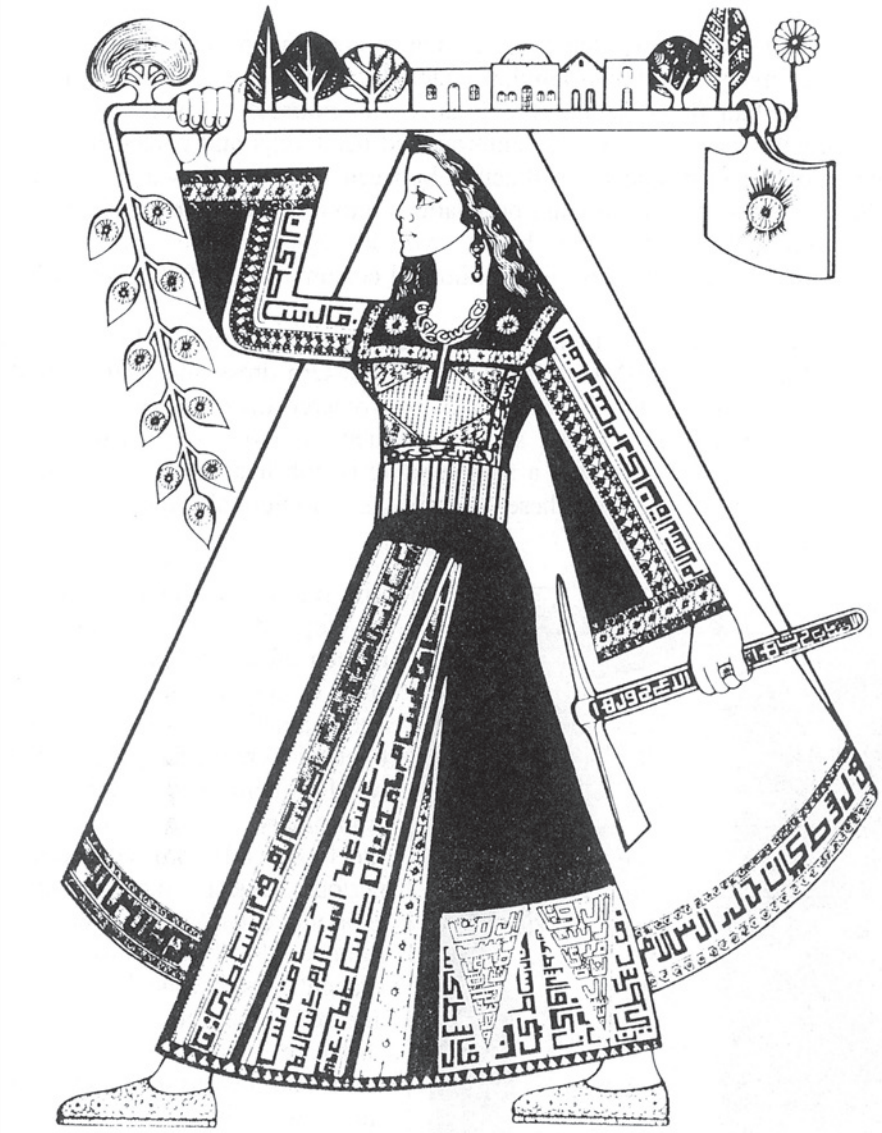
In her recent essay, *Poetry as Homeland*, American Palestinian Nathalie Handal addressed a problem faced by many Palestinians today: 'What is it to be Palestinian? Is it being born there? We weren't. Is it having lived there? We haven't. Is it having a Palestinian passport? Such a thing doesn't exist. Is it speaking Arabic? We can't really. Then why are we Palestinian?'

These same questions are repeated when we address what defines contemporary Palestinian cultural heritage. What remains of the past? What effect has nationalism played in the re-establishment of Palestinian traditions? What forms has Israeli cultural appropriation of Palestinian heritage taken, and what have the Palestinian responses to this been? What new forms of Palestinian heritage have appeared, influenced by the experiences of exile and the *diaspora*, and of Western culture on Palestinian populations in those *diaspora* communities?

These are some of the issues currently researched by the Palestine Costume Archive in Canberra, which has spent more than twenty years documenting the loss of Palestinian cultural heritage since 1948, and the revival and recreation of that heritage in both the Palestinian region and the communities of the Palestinian *diaspora*. While this research will shortly be published in *Symbolic Defiance: Palestinian Cultural Heritage in the 20th Century* (Syracuse University Press, USA), and can be found in part on the Archive's website at www.palestinecostumearchive.org, this article will focus on the art of Palestinian traditional women's costume and embroidery.

Prior to 1948, when the State of Israel was declared, 75% of Arab society in Palestine was located in over eight hundred villages, scattered from the coastal plains to the Jordan River. While costume in the urban regions historically reflected the current occupiers of the country (for example, Turkish styles during the Ottoman period, and European fashions under the British Mandate), traditional costume for village women was regionally and stylistically diverse, with great emphasis placed on ornamentation. Women's costume also contained an intricate communication system expressing the wearer's status, wealth and geographic origin by means of their style and decorative elements.

With the destruction of traditional Palestinian society in 1948, the majority of Palestine's cultural heritage ceased to exist. Costume and textile traditions were vastly changed by these events.



Traditional costume as political symbol: a PLO postcard from the 1970s showing a Palestinian woman in traditional dress with agricultural implements, symbolically supporting her village. (Palestine Costume Archive collection. Photo: Jeni Allenby.)

There is little documentation available on Palestinian costume in the 1950s, a period of great upheaval as many Palestinian families adapted to their refugee status. Palestinian women no longer had the time nor the finances to embroider luxury garments for themselves. Ornate accessories such as embroidered head veils and coined headdresses became things of the past, and the distinction between festive and everyday wear was lost. By the 1960s the moving of mass populations into refugee centres and camps had broken down the long traditions of highly evolved regional styles, and very little remained to be seen of either Palestinian traditional costume or the Palestinian weaving industry.

The styles of clothing worn today in the Palestinian Territories and in Palestinian refugee camps throughout the Middle East include Western dress and Islamic modesty dress as well as various forms of "traditional" embroidered dresses - but what is now identified as "traditional" is a much simpler garment in terms of construction and decoration, and is usually worn with a simple white cotton head veil. Although many Palestinian women now identify these dresses as "traditional" these styles only developed in the 1960s and 1970s.

The first embroidered dress style to develop after 1948 was the "6 branch dress", based on a pre 1948 style found in the Ramallah region and named after the six vertical bands of embroidery that ran from waist to hem. The spareness of the embroidery and the cheap, functional fabrics used during this period reflect the social and economic realities of occupied or refugee life. The beauty of the "6 branch" was that the design structure allowed one to embroider the "branches" to reflect one's own economic necessities: very thin if times were hard, broadening if a little more money was available for small luxuries.

"6 Branch" dresses on sale in the Old City of Jerusalem, 1987.
(Photo: Jeni Allenby.)

The '6 branch' was characterized by its primarily European embroidery patterns, including curvilinear foliage and flower designs and various double bird and mythological beast designs. Cotton was now the preferred thread for embroidery, again for economic reasons, with multicoloured shaded threads becoming very popular in the 1970s.

The second style to develop post 1948 was the *shawal*, which was originally designed for sale in refugee camp handicraft projects in the 1980s. The *shawal* was first produced in the camps in a pre-embroidered uncut form, assembled by the purchaser. Made of heavy linen with the cross stitch embroidery executed directly onto the main fabric, it was sold with a fringed shawl worked in the same manner. Embroidery placement reflected perceived Western styles, with slim bands in the front and back joined by a single band at the bottom on both front and back. Western influence was also apparent in the modified slim line of the garment and the addition of bust darts. Embroidery motifs were usually geometric, with colours often favouring shaded cottons or pastels.

Cypress trees *saru* and 'Pashar's Tent' designs were common. Although originally developed for the foreign market the *shawal* became very popular amongst young Palestinian women in Jordan and the Palestinian Territories who wore it (without the shawl) to represent an up market 'traditional' look - a sort of Palestinian *haute couture*.

Iman Irhimeh (right) wearing her mother's 1970s shawal style embroidered dress at the opening of the Palestine Costume Archive exhibitions in Museum Victoria, Melbourne, in April 2002. The Austraian artist Christine McMillan of Kandos, NSW is the other person in the photo (Photo: Haydn Washington).

Palestinian traditional costume underwent a significant revival in the late 1980s, at the time of the *intifada* uprising, when the embroidered dress became identified in the Occupied Territories as a statement of national and social consciousness.

Prior to the late 1980s the primary symbol of Palestinian nationalism was the *kaffiya* headscarf, with its distinctive checked patterning. *Kaffiya* garments even turned up during the 1970s and early 1980s as individual political statements. However, the new *intifada* linkage of traditional costume with nationalism now produced, for a limited

period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, evocative "flag" dresses featuring embroidery predominantly in the colours of the (then) banned Palestinian flag, with embroidered nationalist motifs such as the Dome of the Rock mosque, the patterns of the checked *kaffiya*, and maps of Palestine, Arabic and English calligraphy, all worked into the structure of the chest panel and vertical skirt side panels. As one woman from Beit Omar explained: 'people were being imprisoned for carrying the flag, so we women would embroider it on our [dresses] *thobs*'.

While the Palestine Costume Archive holds examples of politically embroidered dresses from the 1970s onwards (then known as "Fatah" or "PLO" dresses) these new *intifada* "flag" dresses developed stylistically from fairly simple, political designs to symbolically complex examples, utilizing not only political events but Palestinian folklore and mythology as a source of inspiration.

One dress depicts the dove of peace as the mythological phoenix rising from the ashes, the Palestinian flag carried in her mouth as coloured streamers, while another draws inspiration from a Palestinian folksong, the Jama Muel al Hawa, and is embroidered with Arabic calligraphy as well as with pre 1948 traditional patterns arranged to "protect" the dress.

In village society in the early 20th century, traditional costume and embroidery had symbolized important facets of a woman's village, family and sexual identity. Now, in the late 20th century Palestinian women adapted and reinvented cultural symbolic elements to invest traditional costume and embroidery with a new meaning specific to contemporary national discourse. At a time when Palestinian costume had almost completely fragmented as a communication devise, it again assumed an important role as an expression of national identity, of symbolic defiance without violence.

Detail of the chest panel of a 1991 *intifada* "flag" dress showing embroidered Palestinian boys with slingshots, in the colours of the Palestinian flag, designed by the Anat Workshop, Syria. (Photo: Jeni Allenby.)

Stylistic innovations in dress continued into the late 1980s and 1990s, with the production of more Western style garments, such as jackets and coats, for both the Western and home markets. Embroidered dresses were now often worn with thin belts (sometimes leather or plastic, sometimes embroidered - a style originally made in the refugee camp projects for sale), often now tied across the lower part of the embroidered chest

panel. Pre 1948 dresses were worn only by older women still living in the Palestinian Territories on (increasingly rare) festive occasions. Meanwhile, within the new design structure of the "6 branch" or the *shawal*, modern interpretations of pre 1948 styles - such as the Bethlehem "royal" dress began to appear, with cheap velour and lurex thread replacing the luxury fabrics and intricate metallic and silk floss couching of the past. Some refugee embroidery projects, such as the Family Care Society in Amman, began offering a service to "replicate" surviving traditional (pre 1948) garments 'to keep Palestinian costume lively and vibrant [maintaining] a bright image for present and future generations' as well as offering 'modernized dresses...that carry the Palestinian characteristics in the form and shape of the motifs as well as the patterns.' The message now being communicated through the language of contemporary Palestinian costume is that we must not forget the past, but equally we must move forward in terms of design and culture.

The other important cause of the revival in traditional costume and embroidery was the establishment of embroidery projects in the Palestinian region. Embroidery projects set up to assist Palestinian refugee women with income and promote traditional Palestinian culture appeared as early as the 1950s. Most, however, were established in the mid 1980s, when the need for such projects was finally recognised by the international aid community. In the words of one young woman from the UNRWA *Sulafa* Embroidery Project in Gaza: '[although] we no longer embroider in the style of our towns, we embroider for our houses and for our work. We embroider cushions, clocks and maps of Palestine. Embroidery is our heritage. We love embroidery... and we are proud of it.'

Deaf Palestinian refugees embroidering furniture covers at the Palestine Red Crescent Society's Al Amal Rehabilitation Centre embroidery project, Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, 2000. (Photo: Jeni Allenby.)

The fact that these projects produced items designed specifically for sale on the Western markets meant that their products were therefore not bound by the "traditional" rules of decoration or style that formally created the language of Palestinian dress. Palestinian embroidery from the 1980s therefore began to develop for the first time as a significant cultural form separate to Palestinian costume.

The original product produced by all the embroidery projects from the 1980s onwards

was the square embroidered cushion, in small and "jumbo" (floor cushion) sizes, their surface completely covered with intricate (silk or cotton) multicoloured cross stitch. Their design was inspired by pre 1948 Hebron bridal trousseau rectangular cushions, with their new square shape thought to attract Western buyers. Unfortunately the late 20th century Western market was flooded with cheap embroidery from India and South America which made it difficult for these luxury products to acquire an international market. As a result many refugee projects began to design new products that featured less embroidery (thus reducing production time and costs) while maintaining a distinctive "Palestinian" and "Middle Eastern" feel.

Each embroidery project has over time developed certain stylistic characteristics. For example, Christian imagery, such as stars, mangers and Christmas trees, are common design on products from aid agencies such as *Sunbula* (formally Craft Aid) which has United Kingdom church funding, while several projects maintain a reputation for more traditional styles, such as *Al Badia* refugee project in Lebanon, renowned for their high quality cross stitch in silk thread featuring traditional designs. Many of the projects are currently producing dolls dressed in the more famous regional styles of Palestine (such as Bethlehem and Ramallah) which has become an excellent way of transmitting accurate costume details and cultural iconography to the next generation.

It is important to remember that many of the items made for sale by these projects were purely designed for foreign sale and possessed no Palestinian traditional cultural content at all. Nevertheless Palestinian women have utilized the projects to produce evocative embroideries that reflected the dreams and realities of contemporary Palestinian life.

Detail of "Palestinian Wedding" embroidery panel, The ANAT Workshop, Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Syria. (Palestine Costume Archive collection, photo: Jeni Allenby.)

Over the last twenty years a series of embroidered narrative panels have appeared, culminating in a series of embroidered panels designed in response to the *intifada*, which stand as extraordinarily evocative statements of Palestinian nationalism and cultural expression. The first of these was the Palestinian Wedding panel, designed in the 1980s. It is now sold by many Palestinian refugee camp projects (many of whom also claim ownership of the original design) and is extremely popular with Palestinians in the *diaspora*. What makes this panel particularly interesting is its depiction of the most important of all pre 1948 Palestinian ceremonies - the wedding. It shows several different parts of the celebrations, thus presenting the purchaser (whether a foreign buyer or a Palestinian from the international *diaspora*) with an evocative series of re-imaged scenes from village life, now so central a signifier in Palestinian nationalism.

By the time of the *intifada* these narrative panels had become complex and inspirational in their design. In one of these, designed by the Anat Workshop (Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Syria), the Biblical tale of David and Goliath takes on a subtle Palestinian twist, as a Palestinian youth fights against two large mythological beasts, with embroidered calligraphy reading 'honour to the *intifada*'. In another, the dove of peace is shown in the Jaffa orange tree, carrying the Palestinian flag (the designer chose the Jaffa orange tree, rather than the traditional olive tree of peace, because of Israel's cultural appropriation of this important Palestinian symbol). The roots of the tree contain a poem by Palestinian poet Abu Salma: 'Oh, Palestine, nothing is more precious, more beautiful and more pure than you. The more I fight for you the more I love you.' The orange tree is defended by the Palestinian people, the women in traditional dress carrying stones to the young fighters, who kneel with their sling shots. Beneath the embroidery a single blue bead protects the Palestinian people from evil.

In perhaps the most important narrative panel, "The Martyr", a contemporary Palestinian funeral is embroidered in an almost Egyptian structure, re-imaged in the pre 1948 traditional village life style.

The grieving family walk behind the bier (the grandfather carrying the tools of his trade - carpenter - showing how once Palestinian men were employed) while allegorical figures (in traditional dress representing the Palestinian people and bearing images of the Jaffa orange tree and the key to the lost homes of Palestine) lead the Palestinian dead home from exile (*see image next page*). Thus has an unbearable contemporary reality been embroidered and transfigured into an evocative memory of cultural loss.

Embroidered products have become an important item for contemporary Palestinians. Of those who moved away from the Palestinian region, most continue to preserve their national identity and identify with their original towns or villages. Perhaps the most important visual key they have, in maintaining that separate identity and creating an enduring culturally recognisable symbol, is Palestinian traditional dress and

embroidery. Whether bought from refugee camp projects, or embroidered by relatives, embroidered products hold pride of place in homes worldwide, with Palestinian costume and embroidery also now featuring in the works of modern Palestinian poets, artists and writers.

Detail from "The Martyr" embroidered panel, featuring allegorical figures holding symbols of lost Palestine. Designed by the ANAT Workshop, Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Syria. (Photo: Jeni Allenby.)

While Palestinian costume and embroidery today may feature none of the former material wealth and complexity of ornamentation, in no sense are contemporary costumes or modern embroideries inferior to historical, pre 1948 examples (although this view is still held by Western museums that refuse to acquire them). No traditional costume tradition is ever completely static, and through its ornamentation and design Palestinian costume has always reflected the social and economic situations of the times. In the current revival of Palestinian cultural heritage - in the works of Palestinian artists and writers and the evocative embroideries of Palestinian women worldwide - a lost cultural identity has been re-imagined, and a lost cultural language redefined.

Acknowledgments

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The Palestine Costume Archive

The Palestine Costume Archive was established for safety in Canberra in the early 1980s after the loss of the PLO and PRCS's cultural collections in Tunis and Beirut. The Archive preserves and promotes Palestinian and Middle Eastern cultural heritage via long term research projects, a museum quality worldwide travelling exhibition program, and in depth educational/public programs. Exhibitions in 2003/4 include Mainz (Germany), Canberra, New Zealand, Seattle (USA), Anchorage (USA), Bathurst and Noosa. For research inquiries, donations, further information about Palestinian refugee camp embroidery projects and their products, Archive publications, details of the Archive's Friends program or forthcoming exhibitions and educational/public programs, please contact:

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جيني ألينبي

Jeni Allenby is the Director of the Palestine Costume Archives. She is formally a curator at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Jeni Allenby is an internationally acknowledged expert of Palestinian and Middle Eastern cultural heritage. She recently presented papers at the First World Congress of Middle Eastern Studies (Mainz, Germany), the 8th Symposium of the Textile Society of America and MESA 2003 (Middle East Studies Association of North America, USA). Her forthcoming publications include *Palestinian Embroidery* (Interlink Books, USA), *Palestinian Costume and Embroidery since 1948* (Brill Academic Publications, The Netherlands) and *Symbolic Defiance: Palestinian Cultural Heritage in the 20th Century* (Syracuse University Press, USA), with forthcoming articles in Khilat: *Dress and Textiles in the Islamic World* (Peeters, Leeuven: The Netherlands) and Embroidery (London).

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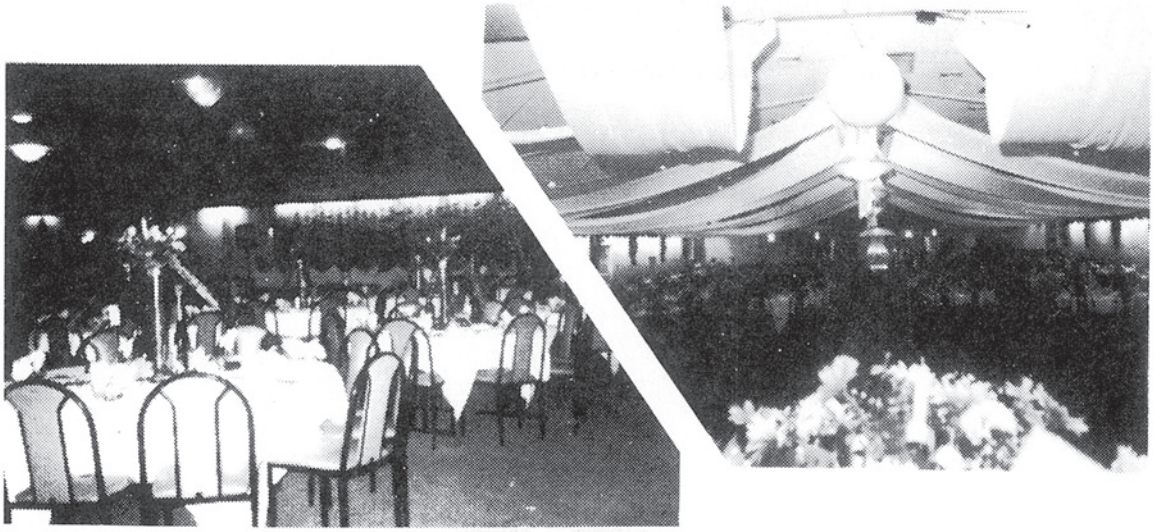

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ASTRA WARREN

Governess in the Bush

My first venture alone into West Australian outback territory found me, teeth gritted, nursing my car along an unsealed station road. Rattling bodywork and vibrating windows protested against the ruts and corrugations. I had undergone a virtual interrogation at the last roadhouse: who was I, where was I going, how long had I been on the road. To my suburban mind, it had been an invasion of privacy.

At last I crossed the final grid[1] into the station yard. To my surprise, a group was standing ready to welcome me; mother, the children I had come to teach, and dogs.

'We knew you were on your way. The roadhouse rang and said you had passed through, so we would have come to find you if you hadn't arrived in reasonable time.' It was an introduction to the raft of differences that still exist in Australia between town and country. Knowing everybody's business is not prying, rather a network of care, an essential safety precaution in remote areas where there is real and daily danger of accident or breakdown. In the intense silences, you listen for the plane going over or learn to recognize the distinctive engine sound of different vehicles in the distance. Police often rely on locals to help find criminals. There is less chance of hiding in the outback than in a suburban crowd.

Since that first time of discovering the inadequacies of a modern car on outback roads, I have travelled by varied means: light plane, mail truck, local bus and even once by mail plane, but nothing conquers the awesome feel of vast distances, the sense of time warp back into the pioneering past, beyond contemporary concerns.

Communications are slowly moving into the modern age, with satellite TV, modems and fax, but the telephone is still lifeline, support system and news network. Answering a 'phone call has its own protocol, apart from social chat. Essential information to be passed on first includes weather conditions, precise rainfall (if any), temperature, where everybody else is, what they are doing, and estimated time of return. These are the important things. A governess, often alone with children in the homestead, also needs to know vehicle call signs and emergency channels and how to use them. Most vehicles, including motor bikes, now have radios.

The job is far removed from the romantic world of a Jane Eyre.[2] In outback Australia,

[1] Grid: a grating of metal bars laid over a trench across the road, designed to prevent animals from straying, in lieu of a gate.

[2] Jane Eyre: demure, ladylike heroine of Charlotte Bronte's novel about a governess.

Australia, sophisticated suburban skills rate very low. For instance, I can't drive a truck, ride a horse or motor bike, clear a blocked drain, climb a windmill[3] or start an apparently lifeless motor. But any station wife can, and if she has to cope with emergencies, somebody has to move into her abandoned domestic chores: meals to prepare, washing to hang out, a sinkful of dishes to wash.

The household has to be kept running. There are no demarcation lines over rights and duties. You help out today, and support will be there when you need it. Your wants diminish in importance: there are animals whose welfare is more urgent than yours. It is essential to have a degree of mental and physical toughness. In a small interdependent community, no-one can afford to be a whinging burden.

There is a new perspective on daily life. Water does not appear in the pipes by magic. It relies on wind to turn the mill which fills the gravity tank, and on a windless day water must be used sparingly. Electricity depends on a generator which is costly in fuel and maintenance, so it is turned off at night. After that, you're on your own with a torch and, most likely, an outside toilet. Many stations now have storage batteries for 24-hour power, but there are traps for the unwary. Some appliances draw heavily on power; woe betide those who deplete the storage unnecessarily.

The hot water system is often DIY;[4] a 44-gallon drum out in the open, lying on its side with space underneath to feed a fire with old fence posts. It is amazingly efficient in spite of the Heath Robinson[5] tangle of soot-encrusted pipes. You rediscover all your childhood's firelighting skills, especially on the occasional wet day when, cold and bedraggled, everybody is waiting for a hot shower.

You realize that the creatures around regard you as an alien invader in their established territory.

Take the frogs in the loo,[6] for instance.

They cling to the bathroom walls like patterns on trendy wallpaper, and pop up the plughole just as you lean over to spit frothy toothpaste. At night, they squat on the toilet rim while their mates perform water aerobics down the U-bend. It is advisable to flush BEFORE sitting down. But fair go! For them, it is the only accessible water in an arid climate. If you really can't face them, there are thousands of empty hectares out there that you can use.

There may be occasional snakes or centipedes, certainly mosquitoes and sandflies, but to spray and kill everything that moves makes us guilty of the ecological vandalism we are so quick to condemn.

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[3] Windmill: wind activated pump to raise underground water to the surface.
[4] DIY: 'do it yourself', i.e. home made.
[5] Heath Robinson: English inventor noted for his convoluted machinery.
[6] Loo: (colloquial) toilet.

One day, a young tree lizard darted across the verandah and under my bedroom door. After fruitlessly turning the room upside down, the only place he could be was down a crack between the wall and the flagstone floor. He often came out to bask in afternoon sun, but we were able to live in peaceful co-habitation. With so many negatives, one might wonder what holds people there or lures them back. But here is the Australia captured by bush poets: McKellar's "land of sweeping plains" and Paterson's[7] "white stars fairly blaze / At midnight in the cold and frosty sky".

There is a clean wind blowing from an unencumbered 360 degree horizon, and a silence so total it presses on the ear.

Above all, there is a freedom and satisfaction in measuring life by simple values which are almost an anachronism in today's materialistic society; an essential mateship of honesty, personal worth, and humour.

أسترا وارِن

Astra Warren is an Australian writer who lives in Western Australia.

[7] Dorothea McKellar, A.B. Paterson: Australian poets famous for their evocation of the landscape.

KENNEDY ESTEPHAN

Return to Sender-
A Lebanese Tune

After three hours of flying over deserts, vistas of green landscapes begin to filter through the plane window. My heart thumps as, in time, I identify the cedar forest, the *Qadisha* gorge, and the clump of brick roofs that is my village. The plane cruises west for a few more miles, swerves south over the Mediterranean, then touches down in a minute or so. My wife and I sigh in relief; it has been such a long trip from Sydney. Seatbelts click open, travel bags are hoisted. Every one is lining up and ready to move out. Beirut, here we come.

The airport has been thoroughly renovated since my last visit back in '98. There are no posters of politicians studding the walls, no porters rushing to carry your bags and earn their *baksheesh*. Outside, the air is thick with the beeps of a thousand horns. The family greets us: kisses, hugs, tearful eyes. We get into the car, exit the highway and take a shortcut that runs through the city's southern suburbs.

Cars, trucks, scooters, all beeping and cutting and bypassing. Amidst the rapid flux of images, a teenager driving a scooter single-handedly, his free hand precariously holding an aluminum pole like a huge lance. I am sitting in the passenger's seat, my feet pressed forward as if to push back the traffic coming from every direction. For what feels like eternity, and tens of gasps and shrieks later, we reach *Bsebah*, a hilly suburb on the south-eastern outskirts of Beirut. It is late afternoon and the main power is cut off. The staircase leading to the second-storey flat is windowless and dark like a tomb. I miss a step, the suitcase bumps against a tile, and the handle snaps instantly. One hundred and fifty dollars down the drain. And right there, amidst the echo of footsteps, I can almost hear a distant hum: *Welcome to Beirut.*

Early morning. I stare through the kitchen window at the surrounding hills. Blocks of flats invade pine forests like a malignant tumour. Thousands of years ago, ancient ancestors also felled forests for monetary gain. Indeed, the Phoenician blood is alive and kicking.

In the evening, a relative comes to visit. We sit on the balcony and he puffs on his cigarette. A hissing 66,000-volt pylon towers above us.

'I've heard you had a book published,' he says.

'A story, really.'

'How much did you get for it?'

'A hundred.'

'Dollars?' His disappointment is not quite concealed.

'Australian.'

'Ummm.'

Suddenly, the power is cut off. The fan shudders to a halt, the fridge stops droning. Darkness everywhere. Only the glowing butt of my relative's cigarette, and the high-voltage pylon which I realise, with a dread, is still hissing.

'A blackout,' he says redundantly. After a brief pause he adds: 'There's a good flat for sale. Sixty thousand dollars. It's worth at least a hundred, but the owner is broke. Perhaps we can drop the price to fifty.'

As unexpectedly as the power went off, it returns. The fan whirs back to life. Noise returns from the fridge, from the neighbour's TV.

'A good offer,' my guest adds casually. 'Cash, of course.'

'How do you like your coffee?' I finally ask.

There is noise wherever one goes in Beirut: beeping horns, rattling jackhammers, the shriek of engines sucking water up to the top floors. Noise. And dust. From demolition, from construction, from recently cut highways. In some alleys, in the middle of a gridlock, the air is so thick with pollutants my eyes sting.

At The Martyr's Square, it is like stepping into the eye of a hurricane: wide streets, orderly traffic, open spaces. All quiet and peaceful. No barricades or mines, no rattles or thuds, nothing to remind the beholder that this indeed was a front line, a notorious killing zone that had sliced Beirut into two for more than fifteen years.

Some of the restored buildings easily catch the eye: St. George's Cathedral with its baroque facades and arched pathways; El-Omari mosque with its towering minaret and little snow-white domes; St. Elias Orthodox Church whose central dome and compact vaults speak of a Byzantine heritage; and the Ottoman Serail with its small arched windows and railed balconies which, I am told, now houses government offices. A litany of cultures. And there, at the northern tip of the square, Roman ruins recently uncovered. Though they could easily have been Persian, Phoenician, Canaanite.

In West Beirut, we pull over in a private carpark outside the American University Hospital. The man in charge is in his mid twenties, with a round face and a beer belly. He is yelling his instructions at his clients in a sing-song fashion. *'BMW, habibi, (my love) keep reversing; when you bump into the car behind you, you'll know all right. And you Renault, habibi, don't worry about your old car; the coming Prime Minister will buy you a new one. And you, Mercedes, habibi, (Now he is looking at our taxi driver) leave the keys in the car, just to preserve the ecology.'*

At first I am perplexed by the whole repertoire, its shattered logic. But soon I realise that this sort of monologue is common around here, a Beirutis way of dealing with the drama of everyday living.

I pay the man for one-hour parking, but return in two.

'You're late.' He looks at me.

'Just to preserve the ecology, habibi.' I smile. Okay, I am beginning to enjoy the logic around here.

The taxi driver, till then waiting for us in the carpark, is in a controlled state of panic. He is throwing his hands in the air.

'What's wrong?' I ask.

'You're late. Didn't I tell you?'

'Tell us what?'

'I can't drive at night. Too much glare. I'm almost eighty. Remember?'

'So?'

He is quiet. He is thinking. I do not like the way he is staring at me.

It is dusk when I start the engine and release the handbrake. The old Mercedes lurches and heaves in the dense traffic, horns and beamlights attacking me from every direction. The car's owner is sitting in the passenger's seat. He is as stiff as a log, and I can almost read his thoughts. *Will I survive this?* Somehow, I drive my way back to the hilly suburb. My wife, who has been sitting at the back, pays the old man a bonus for the extra wait and wishes him a safe return to his place. For a minute we are both worried. Luckily, he lives just around the corner!

Two days later, my brother-in-law arrives in Beirut and drives us up to our village. Slowly, the Daewoo weaves its way up the twisted roads, gaining height. It is election time, and posters of men running for the parliament meet us at every corner: beaming faces, poetic blurbs, all the promises in the world. At the main street in *Amioon*, a coastal town in the North, there exists a traffic light. Drivers obey it!

An hour later the arid heights of Mount Lebanon Range surround us, their shoulders cascading down in a maze of apple and oak and poplar trees. Along the way we drive past late-model Land Rovers, also past rusty Renaults which are anything but roadworthy. Near *Bka'kafra*, the birthplace of St. Charbel, a boy no older than twelve is driving. The car is roofless and frameless. All that is left is a chassis, a steering wheel, and a rusty engine at the back which reveals its VW parentage.

We arrive at the village. From our balcony I stare at the *Qadisha* gorge, the same gorge I looked down at from the plane's window. Rugged limestone cliffs, balding bluffs. The distant roar of waterfalls, the not-so-urgent bark of a bored dog. There is something about the landscape which I cannot define; that same element which, I know, had inspired Khalil Gibran to write his books, and prompted many monks and hermits to turn their backs on the world and inhabit its caves and monasteries. My eyes are momentarily drawn to a grey mass of wild pigeons disappearing into a crevice. At this moment, something wonderful happens. I breathe.

Next morning, I walk to the village supermarket. A hundred-metre stretch. On my

way there I come across some old friends. Unemployment, skyrocketing prices, the lack of any future - all their worries. An hour later, when I finally reach my destination, I forget what I set out to buy in the first place.

Election is a big event in Lebanon. *In Beirut alone*, a high-ranking official admitted not-so-happily, *the amount of money spent on buying votes is equivalent to the budget allocated to a U.S. election campaign.* Hundreds of millions of dollars! Good for the economy, my guess. On election day, up in the village, an army regiment arrives in armoured vehicles and bivouacs in the main square. They are here to nip any trouble in the bud, but there is none. Soon the military posture devolves into a relaxed trudge, their dangling RPGs, M16s harmless sticks for all they matter, and the soldiers slip into a common pastime: watching one another.

In the village's main Internet cafe (there are more than three of them), people surf the net, irc (live chat), and talk to one another in a repertoire of tongues: English, French, Arabic, Spanish. Some are tourists, but the majority are the sons and daughters of the village emigrants. They have come here to visit the land of their ancestors and, for some perhaps, find a future husband or wife in the process. Economic crisis, social problems - many of the country's youth will do anything to secure an overseas visa. Plenty of 'good catches' around, or so they tell me.

This is my last afternoon in Lebanon. My mother is anxious, her eyes are misting already. Soon, mine will too. As if to escape a thought, I walk out of the house and climb up the rampart of red earth across the carpark.

Beetles shrill. A collared lizard emerges from a bush of thorns and stares sideways at me. I face west and look down at the jungle of buildings that is Beirut. The ugly memories of war, the warm memories of teenage years. Sometimes I wonder how I should regard this ancient city. Is it through the eyes of the Lebanese that I was, the Australian that I have become? Or is it through the eyes of the emigrant, the man with one foot in each world?

Perhaps Beirut will always remain a melting pot of paradoxes - of wealth and poverty, of fundamentalism and gaiety. This is the city which cannot provide its youth with jobs, yet employs hundreds of thousands from the middle east, south-east Asia and eastern Europe. The city where a taxi driver will try to charge you fifty American dollars for a twenty-minute drive, though, of course, you can haggle the fare down to ten. The same corner of the world where you can randomly pick a person down the alley, ask her about the whereabouts of a pharmacy, and this kind young woman, who also happens to be from across the religious divide (In Beirut, accents are often a tell-tale sign), will walk ten minutes out of her way to get you there, then top it all with a good-natured smile. The city of the utterly narcissistic and the genuinely selfless. A million stories here, stirring in this microscopic strip of land.

Perhaps one day I will understand Beirut. Or perhaps my vision of the city will

always be hazy, much like it is now, courtesy of that grey smog hanging over it like an amorphous shroud. From the southern tip, somewhere near the airport, a muezzin chants his prayers. His voice is sonorous and God-fearing even to my untutored ears. From my half of the city I wait for the toll of church bells to answer the call, but they remain silent.

I look up at the sky. A half moon is overhead, sliced by the cables of the high-voltage pylon. No hissing today. It is as if Beirut has decided to farewell me in the best way it can. *I am not that bad, you see.* Ninety degrees to the west, a crimson tunnel stretches across the Mediterranean and joins the airport to the setting sun. A plane is taking off. It has just crossed that tunnel of light. Tomorrow afternoon, I know I will have to cross it too.

The sunsets, stars begin to crystallise. There are patterns and shapes in the night sky, but I cannot identify any. No comfort up there! Then I look south, at the curved tail of Scorpio. Antares, the red star, stares back at me. It is low in the sky, almost grazing the horizon. Suddenly I stand on tiptoe and crane my neck. As if by this simple act I can see beyond the horizon, can glimpse what lies beyond the planet's curvature. A silly thing to do, I know, but a feeling has taken hold of me. Just like that.

And I am suddenly aching for that Southern Cross...

كنيدي إسطفان

Kennedy Estephan is a writer of Lebanese origins. A graduate of science from the American University of Beirut, he obtained a Diploma in Education from UNSW. He lives in Sydney, Australia and works in teaching.

OUDAY JOUNI

The Last Night with a Temperamental Lover

One year passed since an aeroplane curled me inside "her womb" to deliver me back home, a new labour- a rebirth.

On the same day as today, one year ago, I left Sydney, the forsaken and forsaking lover, or as I used to call her: The Temperamental Lady of the World Down Under.

At this very minute, I am sitting and there is a candle illuminating the deeply hidden faces of memory, with their sorrow and joy, disappointments and accomplishments, grievance and excitement, love and hatred. It is the journey back to the other side of the womb: The Unknown.

With every flickering flame of the candle, a name comes out of the dark shadows: The Rocks, The Opera House, Saiid, Hussein, *Kalimat*, Boronia Road, and many numbers like the post codes I used to write when addressing my letters. Every number and every letter is a story, a repeated game of birth and death. Only the eyes are clear in the fragments of wax molten on the table, drawing faceless pictures, yet I can recognize the faces by names I call them by, no matter how the names are different from reality. They smile and sleep. *This is Sydney, it always sleeps smiling...*

A Saturday afternoon, the train is swinging stuck to its iron shoes, chained to one destiny. *I am the train...All of us are trains, but with fleshy shoes.* The weekend paper is folded in my hand. The front page in its game of words reads all what is thought to be said, however nothing is yet said. There is something between the lines: *Sydney never says all things at once.*

In one of the cafés in Circular Quay, the newspaper is unfolded. My coffee and my cigarette are mating: *How are you mate? Have you got a lighter?* I raise my head. A round face with blue eyes is staring at me. The flickering of the lighter mates with the candle. It is a *re-creation. The first fire of Man is still burning in the shadow of the place.*

Painted with bizarre colours from head to toe and carrying a torch, a man, or probably a woman- I think it is a woman, is standing like the Statue of Liberty. How funny you are Sydney! The only Statue of Liberty, in flesh and blood, is in Sydney. Have you ever seen the Statue of Liberty begging to live? You are right Sydney: who says that Liberty is not begging for life. *I hope the Americans do understand the Statue of Liberty in Sydney...Made in Australia...Oi Oi Oi.*

No one can be a statue of Liberty better than a woman from Sydney. Her eyes are

narrow and deep, her face is round with middle-eastern features, her hair smells like those wild flowers in the Heights of Yorkshire where the spirits of Catherine and Heathcliff are still roaming the moors. An earring and a tattoo mark the beauty of a meaningful smile of Keats, Wordsworth, Starter and certainly of Judith Wright. *This is the real globalisation... A smile.*

On the way back home on board the same old train, I lay my head against the window. The eucalyptus trees are walking. A magpie, wearing its regular tuxedo, is preparing himself for an evening formal party held by an aboriginal tribe in Macquarie Port. A kid about ten years old is shouting at his mother: 'Leave me alone... I want my ball back.' The bars of chocolate have ruined his teeth but not his smile. His small eyes are bathed with drops of overwhelming innocence. 'I want my ball back.' Even the children in Sydney smile with their tears cornered in the eyes. *The ball is round like our earth. You are right boy! We all want our ball back...*

'The next station is Bankstown,' the train driver deafens the carriage with his coarse voice as he speaks with a different accent. The flapped "R" is as clear as those said by La Mancha in *Don Quixote*. In Bankstown station, it is still 8 p.m. and the air is so lousy and tired while the station is breathing hard to push those people in and out. Two policemen are standing under the bridge. 'They are looking for a young man about 18 years old. They said that he is of middle-eastern appearance.' An old lady whispered in her husband's ears.

This is the other side of Sydney. But this is not Sydney who is talking. Someone else is pretending to be Sydney. For sure, it is a politician.

The streets are half dimmed. The pigeons of the Old Plaza have gone to sleep. The winter is coming quickly this year. What a good idea! A glass of wine would help a lot. There is a bar very close to the bus stop. I should be careful to catch the bus to Greenacre, otherwise I have to go back home on foot.

At a table, and a glass of wine in my right hand, I am listening to a half-drunk man sitting at the next table on the left: 'The Broncos will win the League...It is determined.' Another man at another table on the right, looks more educated than the first one, but he is a little bit more depressed: 'I don't know what to do mate. The mortgage is eating half of my wages... The government benefit is only a trap for the elections. Both parties are the same.' His mate at the same table is well-dressed. His voice resembles those actors who play in the drama series *On the Way Home*: 'Yea, you are right mate. I work in a bank and know exactly what you mean. But, no body can buy a house without a mortgage nowadays.'

It is a quarter past nine. Here is the bus going to Greenacre. Just on time. The bus is creeping on the road. The little drops of rain are dancing on the roof. John Donne is reading *Farwell Ungrateful Traitor*.

Back home, the smell of my packed bags dominates everything. A long night was that night I lived one year ago. *How strange you are Sydney! Everything now is like*

yesterday.

The candle is exhausted, the flame is fading away…

Ladies and Gentlemen. I am the captain of 321 flight going to Dubai… I wish you a happy journey.

The plane is soaring higher and higher, but I can still see the smiling face of Sydney.

The fireworks gleam the Harbour Bridge with a smiling face

'Yes Sir, how can I help you?' A beautiful attendant asks me.

Taken by surprise, my voice is baffled by something stinging my throat: 'Will you help me get my ball back, please…'

عدي جوني

Ouday Jouni is a Syrian journalist/writer/poet who currently works in Tehran, Iran. He spent a few years in Australia working for the Arabic press. He was an adviser to *Kalimat*.

ANDREW McKENNA

The Beatification of Malik al-Fulani

The day he shot the helicopter down, Malik al-Fulani was sniping at angels. It had been a season of strange events. The *sharqui* had rarely let up over the past months. Some days the sun disappeared for hours; for one week Malik and Zainab hardly saw it at all and the roosters never ceased crowing, thinking it was perpetually dawn. Two date palms outside his courtyard came crashing down under the immense weight of their shawl of red dust from the southern desert.

In his heart Malik heard hyenas howling outside the village, a rare event, as hyenas had not been heard for years in those parts. And other noises came to him through the wind; the roaring of a thousand savage beasts over the hills; a strange metallic clanging as of hundreds of blacksmiths working their forges. He could put no names to any of it. Malik began to think a chasm had opened in the earth and the creatures of hell had climbed out, as if Iblis himself were abroad, prowling the fields.

Even stranger were the shapes that drifted through the desert dust; ill-defined creatures shambling over the horizon on foot, vehicles that you just caught sight of before they melted into the wind. Cutting barley in his fields, he saw them out of the corner of his eye and the hair stood up on his neck.

The morning of the day he shot the helicopter down his wife told him; 'If they come here, we will resist. We will resist even to the dead in the cemeteries. They will rise up and help us repel them. They will help us throw the invaders back into the sea.'

The first calls of the muezzin floated in to them from the other side of town. He looked at her sharply and said; 'Don't talk such foolishness. The dead will not rise up.'

'They will,' she told him. 'And what's more I have told the world.'

'What?'

'When I was in the village last week a foreign news crew was in the street talking to people. They put a microphone before me and asked me how I felt. I grew angry, Allah forgive me. I told the foreigners that's what would happen. That the dead would rise up.'

Malik considered Zainab's words carefully and after morning prayers he climbed into the attic where he kept his rifle. He found it there wrapped in an old towel, as he had left it three years earlier, and he sat down in the dim, musty air of the attic. It was already growing hot and

the wind whistled and he knew he had work to do outside, but this was urgent. If Zainab had spoken a week ago there was now no time to lose.

He pulled the rifle to pieces. It came apart easily with a few dry clicks. He always oiled it after he used it and, although in the dust-dry space above their house even the oil had dried and congealed, the gunmetal was still in good condition.

He polished and oiled each piece meticulously with a soft green cloth, holding a magnifying glass to each one, considering it with great care. He hummed quietly as he worked. He reassembled the weapon and held the comforting weight of it in his arms. Then he took his box of cartridges from a shelf. It was a wooden box his grandfather had used in the campaign against the British, and the smooth weight of it in his hand gave him courage. He counted the cartridges (he had one hundred and seventy-three, which he took as a good omen), and climbed back down the ladder.

Zainab had already left for her work in the village, and he shouldered his rifle and shovel, took his canvas bag with his midday meal, put the box of cartridges in it, filled a bottle of water and left.

The day was clear. The wind he heard in his attic had dropped and the air brought the foretaste of summer with it. Two small clouds shaped like pigeons drifted overhead, and that, too, Malik al-Fulani saw as a good omen.

He walked down the path outside the mud walls of the village, keeping to the shade of the palm trees growing on the edge of the fields. Puffs of red dust rose with each footfall and stained the hem of his djellaba. When he reached his fields, he sat down at the side of the road. The sweet smell of mown barley floated to him as he loaded the rifle, the cartridges clicking into place reassuringly.

Just as he had finished packing the ammunition box back into its bag, and thinking about his son and daughter, his friend Ja'far rounded the crest of the Hill of Ajeeb. Ja'far sold coffee to the morning worshippers at the mosque, and the baskets on his donkey's back clinked and tinkled with canisters and porcelain cups. Malik watched Ja'far approaching and laid his rifle on the ground.

He had known Ja'far for more than thirty years, but all the same these were bad times and Malik felt he had to be careful about what he said, even to friends.

'Good morning,' said Malik.

'Peace be upon you,' Ja'far said, his face covered in sweat.

'You've had a good morning?' Malik enquired.

'As may be expected. Many people are staying at home.' He waved his arm vaguely to the south. 'What with everything that's happening.'

Ja'far tied his donkey to a stump and sat in the shade beside Malik. His chest was damp with sweat and his sandals were smothered in red dust.

'What's the rifle for, Malik?' he asked. 'Are you going to throw out the invader single handed?'

Malik was quiet for a few moments,

then he said; 'Could I have a cup of your fine coffee?'

Ja'far sighed, stood, and rummaged through the baskets. He poured two cups of thick black liquid from a dented steel thermos and settled himself back beside his friend.

'Aaah,' he said, smelling the coffee.

'Evil is descending on our country,' Malik said, gazing up the road.

Ja'far shrugged. 'Evil has always been with us,' he said. 'It all depends whether you can cheat it or not.'

'My wife is creating difficulties.'

Ja'far laughed and sipped his coffee. 'And when does that not happen?' he said.

Malik told Ja'far what his wife had told him that morning. As he spoke two ravens landed just up the road from them and stood panting in the sun. Malik took that as a bad omen. They were of a shiny blackness and they sucked in the daylight around them.

'You see what I mean,' Malik said when he had finished explaining what Zainab had said.

Ja'far was quiet for a few moments, watching the ravens.

'They are ugly birds,' said Malik.

'If Allah made them man can find a use for them,' Ja'far said. Malik snorted and sipped his coffee.

'And what do you propose to do about it?' Ja'far asked at last.

'I have my rifle. I will do only what I can.'

'You know, everything that happened three years ago was decreed by Allah.'

'I am not sure of that even now,' Malik said.

'Trust in Allah,' said Ja'far.

'But tether your camel first,' Malik said quietly, and he put his hand on the butt of his rifle.

Ja'far spat, tipped the dregs of his coffee out in the dust and stood.

'Here, my cup,' Malik said, holding it up, squinting into the sun.

'Keep it,' said Ja'far. 'We have not had this conversation. I have not seen you this morning. I would have been better off to have passed you by and continued on my way unmolested. Now I have a heavy heart. You bring down something terrible on your head.'

He untied his donkey, slapped it on the rump and walked off up the road.

Malik sat for half an hour in the shade of the palms, watching the ravens hop back and forth, scratching in the dust. They had been a scourge over the past year in his barley and sesame fields, and he had poisoned many of them.

The boy had been in love with his half sister from their earliest days. As children Malik tried to stop it. He told himself they would stop, that they were young and foolish. But as they grew up they lay together, and to his unending grief he had discovered them.

'Allah has forbidden such outrages,' he screamed at the boy. 'And man has condemned them.'

He was a handsome youth, only eighteen, good at his studies, a career in medicine before him. But when Malik argued with him, he just laughed.

'We will be dishonoured forever!'

Malik told him.

But their passion for each other knew no boundaries. Their souls yielded to the prompting of Iblis.

Life is a dream. When we die we wake. What had followed was like a terrible dream, yet Malik was still waiting to be woken. They were the vilest of bad dreams congregating inside his head every night, the horrors of hell crawling up to peck his flesh, for what he had seen and done three years ago. It was so horrible there were no words to describe it. Azrael, the Angel of Death, turns the world this way and that, just as men turn money in their pockets. Every night he woke in a cold sweat.

Malik considered that nothing could occur without the intervention of angels. Even every raindrop that falls is accompanied by an angel. For even a raindrop is a manifestation of being. He thought of that as he took up his rifle and climbed over the fence into his field of new-mown barley.

He felt surrounded by a vast sea of golden light, as if the angels were already descending. He turned his face to the blue sky and scanned. He knew the odds were against him and he could see nothing, but he trained his rifle heavenwards and began shooting.

Just before midday prayers, with the calls of the muezzin ringing in his ears, and with half his shells gone, he had luck. With a crash that shook the ground and a shattering as of broken glass, an angel came to earth in his field, not twenty metres from where he stood. His heart pounding in his throat, he ran up to it.

It was covered in hairs of saffron from head to foot. Tears fell from its eyes which, as they dropped, transformed into bright Kerubim, incandescent splashes of light that took to the air and flew away.

The angel had a baffled expression on its face, and its knees and hands were filthy where it had broken its fall. Malik stood dumbfounded. The angel's hair was in long tresses. It wore a red robe embroidered in green and its wings were of green topaz, embedded with grains of red chrysolite. Its face was as beautiful as a rose, and its brow was encircled with a diadem of light, on which was written 'There is no God but Allah'. Malik squinted to block out the brilliant golden light emanating from the angel.

'I shot you down,' he said, trembling.

'You didn't shoot me,' the angel said indignantly, turning sharply as if it hadn't seen him. 'I've been having trouble with all the dust.'

'It's not dusty today,' Malik said, glancing at the sky.

The angel cleared its throat. 'All the same,' it said, 'you didn't shoot me.'

'I didn't shoot you?' Malik shook.

'You were trying to?'

'Forgive me. I am poor for the mercy of Allah. I am a poor farmer. I lost my children – '

'I know who you are,' the angel said impatiently, standing up and dusting down his djellaba. 'And I know what happened to you.'

'I did not want my dead children to rise up. That's all.' Malik looked at the angel and saw that one of his wings was

broken. Malik could see a bullet – his own – lodged in the feathers, and around it the skin was broken and feathers were stained with blood. The jagged edge of a broken bone stood out from the feathers.

'I did shoot you,' Malik said, quivering. 'Allah forgive me.'

'Aah, you did!' the angel exclaimed. He reached with his hand into his feathers for the bullet, but could not quite grasp it.

'Could you help me here?' he asked, and obligingly, Malik reached in and removed the bullet. His feathers, ruffled gently by the breeze, were gloriously soft and warm, a thousand times more so than goose down.

'Allah forgive me,' Malik said again, rolling the ball between his fingers. It was hot to his touch and he felt ashamed. His face burned.

'Don't trouble yourself overly,' the angel said. 'I see it as an occupational hazard. Especially in these times.' He nodded vaguely to the south. He shrugged his shoulders and checked his wings for take off.

Malik looked at his back where the bullet had been and the wound had already healed, the bones knitted.

'I beg your mercy,' Malik said.

'You have it. I am a messenger of Allah, and He is the most merciful. And you know, of course, there is no strength or help save in Allah most high?'

'I do.'

'Then we have no disagreement.'

'I shouldn't want to disagree with you,' Malik said. 'I only wanted to wrestle you down. To stop you.'

The angel laughed and smoothed his wing feathers. 'Aah,' he said. 'The perfect man is the one who has wrestled with the angel of his own inner being. Are you a perfect man, Malik al-Fulani?'

Malik stared at the ground. 'I've tried to be perfect,' he said.

'But you haven't been.'

'No.'

The angel stared hard at him.

'I could judge you harshly,' he said, adjusting his wings again and looking over his shoulder at them. 'I could punish you. The earth and sand are burning. Put your face on the burning sand and on the earth of the field. Do it now.'

Malik dropped his rifle and lay heavily on the earth.

'All those who are wounded by love,' the angel continued, 'must have the imprint on their face, and the scar must be seen, for by their scars are known the men who are in the way of love.'

Malik felt the earth burn into his face. 'I thought I understood the world,' he sobbed, 'but what happened to me was so pointless that I am struck dumb, and it has defeated reason and knowledge.'

'Be thankful it wasn't Iblis flying past, or Azrael,' the angel continued, ignoring him. 'They'd never have spared you, and there wouldn't have been much anyone else could do. Not even Allah.'

He spread his wings.

'Wait,' Malik said jumping to his feet. His cheek was burned and weeping. 'Tell me–'

'What you seek you will never find,' the angel said, lifting off the ground. 'When Allah created you he let death be your lot. You and your kind.'

'What should I do?' Malik yelled as the angel rose higher.

'Do?' the angel called, his face creased in amazement.

'Yes!' Malik cried. 'What should I do?'

The angel shrugged. 'Let your every day be full of joy. Love the child that holds your hand. Let your wife delight in your embrace. Those alone are the concerns of humanity.'

And the angel rose higher and higher into the sky until it was gone. Malik was overcome with grief and stood in his field sobbing. He remembered the horror of that night three years ago when he had forced his son and daughter out of the village at gunpoint and then it had gone badly wrong. He remembered the struggle with his rifle, the flashes of light in the middle of the night, and the blood on his hands.

'Father, what's wrong?'

He opened his eyes and looked down. He was holding the hands of two small children, his very own Safaa and Riad. The children stared up at him with wide brown eyes, frightened by their father's weeping. He knelt down in the field and held them to his breast.

'My children,' he said, and they jumped onto his lap.

'What happened to your face?' Safaa asked him, holding her hand to the burnt skin.

'A lesson I learned,' he said, and he embraced the children. He picked up his rifle and scanned the field. Not thirty metres away an American helicopter sat nose down in the dirt. A thick cloud of dust had risen around it. Two airmen were frantically scrambling out of the cockpit. He pointed his rifle toward them and took aim. He had the pilot clearly in his sights, could see the insignia on his jacket, and a moment before he squeezed the trigger, he lifted the barrel to the sky. A shot shattered the air. The two panicked men jumped out, ran off towards the copse of date palms on Salim Al-Hamouri's field.

A raven tumbled out of the sky, shot clean through the breast by one of Malik's bullets. He laughed, took his children's hands, and walked home.

أندرو مكّنه

Andrew McKenna is a writer and journalist, and has written for travel publisher Lonely Planet, had plays performed around fringe theatre and national radio, and published two non-fiction books and many articles. His work has been published in The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature (USA); River Teeth, A Journal of Non-fiction Narrative (USA); New Internationalist (UK); Carve Magazine and the Best of Carve 2002 (USA); Antipodes, (Canada/USA); the New England Review (Australia); Petroglyph (USA) and Gowanus (USA).

RYN ENGLAND

Two Feathers

I came around the corner and caught sight of you standing on the footpath. You were smiling. Your lips parted and your hands clasped together like a little girl. The sprinklers on the hospital lawn spun around noisily. Cars sped past and magpies sang their morning song. You pointed up at a big white bird that sailed overhead, its wings clearly outlined against the deep blue sky.

That summer a flock of white ibis came sailing into the city. Blown off course by storms and then carried along by hot north winds, the ibis migration found itself far south of its favourite nesting grounds. They built their nests in a stinking swamp. It was an industrial wasteland separated from the city by a small bay. They scavenged for food at the local garbage dump. But by day, when hundreds of ibis circled in the sky, the city was transformed. I can still picture you up on the roof with your arms outstretched as the ibis floated above on warm currents of air.

Each sweltering day seemed to mingle with the next. The heat was all-pervasive. Sounds of children from the commission flats filtered up from the shady street below. The wall clock mapped the passing days. Its distorted chime marked the hours that slipped away from me.

In the evenings we sat in the roof garden and watched city lights dip as air-conditioners strained the power supply. In the relative cool of darkness, sitting amongst the geraniums and tomatoes, it seemed inconceivable that the dawn would bring another 40 degree day. The cat slept on your lap while the city tossed and turned in its beds. Bats flew silently. Dogs barked. It was the hottest December on record.

Monday

I was sitting by the window, looking out across the cityscape, when you came in. Little jewel-like beads of moisture decorated your shoulders. Your arms were full of construction materials and your cotton sundress clung to your legs with sweat. Snug wound in and around your ankles, but you were too preoccupied to feed her. She slunk off to the roof to stare longingly up at the circling ibis.

I walked to the milk bar at dusk. Streetlights were springing to life and moths danced around their strange glow. I stood in the alley and looked up at the light in our apartment. I pictured you up there, surrounded by big sheets of brown paper, as you

drew intricate diagrams and made detailed plans. It was then that I realised the sand had begun to shift again. The sky was empty. In the distance a dog began to bark.

Tuesday

When I woke early the next morning your bed was smooth and unruffled. I found you still sitting at the kitchen table with dark circles under your eyes and your hair tied in a topknot. The kitchen was strewn with scraps of paper and wire. I ignored it and made us cups of black coffee. You barely looked up from your work.

For the rest of the day it seemed as if you were only half there. You joined me on the roof at sunset, smelling of soap and wearing pink. I hadn't seen that dress for a long time. You kissed me on the cheek. Together we studied the flight patterns of the ibis.

As darkness fell we watched them fly home, back to the west of the city.

Wednesday

There was a skeleton on the kitchen table. Saucepans full of hardened yellow beeswax. Canvas pulled tight by twisted wire and bamboo. Discarded attempts. Prototypes. Scraps. I couldn't see the blue laminex tabletop anymore. I spent the afternoon listening to the children in the street below while I tried to scrape the remnants of wax from our saucepans. Every evening after that, I brought home take-away from the strip of flashing-light restaurants along Johnston Street.

Thursday

I woke and found myself alone in the apartment. The day passed slowly. I watched the clock and listened for its chime. You returned in the evening, muddy and elated. You'd discovered the nesting ground of the ibis. I stood in the doorway and talked to you as you showered. You seemed happy. I woke sweating from a nightmare.

Friday

There were feathers everywhere. You sorted them into piles all over the kitchen and lounge room. Muddy feathers were carefully washed and lay drying on window sills. You left trails behind you. They infiltrated every corner and popped up in the most unexpected places: the fridge, the bath, under my pillow.

Saturday

The tomatoes had started to ripen. I kept your geraniums alive in the hot north winds that scorched their leaves. You didn't notice any of this. It seemed that you faded in and out.

The ibis had stopped circling over the city. They were busy in the swamp, teaching their chicks to fly. You sat at the table with a needle and thimble, surrounded by piles of feathers, as you meticulously stitched them to the waterproofed fabric.

Sunday

I went to visit Celia in the afternoon. When I walked home at six o'clock the air was bristling. As I walked along the wide streets of terrace houses I collected flowers that hung over garden fences. When I arrived home the apartment was clean and quiet. The clock ticked and Snug dreamed in her favourite armchair. There was a Polaroid photograph on the kitchen table. It had been taken at arm's length. Your face was twisted in that familiar half-smile, framed by a pair of enormous white wings. I started to run.

We were in the tree house. It was a summer Sunday and the air smelled of freshly mown grass. Children and dogs played in the street. An ice cream van wound its way along suburban avenues. Its tinny music filled the afternoon.

'When I grow up,' you said, 'I'm going to be a bird.'

Tall trees and tiled roofs stretched out into the distance. The late-afternoon sun hovered low and spread golden light. I remember it all so clearly now. You wore your pink fairy costume. The iridescent wings attached to your back, your blonde hair, your tanned skin, were all bathed in that magic sunlight.

For a moment it seemed possible. I dared you to fly.

As you leapt from the tree house you were momentarily caught in the dazzling play of light. Suspended. It seemed as if you rose up on your fairy wings before you disappeared from view.

There was a thud. Then a silence that seemed to last forever. I was paralysed. As I sat in the tree house, stricken, I thought I heard you whisper from below, '*I flew.*'

Then the sickening screams began: the sound of adult footsteps running down the garden path.

The echoes faded. The street below was empty and I was surrounded by pots of geraniums, asters and tomatoes that I found oddly reassuring. The sky was dark and grey. Far away on the horizon the great white flock moved steadily northward. The city was bathed in that strange storm light. The first drops of rain landed on my upturned face.

In spring the landlord sold the building to a development group. It's to become modern townhouses. I've moved to an old house on Merri Creek where I fall asleep to the sounds of frogs singing rather than sirens and car alarms. The backyard is full of herbs and fruit trees. The plums are almost ripe. Sometimes when I look out the window I imagine you swinging around on the Hills Hoist and laughing.

There's a crack in my bedroom wall in which the bees have made their home. At dusk I watch them returning to the hive in single file, a strand of thread that weaves its way across the garden and through a split in the weatherboards. At night cicadas crack from their shells and leave their suits, like ornaments on the fence. I lie on my bed with my ear against the wall and listen to the bees' steady hum making harmonies with the fridge.

On Tuesdays I go to an air-conditioned office with glossy plants and expensive paintings on the walls. The doctor asks me a lot of questions about you. She says I'm too old for imaginary friends – too old to believe in ghosts. At first I tried to make her understand. But now I just nod my head and keep our secrets.

رِن إنكلاند

Ryn England is a writer who is inspired by the natural world. She lives on a hill in central Victoria, where she is working on her first novel.

MARY GOULDING

Forbear

'Happy Birthday Dad,' I called from the bedroom above the hypnotic Celtic wailing of my father's favourite Irish band. The sorrowful words circled my mind:

Did you really believe that this war would end wars?
Well the suffering, the sorrow, the glory, the shame,
The killing, the dying well its all done in vain.
For young Willie Mcbride it's all happening again
And again and again and again and again.

'Dad! Do we have to be having that tragic stuff so early in the morning – it's your birthday for god's sake,' I yelled at him.

'You've always had too much to say for yourself – that's your trouble,' he shouted and turned up the volume.

These mournful voices from his homeland seemed to soothe him since the black cancer had begun to ravage his body. My throat tightened as I packed my suitcase.

I opened the window on this the last morning of my visit, feeling the crisp morning air on my face. The strong waft of jasmine suggested a beautiful Tasmanian spring day but Mount Wellington looked broody that morning – the clouds hung low.

The grandfather clock chimed 8.00am. 'It amazes me that you still tolerate that merciless clock Dad!' I said, more to myself than to him. Surely it was a relentless reminder to him of the passing hours, and days. Or was it maybe a comfort? He was still here and time would not betray him - maybe that was it.

I walked down the dark passage past the tall narrow bookcase filled with a lifetime of books. A litany of garage sales, op shops and school fairs - books on every subject ballooned the sides of the bookcase: *The Broad Arrow - The Story of a Lifer, The Aborigines of Tasmania, Poetry of W.B. Yeats.* He had some first editions too - *Martin Cash The Bushranger of Van Diemen's Land in 1843-4.*

'I'm a self-educated man you know,' he would often tell us all as we all sat around the kitchen table listening to what my mother used to refer to as '*your father's embroideries*'.

Funny to think now how he used to keep the most valuable books stacked in the ceiling, worried that the Tax Department would ask him for capital gains from the bookstall he had every Saturday morning at the local market.

My father now, sitting at the small white laminex table in his wheelchair, appeared in stark relief with the morning sun streaming behind him through the rain spotted

window. *Wherever you go you always leave a presence of yourself behind - a shadow of a kind*, he had told me once.

Somehow his illness had not diminished him – it had given him an ephemeral, mercurial quality. Visiting spirits seemed to imbue him fleetingly with their personas. Momentarily he was King Lear, a dead poet, the ghost of Christmas past, and the young man in the photograph on the dresser just home from the war.

That morning he was an IRA soldier with an olive green thickly knitted beanie on his now bald head, fur lined leather gloves, and ugg boots on his motionless feet. The high colour had returned to the side of his cheeks after the blood transfusion yesterday. Such fine, unlined, swarthy skin he had, when he has been well.

'You don't look so yellow this morning Dad,' I said.

' Ha! A Chinaman who's never been to China - but I was in Italy during the war,' he said with a hint of the twisted smile. 'Warm-hearted people the Italians. Not brave but warmhearted. Don't like the Greeks though. Always plotting and scheming your Greeks. Ha! Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.'

My father had been sitting in the same place at the kitchen table the previous night when my brother, and his beloved son, Jim had called from Sydney. *A hero complex that's what the lad suffers from - a hero complex - he thinks that he's the 'great white hope' and that he has to make his fortune on the mainland and come back and save us all.*

Jim wouldn't be able to make it for our father's birthday.

Things had come up.

He wouldn't be able to bring the kids down.

'I understand son. You are a businessman. Do what you have to do lad,' His tears plopped freely onto the waterbottle on his lap. We sat in silence for a long time that night.

'Hello, hello. Good morning,' Fran called down the hallway. My sister had arrived – she was never without purpose.

'Happy birthday Dad' she said bending down and kissing his cheek.

'I brought you a cake Dad,' she said, flashing her perfect teeth.

'Dad, Jim asked me to buy you some whisky but I didn't think you could drink it so I got you this.'

She produced a huge packet of Tasmanian smoked salmon. She stood above my father and held the slab of salmon out like a prize fish. My father smiled a little now.

'And Dad, Jim asked me to get you a special card – something with a picture of the sea or a boat. I got this one because the words are beautiful. There you go Dad – open it.'

He took the card and opened it slowly.

'Oh no,' he said as he burst into tears and threw the card bursting with $100 notes on the table. For a few seconds I watched his face contort into rage and then sorrow – something unspeakable.

Then for a moment I saw him - the man in the black and white photograph on the

lounge room dresser – the father of my childhood - the young man just back from the war in his de-mob suit, brutal and brutalised, with burning angry eyes and a twisted half smile. He left as quickly as he came.

'That's from you boy Dad,' said Fran picking up the money and neatening the pile of scattered notes with her white and perfectly manicured hands. She tapped the wad of notes on the table with a sharp insistence of our brother's greatness.

'He shouldn't have done this for me.' Tears were streaming down his tight face.

' That's what he thinks of you. That's what you boy has done for you. Count it Dad.' He picked up the money. It was $1500 or more.

In a dream my father was a little boy again running along the beach a pebbly beach in bare feet. ' You are going to get hurt if you don't protect yourself' the spirit had told him. 'Put something on you feet.'

Fran smiled widely at me. Her hazel eyes were triumphant – Jim would be pleased with her. She stroked my father's hand.

I left the room and put a little parcel of red socks on the dressing table next to Fran's charcoal sketch - a Madonna and child composition of our father, holding his little dog against his chest, with his twisted half smile, and wistful migrant's eyes. She fancied herself as an artist, did my sister Fran.

My case was in the boot. No need to say goodbye. The door of the yellow cab closed with a hollow grey sound. The vinyl seat was cold and the cab smelt heavily of the night before. The hope of a spring day was gone. Snow covered the mountain now and the clouds were gathering around the base. The spirits of the unrequited hung low and sang softly in the wind.

Did they beat the drum slowly, did they play the fife lowly?
Did the rifles fire o'er ye as they lowered ye down?
Did the band play 'The Last Post' in chorus?
Did the pipes play 'The Flowers O' The Forest'?

ماري غولدنغ

Mary Goulding,born in Manchester UK in 1952, migrated with her parents to Australia in the 1950's and grew up in Melbourne and then the family finally settled in Hobart. She left home at 18 years to live in Alice Springs where she later got married. She now lives in Bendigo, Victoria, with her husband and 12 years old son.

GREG BOGAERTS

The Narrows Beach

The boy waded out through the runnels of water. Wind rushed across the lake, dropped, dead, leaving the water flat, unmarked, then springing into life again. Tearing away in a hundred different directions, making a maze of markings on the water surface. A cross-hatching of wind stripes so the boy seemed lost in an expanse of scars. Some ridged hard and white butting against his body, others vague blemishes beneath the surface, frothing up, dissolving around the legs of the boy.

As he held the hand line, with the hook concealed by a ball of mullet flesh and gut, blood from the bait spotted the water. Red and greasy globs broken apart by the small current shift of the water, tiny spots of pungent mullet blood and oil bringing fish close to shore. Carefully, the boy hung the line, in the air, pulled back his arm, threw the spools of line, the hook, the gut, the small sinker, spinning across the sky like web coming from the arse of a spider.

Wind tore blood and oil from the mullet gut and flesh, a spray of crimson came back like seeds in loams of air turbulence, spattered the face of the boy, spotted the old cardigan and grey trousers, secretly stained his clothing with blood. But he had no time to think about that, wiped his arm across his face, smeared the blood across the checkbones straining the mask of taught skin.

Quickly he retrieved the coils of line, slowing down when he felt the slack taken up by the sinker and the weight of the mullet on the end of the line. Carefully, he continued pulling the line, keeping the bait on the move, enticing the fish to strike at the bloody flesh with the silver steel hook hidden there.

He felt the pickers, the rubbish worrying the bait, not having a decent go at the mullet, small jerks that ran like electric shocks up the line into the hands and thin wrist bones of the boy. Behind him, in the house, built where the beach narrowed to a point of rock, his mother began to call him home.

The boy tried not to listen but the woman's cries were like the harsh squabblings of the seagulls when they argued over the head and guts of a fish the boy had caught and cleaned. Threw the shiny purple intestines, the severed silver head with the eye knitting over with the caul of death, into the air.

The gulls, a mad thrash of flying feathers in the air, a strident scream of voices when the head and guts landed, bounced on the beach and the birds flapped their wings, pecked each other without mercy. Until one or two of them escaped with the head and guts.

Something bigger was at the bait, it was enough to bring the boy's concentration

back to the line, ignore his mother, who was on the verandah calling him by the name she had him baptised by. Harder to ignore once she called him by his name rather than 'boy' or 'you'.

'Jimmeeey, Jimmeeey! James Strong!'

But the heavy drag on the line kept the boy concentrating on the mysterious fish more than interested in a feed of strip mullet and intestine with capillaries of blood and oil leaking into the water, teasing the fish. The heavy drag on the end of the line persuaded two loops of line from the boy's delicate shell-curl of fingers, he let the line go.

Wondered what was on the end, had visions of a big leatherjacket with its periscope spike carving through the water. Saw the yellow and brown fans of the fins flick flicking, undulating sinuous movement as the fish pulled down heavily on the bait. The boy could see the mouth open, the teeth snaggle into the flesh and intestine, the two or three lurching bites before the lot disappeared down the gorge of the fish with the hook taking hold in the gullet.

Ignoring the woman on the verandah, the boy walked a few steps out into the lake, placing loops of line onto his fingers. From the corner of his eye he could see the other house built on the shore of Narrows Beach. Not that you could call it a house, a ramshackle nail-and-tar cobbling together of second-hand boards and rusty tin plonked on pylons the owner of the shack had scrounged off the beach when they were washed up in a big blow years ago.

Inside of the shack the boy knew his grandfather was sitting, waiting for him to turn up before the boy went back home to his mother. Jimmy wondered, as two spools of line were taken from him by the big fish, why his grandfather, his mother's father, waited most days for his grandson to come to him with a fish.

Jimmy knew his grandfather loved fish, any sort- bream, taylor, flathead or leatherjacket- the boy happened to catch. But it wasn't as if the old man was starving, it wasn't as though he depended on his grandson for food every evening, and sometimes for breakfast during the school holidays when Jimmy had time to fish in the early morning.

A sudden vicious side-to-side wrenching of the line told Jimmy the fish had struck, he pulled hard but the line went limp. Peering into the few feet of water, as he retrieved the line, the boy could see the hook trailing a few skerricks of ragged flesh and gut. Somewhere, not far away, in deeper water, the big fish, whatever it was, was digesting a sizeable chunk of bait. The last bit of bait the boy had until tomorrow.

The grandson would go empty handed to his grandfather. Although the old man would settle for steak and vegetables that night, it bothered Jimmy, it was important he turn up each evening and offer his grandfather the fish he'd caught for him. A ritual Jimmy and the old man never tired of.

'Oh what a beauty Jimmy. And yer say yer want me t' have it?' his grandfather

would say every evening to the boy standing there with a pleased grin as wide as the circle of the bay that looped out of the close cleft of Narrows Beach.

The Narrows Beach, a painting by Dobell that insipired Bogaerts to write his story. Reprinted by permission of the Dobell Foundation.

'Oh I couldn't take such a beautiful fish from yer. Yer take it home to yer mum now,' the old man would say.

'No grandad you take it. It's for you,' Jimmy would insist.

'Oh I don't know. But if yer sure now. If yer want me t' have it then I'll just have t' take it,' the old man would say.

He'd hold out both his hands solemnly, Jimmy would place the fish on the creased and cracked palms, his grandfather would hold it up to the last of the daylight, the scales sparkling like treasure found.

So to go empty handed to the old man was a disappointment so keen it hurt as badly as when Jimmy sliced his hand with his fishing knife when he was cleaning his catch one day last year. His mother had called him from the verandah and he'd lost his concentration crouched over a pile of fish on the sand of the fork of the beach.

As he pulled the line towards him, the scar across the back of his hand glowed whitely in the gloom of evening. The hook was a few feet from him when the whiting darted through the water and grabbed the last bits of bait. Nothing shy about whiting when they strike. All or nothing. The boy pulled in the fish, reached down into the water to his shins, took the whiting from the water. Held him up to the half disc of the sun on the horizon. A small cry of delight from Jimmy when he saw the unusual dark bottle green, the colour of moss growing on rock, across the head, flecking the flanks of the fish.

Carefully, folding, holding down the fan of dorsal spines with his hand, the boy placed the fish in the canvas fishing bag. Swung the bag, smelling of fish and bait, over his shoulder. Left behind the lake to the night, set off down Narrows Beach towards the shack of his grandfather.

But that meant passing the house where his mother was still standing on the verandah demanding his return.

'Jimmeeey you come here now. Right away! Put away yer lines and bait and come inside fer tea. And if yer with yer grandfather, leave 'im and come home this instant!'

The boy could see her, he stopped, then ducked for cover into the thick stand of tea trees. Something he'd done before, hiding from her, but never convinced the wind-wobbling green and yellow shade cast by the crowns of the trees offered enough cover to keep him from the crow eye of his mother.

Holding his breath, he was convinced she could see into the tea trees, could see him crouched down, one hand against the side of the canvas fishing bag, feeling the bucks and leaps of the whiting still stroppy after so short a time out of the water.

His fear was because he could see her. If he could see her, then it made sense to him that she should be able to see him. It was like standing in the shallows of the lake fishing and seeing the fish a few feet in front of you. An old fisherman from Wangi Wangi told the boy that if you could see the fish then they could see you and that made it nigh on bloody impossible to catch the buggers.

But his mother would catch him, he thought, even if she couldn't see him, she would sense that he was there, in the tea trees, feet from where she was standing. He crept through the tea trees, tried to hold his breath as he passed so close to the verandah he could see the weathered, grey strips of boards, and flashes of the blue dress his mother was wearing.

'I can hear yer Jimmy and I can see yer. Come out, I know yer in them trees,' she demanded.

This had worked many times, the boy's bluff had been called and he'd come from under cover, go to the verandah where his mother smirked her grim satisfaction at him. Took the fish from him and placed it in the ice chest for tea that night. But he'd won a few times, stopped his ears with his hands and kept walking the way he did now.

Ignored the siren words, bent over like a soldier in no-man's land seeking the comfort of a trench and a cup of tea. Burst from the far end of the copse of tea trees, ran across the sand littered with shell and seaweed. Saw his grandfather standing on his verandah, the big grin splitting open his water chestnut face.

The complicity between the two a triumph whenever the boy managed to get to his grandfather's shack under fire of his mother's words. Taking the whiting from the bag, Jimmy approached the verandah where his grandfather waited with the words the boy loved to hear, the gestures the boy loved to witness.

At the edge of the copse of tea trees lay an ancient boat with a cabin, the timbers stove in by the elements and by boys with nothing better to do than throw rocks at the old vessel. Broken port windows gaped, the deck boards, long sprung, stuck out like tongues gossiping. Its bow was half buried in the sand, tears of grease and salt wept from the bow boards.

Jimmy could see it when he woke of a morning and looked through his bedroom window, it was usually the first thing he saw. Because he'd rather sit up in bed and look through the window than venture out into the kitchen where his mother would be waiting with breakfast and a lecture on what he should and shouldn't do for that day.

The boy knew the boat belonged to his grandfather, he knew it had been beached on Narrows Beach for years, had lain there for as long as anyone from Wangi Wangi could remember. As he sat up in bed, with the westerly wind whistling off the water, Jimmy wondered about the boat and why no one would tell him about it.

He'd asked his mother about it, saw her mouth knit into a higgledy piggledy fence paling line of displeasure, saw her thump the saucepan of porridge on the gas ring, the slurp of grey sludge fly through the air slopping on the floorboards. His mother grimly wiping up the mess, then turning on him.

'Don't yer ever mention that boat within my hearing again if yer know what's good for yer! Now eat yer breakfast and get t' school so I don't have to lay eyes on yer,' she said.

He went to school with a flea in his ear and learnt to steer clear of ever mentioning

the boat again to his mother. But that didn't stop him asking about it around Wangi Wangi, inquiring of old men, who sat out the front of the pub in the main street. But there was nothing to be told as far as they were concerned although the boy could not help but notice the peculiar side-long looks they gave each other when he asked them about the boat. And the uncomfortable shifting of their prodigious rumps on the wood of the bench.

Jimmy sat in the kitchen waiting for the porridge to be ready, he glanced at his mother from the corner of his eyes. Didn't dare look at her directly because he knew it would send her off. Something he'd recently discovered, his mother's displeasure at being looked at directly.

Another accident that happened when Jimmy cut himself with the knife when he was cleaning the fish and she distracted him with her calls. An anger welled up in him as strongly as the blood welled from the wound across the back of his hand. For the first time James Strong experienced anger, a white, hot fury at the stupidity of the accident. He didn't mind the blood and the pain, he didn't mind the thick scar that would be there but he did mind how unnecessary it was particularly when his mother could see him clearly from the verandah.

He was only a few yards from the house, his mother had no reason to yell like that other than she'd done it for years to see him jump with fright. A small amusement for her, although to hear her laugh after he'd jumped with fright, you'd have thought it was the pleasure of her life.

But it had been different that day, he'd flung the fish he was cleaning from him, marched up to the verandah, held up his bleeding hand and looked straight at her. The smirk vanished from her mouth, he saw her shift uneasily from foot to foot, saw her look away from his direct look. And then the anger flared.

'Don't yer look at me that way boy! Get away from the verandah with that hand. It's leavin' blood all over th' place!' she showered him with her tirade.

But much to his amazement, as well as his mother's, he stood his ground, thrust his hand over the railing and let the crimson drop all over the bare boards that thirstily drank his blood. His mother backed away, he kept his eye upon her, she couldn't look at him, let herself into the kitchen from the verandah and yelled at him from behind the cover of the salt-encrusted lace curtains.

'Don't yer look at me that way James Strong! Keep away and if yer think I'm goin' to spend money on gettin' yer an ambulance yer mistaken!'

He left her hiding in the house, walked along the beach knowing she would watch him as he headed for his grandfather's shack. And it was as though the boy's grandfather knew about the cut, sensed the pain, could not have known from his daughter's yelling because the old man was almost deaf.

He was standing on the verandah of his shack holding the finest piece of fishing line

he could find and a long thin needle. No words were necessary as the boy tramped up the steps holding his good hand under the wounded one, trying to stop the blood falling on the boards.

Quickly the old man went to work washing the wound with sunlight soap and hot, water, then dabbing some methylated spirits onto it with a wad of cotton wool, the boy gritting his teeth holding back the cries of pain. Knowing his grandfather was doing it for his good to kill any infection that might be there from the guts of the fish, the salt, the knife blade, the sand.

A cross-hatching of fishing line stitching so fine, in the hand, the boy could hardly see it. Small beads of blood peeped from the line of the flaps of flesh sewn together. But they soon dried, the small knobs of blood, the fine line, stopping any more bleeding.

And Jimmy didn't go home that night for tea, for the first time in his life he stayed with his grandfather while the old man placed the black iron frying pan on the wood fuel stove. Lumped a knob of butter, a glug olive oil and a squeeze of lemon into the metal, threw in two good-sized bream. That sizzled so the silver skin curled away from the clean white flesh.

James Strong and his grandfather sat on the verandah with the southerly buster bustling up the coast from Sydney cutting away the heavy heat of the day, wetting the old man and the boy with fine salt spray from Lake Macquarie as they forked the fish into their mouths. And nothing to say to each other while there was flesh to be found on the fish bones.

No words, only a shared smile when the boy's mother started calling him home and the two ignored the sound, kept feeding themselves while the wind howled louder than the woman on the verandah of the house not far away.

As the coffin was lowered into the earth of the cemetery in the bush on the western side of Lake Macquarie, he looked at the woman but he could only see relief in her features. It wasn't what he expected to see, maybe, he thought, she would find some tears for her own father. But there was no mistaking the brow clean of lines of care, the suspicion of the mouth corners about to turn upwards.

Anger blazed in him and he looked straight at her, her eyes were turned down but he knew the force of his eyes would make her look at him. And she did, glancing up, his eyes hooking her as securely as a big silver hook in the gills of a fish. She couldn't look away from her son and he punished her, made her squirm like an eel wrapping itself tighter in coils of unbreakable fishing line.

James Strong stood on the opposite side to his mother as the diggers began to fill the hole with earth. He kept the line of his look taught, no slack was offered to the woman. And he began to draw her towards him, she could not help it, she had no control. Stumbling in the mound of dug earth she tottered towards the open grave, small dolly steps, closer to the edge. Until the man, standing beside her, a distant relation of

Jimmy's grandfather, come from Perth for the funeral, took the woman by the arm, pulled her back from the edge.

Later, in the afternoon, after the funeral, after the relations had come and gone from the house in Narrows Beach, the boy, almost an adult now, went down to the wreck of the boat. Lashing the chains and the ropes of pulleys around the hull of the boat, he attached the other ends to the underpinnings of his mother's house.

Bent over double he began to wind the pulleys, grind the winch, the boards of the old boat protesting almost as loudly as his mother when she came onto the verandah and saw what he was doing.

'What in God's name do yer think yer doin'?!' she demanded.

But he ignored her, kept winding the ropes and chains, saw the hull move slightly in the burial of years of onshore wind drifts of sand, heard the hull groan like a man in pain. Kept winding until the hull rose a few inches free of the sand; salt water, grease dripping from the green and grey sludgy bottom of the boat.

'Leave it alone. Don't yer do it!' his mother protested.

Beneath her feet she could feel the pylons, some of wood, some of bricks and mortar, move, quiver under the weight of her father's boat being drawn from the sand of Narrows Beach. And she was scared the weight of the vessel would break the pylons that kept her house above the sand and salt water of Lake Macquarie. But not as afraid of whatever had made her son, James Strong, decide to raise the wreck. Not as afraid of what someone might have told him about the boat and his grandfather still warm in his coffin in the grave not too far away.

Her son left the ropes and chains attached during the night, ready for him to continue the next day. And his mother lay in her bed feeling the taught lines of rope and metal underneath her humming like the gut strings of a violin. So when she arose next morning, she was dog tired, too worn out from lack of sleep and fear to berate her son like she usually did every morning.

Over many days, James Strong pulled, pushed, persuaded the old boat out of her sandy grave up the slight slope of beach until she rested only a few feet from the verandah of his mother's house. Placed on trusses of wood, the boat was left to dry in the scorching sun of summer. And the boy and his mother could hear the grain drying, the soft whimper of wood as the moisture was taken from it by the heat.

It just about drove the woman mad having the boat of her father sitting there right in front of her house, the hull blocking her view of Lake Macquarie, the sound of its timbers haunting her day and night. And her son drove her to stay inside nearly all of the time now because he spent all of his time working on restoring his grandfather's boat.

Every waking hour was spent replacing some of the boards of the hull that were beyond repair, the sound of hammering filled the quiet, still air of Narrows Beach and it filled the head of the woman sitting wan faced at the kitchen table.

And as he worked, James Strong remembered the words of the distant relation of his grandfather from Perth, the story the old man told him at the wake. How James's mother gave birth to him out of wedlock and almost immediately gave him up to the father to take away. Because she wanted nothing to do with the baby and nothing to do with the shame of being a mother out of wedlock in a close community like Wangi Wangi.

The boy learnt how his grandfather went after the man, another fisherman, who sailed towards the opening in Lake Macquarie hoping to reach the sea and take his son from his grandfather, north to Queensland, before the old man found out.

Jimmy's grandfather pursued the father, sailing the boat Jimmy was restoring. And it had been a long, slow but vicious struggle when Jimmy's grandfather sighted the boat and boarded her before it reached the open ocean. Badly cut by a rusty blade, the grandfather took the baby in arms onto his boat and sailed back towards Narrows Beach.

Faint from the loss of blood, the man, old then, struggled to keep from passing into blackness. An alignment of the planets caused a huge king tide to rise, the swell of water in the lake finally taking control from the old man. The vessel taken high into the air by the tide, the old man on his knees on the deck holding the bundle squawking protest. The tide falling as quickly as it rose, dumping the boat into the sand of Narrows Beach where it sat for years.

And as he worked on the boat, James could see his grandfather crawling up the beach holding him in the crook of one arm, his grandfather's blood baptising the tight red and wrinkled ball of his face. Until the old man reached the cottage and presented the child to his daughter.

Under the brightness of daylight, the boy, almost a man, rubs linseed oil into the finished timbers, the boat glows like a fish in a clear fathom of water.

غريغ بوغارتس

Greg Bogaerts is a writer from Newcastle, Australia. He has had many short stories published in journals, magazines and anthologies in Australia and America. Many of his stories have been read on radio, and some translated into Arabic.

L. E. SCOTT

Black Family Letters from Boston

What Should Be Is Remembered

Well,

I knew you would be somewhere between Africa, Australia and New Zealand. And I know how often I have told you that because death is the way it is, you should let people – at least family (we won't get into all the reasons why 'at least family') – know your whereabouts in the world. It's not like you live around the corner anymore.

I didn't want to call your ex-wife's family to find you, buddy, but you didn't leave us much choice. Life can be so unsavoury around you. I find it hard to remember that beautiful child that lived in you. I read something the other day that said, "adults live off the crumbs of childhood". I'm not sure that's true for you. I'm not sure what you're feeding on. You say you like women. I have my doubts.

Coming back to matters at hand, family needed to let you know there had been another death. Your mother and now your brother. Death has harvested so much from this family in one season.

I'm not sure who was spoken to in your ex-in-laws' family, whether it was the mother, whom you said you could "stand a little bit", or the father, whom you thought was a freak of someone's lovemaking, or maybe your ex-wife's sister, whom you said would swallow the devil's sperm if it gave her the power of revenge over her prettier sister and the parents who loved the prettier one more. You said more ugly things about her, but I won't repeat what you said. I have no reason not to believe you, but it made you a little bit ugly too, speaking such hard words with no glimpse of mercy. Like I said, I find it hard sometimes to remember that beautiful child that lived in you.

It was your niece Brenda who called them. I don't know how kind they were in helping us find you, whether they felt bothered about the phone call, whether the fact that your brother was dead meant anything to them, or whether the taste in their mouths about you extended to the rest of us. I don't know how much dirt you did to them and they to you. Evil and retribution can sometimes come dressed in the same clothes and laugh the same laugh. Whatever the blood is between you, they gave us the name of someone they said would know your whereabouts. It was your friend Lyson.

I remember his name from when you were home for Mom's funeral. He's from East Africa – Tanzania or Malawi? He told Brenda you would be on your way back from Africa to New Zealand. He thought you would be back in a day or so. In the 'hood we would say 'in a minute or so'. Language is a funny thing –we have become so sophisticated about what we are not. Or as the old folks would say, hiding our smell.

Lyson mentioned you would be stopping off in Sydney briefly before going on to Wellington. It was then I remembered your friend Barbara in Sydney and that I had her phone number somewhere around the house. It took me a while to find it – sometimes life hides out in corners and dark places and other times it gets right up in your face.

I called her. We had a long talk – some about you, some about her, some about me, and some about your dead brother. I told her how your brother had died. She's a good friend to you and she seems to know so much about us. When I told her Eddie had died she knew he was your older brother and looked a lot like Mom. I told her the older you get the more you look like Mom too.

I talked to her about our feeling of shame that your brother had died by himself and that they didn't find him for two days or more. Your brother had been an alcoholic for so long, it's hard to remember when he wasn't....but I do remember and I know you remember too.

I remember when he married Helen Poole, the prettiest girl in all of Cordele, Georgia, and they moved to New Jersey and started working in that rich private white school that had no retirement programme for all those Black folks who worked their whole lives there. But yet and still, Eddie and Helen became the road for all the other brothers and sisters to escape Cordele.

Your nieces and nephews don't remember that part of your brother's life. They remember him as a drunk. They don't remember how sharp he used to dress and that every three years he bought a brand new Ford car. They don't remember how he put food on the kitchen tables of this family. They don't remember how he and Helen moved about life with style, grace, wit and a Black beauty that refused to be beaten by racism or fate. But you know fate and destiny ain't on the same heartbeat and their mirrors don't necessarily reflect in unison.

Barbara asked me why Helen had left your brother after all those years. I told her what I knew and wondered about what I didn't. I know she loved him, I know she cared about him, and I know she is always family. But that destiny mirror shows a lot of deep scars in those 30-some years they were together. Maybe it had something to do with them not having children and him fathering a child somewhere else. Maybe it was the demons the alcohol gave birth to. Maybe it had something to do with what she saw in the mirror day in and day out. People leaving people, I told her, is a house with many rooms full of the seen and the unseen.

After Helen left him, your brother was never the same again and I've no doubt that neither was she. Until the day of his death, drunk or near drunk, he kept that beautiful picture of her nearby. He lived in a dark room for a long time. Your sister Verdell put that picture in his coffin.

Verdell was the last person we know who spoke to Eddie. She said he sounded like himself when she called him on Saturday morning. Usually she called him once or twice a day, but for some reason life just got in the way and she didn't call again until Monday morning. When he didn't answer she thought he had gone out to get his daily supply of booze.

Monday evening when she called and he still didn't answer, she had a strange feeling. It was like the air in the room didn't smell right. Things in her mind that she couldn't identify were bothering her. Her feet felt heavy. She sent her daughter Dorothy around to his place. Dorothy found him just sitting there cold as ice – he was gone. Death and the word 'gone' – how did they ever become one?

Somewhere between late Saturday and Monday evening he left us. I think about all those years your brother sat in that room listening to all those sad old blues songs and pining the loss of the prettiest girl in Cordele, Georgia.

Helen came up from New Jersey for the funeral. They hadn't been in the same room for more than twenty years. I don't know what the dead know or don't know. I hope he knew she was there. I don't know what she felt about her picture being in his coffin.

Barbara said she wasn't sure when you would get to her place, but that she would let you know about your brother. She said she knew you would be sad you weren't there for the funeral to say goodbye.

I'm sorry that we couldn't find you in time, but that's how you've been travelling your life for a while. Verdell once asked me why you live so far away from us. I told her that to the best of my knowledge you left here to find James Baldwin in Paris and after that....only you and God know. "That child has been gone a long time now," she said.

In the eulogy I talked about your brother to remind your brothers and sisters who he had been and to tell the nieces and nephews how much more he had been than what they knew of him.

Your brother is buried not too far from Mom's grave. At the graveyard I thought how far Boston is from Cordele, Georgia. And I know, what should be is remembered....

We love you.

P.S.

I loved that beautiful child that used to live in you.

لويس إي. سْكت

Lewis E. Scott is an African-American writer, poet and editor who made New Zealand his home. He is *Kalimat*'s adviser for New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

This is one of a new series of "Black Family Letters From Boston". The stories in the series cover a wide range of subjects that may be loosely grouped under the heading 'the Black American experience" and explore the relationships between family members and the way in which their lives are affected by their struggle in and with white America.

ALI AL-KASSIMI

Translated by ***Ali Azeriah***

Fear

Leaving the bustle of the city and its squalor behind me, I made for the sea, seeking its immensity and pureness. As I was wandering around the city that afternoon looking for work, I felt as though its streets were getting narrow, and as if its tall buildings were closing in on me from both sides. My headache was severe, and as my breathing started to become faint, I felt my bosom throbbing with pain. I craned my neck for a puff of fresh air, and I looked up to get a glimpse of the blue sky, but all I could see were tall buildings that seemed to be moving closer towards one another to the point where they almost met, like the sides of a towering pyramid. I tried to take a deep breath but failed, as if air had turned into a heavy solid matter that could not pass through my nose.

I stood on the sidewalk, letting my eyes rove about around me. The houses seemed to reel before my eyes, and I felt the ground moving under my feet. Beads of sweat broke out on my forehead and on every part of my feverish body. I looked around me, but all I could see were fast passing cars following in close succession. They were honking and emitting black fumes from their exhaust pipes. I could see the fumes rising aloft and mixing with black smoke discharged by the factory stacks. The fumes amassed like a huge cloud over the city, smothering the air and preventing the sunlight from reaching the sticky streets. After a while, I found myself leaving the city, walking along its treeless back streets, and roaming its squalid quarters that reeked of garbage and of the excrements of stray and pet dogs. I rushed towards the sea.

Sitting on a hillock amid a field commanding the sea, I shifted my sight from the greenness of the lowland around me to the blueness of the vast expanse of seawater. The sunrays had scattered on the surface of the water as the sun began to go down, escorted by a bank of dark clouds. My mind strayed on the city, which awoke in me memories of my father's stories about it when, in his childhood days, it was an extension of those flowery fields and lush orchards. In his days, all that could be heard in those fields were the chirping of birds and the flutes of shepherds. However, the picks of the city's sweeping expansion hacked down the trees of the fields and mercilessly plucked out the roots of the plants. Greenness faded away, birds vanished, and clouds no longer showered the fields with their rain. They'd pass quickly over the city, without ever stopping over it.

There was nothing that could spoil the peace of that evening: the breeze was gentle, the sea calm, and the waves rolled in gently to the soft sand of the beach. My eyes swept the immense horizon, bathing agreeably in the blueness of the water. A feeling of relief and quietude crept into my inmost depths, as the sea crept noiselessly up the

shore. The evening wrapped me up in its refreshing breeze and its passing clouds put me in good mood. I began to feel invigorated, and my vertigo left me.

As I sat alone on my high hillock overlooking the sea, a long distance away from the city, in the middle of that vast space that was plunged in the evening silence, I did not know what strange feeling prompted me to turn my head apprehensively, like a frightened neighing horse tens of miles away from the place where a sudden seismic shock had occurred. I stared into the void. The silhouettes of the buildings were still visible, in spite of the fact that their color had grown dim due to the changes in daylight. The noise of the factories had faded because of the distance between the city and me, and all I could see clearly of the city were the clouds of smoke billowing out of the tall factory stacks. All of a sudden, four men heaved in sight; they were coming from the city and scurrying towards the sea. At first, I thought they were going to picnic at the beach. The man who was ahead of the group was walking with his hands behind his back. Subconsciously, I riveted my eyes on them, spontaneously watching every step they made. The closer they got towards me, the clearer their miens became. I noticed that the man who was in front was wearing civilian clothes, and that his hands were cuffed behind his back. He was hemmed in by the other three in Khaki uniforms. My attention was engaged by the sight of the man's leaning forward as he trudged with his hand tied behind his back. The other three were pushing him, forcing him to walk on.

Their sharp-featured, tough faces were fastened on the sea. The handcuffed man looked left and right, as if looking for someone or something, which enabled me to get a closer look at his face: a high forehead, bright eyes, and facial features unaffected by distress. It was a likeable, smiling face. I said to myself: 'This face's familiar! I've known it since I was a child.' But I could not remember his name at that moment. I used to see him in the village where I grew up, at my school and in the city where I worked. But his name had slipped from my mind. As a child, I felt drawn by his sympathetic face, and I still do even as an adult. His face, which was more luscious than dates and sweet water, is dear to my heart. Many a time I told my children about him, and they loved him as much as I did. But I still could not remember his name. 'Help me, Oh Memory! Come to my rescue, please, in the name of the captured man!' Having failed to recall the man's name, I said to myself: 'What's important is not the name, but the thing so named. The origin is not the word; it is the *Being*. Whatever his name is, the man is now in trouble.' One question kept pestering me: Why did they handcuff him? Where are they taking him?'

After a short while, they walked closer to the beach until their feet were submerged by water; there they made the man stand in front of them. As they stood there staring at his face hatefully, one of the three men brutally put his hand on the man's jaws, forcing him to open his mouth. Another man pulled something, the nature of which I could not really tell, from the open mouth of the captured man. The third pulled out a knife, cut off that thing and tossed it into the sea. I saw with my own eyes a red line extending

from the water all the way to the horizon, merging with the scattered sunrays, and rising to the heavens like a mighty jet of blood. Then they began to bend the captured man's head forcibly, pushing it down into the water in a blatant attempt to drown him. He put up a stiff resistance, now and then lifting up his head towards the sky and backward. As he was trying to hang on for dear life, he caught sight of me from afar - or that was what I had imagined. I imagined that his eyes were appealing for my help, urging me to do something like screaming to their faces, calling out to the peasants in the near-by fields or to factory workers from the city. It was as if his eyes were supplicating me to do something – anything - to save his life, not out of pity for him, but as my duty as a human being commands, or as my love for him dictates. Instead, I just froze in my spot. A feeling of fear gripped me, and I felt a shudder shaking my frame and creeping into every one of my veins and arteries, injecting in them a biting chill that made blood curdle. My feverish forehead broke into sweat, and my blood curdled with terror at the sight of their drawn daggers. I felt numb with fear to the point where I could not feel my legs any more. Stupefied, I sank deep in the deluge of suspicions and distrust. I thought about running towards them and attacking them, but I did not budge. I did not raise my head, or open my mouth, and I did not move my hand or foot. I thought that if I did anything of the sort, I'd certainly be dead, and that I'd be brought home to my children on a bier, instead of bringing them the good news of my finding a job – that is if I had made it home alive that evening! I felt like the man who went out into the country to hunt game for his starving folk, but was eaten by a lion instead. With some bitterness and shame, I acknowledged myself to be non-combative by nature. The image of my childhood and my classmates, who were always fighting and wrestling while I withdrew to some peaceful place to read a book, peeped out at me through the holes of my dark, forsaken memory.

'Therefore, I will cast down my eyes,' I was saying to myself, 'I will turn my face away from the sea, pretend that I haven't seen anything, and convince myself that what I have seen is no more than a hallucination and a visual aberration. But what will I tell my children after today? Will I tell them that I have opted for my safe return to them instead of venturing with my life to save the person I loved, and still love, and whom they love, too? Will I be able to justify my weakness and cowardice in front of them? And even if I kept the story to myself and did not tell them anything about it, shrouding the incident in silence and secrecy, does that mean that what happened this evening did not take place? We cannot distort the truth with our mouths or pens. Even if no one were aware of my meanness and defeat, I'd still carry within me a defeated man, just like a palm-tree whose trunk has received a fatal axe blow. The scene of that captured man will haunt me wherever I go; it will follow me like my shadow. My weakness and cowardice will deprive me of sleep, even if it comports with my body which will be eaten away from inside and disintegrate. With this defeat of mine, I will torpedo what is left of the bridges that connect me with myself and with the people of my town, those

who trust me and share with me the love of that man. Since I love this man, I must do something to save his life. I must act now before they cut off his limbs and kill him.'

But instead of going forward, I was shaking, dragging my lame feet backward in the opposite direction. I lost sight of him amidst the vortex of fear. I, too, had committed a crime: that of not coming to the rescue of a human being in danger.

علي القاسمي

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LATIFA BAQA

Translated by ***Ali Azeriah***

Intestinal Worms

The little girl calls me from inside the lavatory. She says that she has the "worms". I carefully examine her stools; sure enough, they do contain intestinal worms. I go back to finish writing my job application, which I could not bring myself to do until very few minutes ago; it contains a paragraph that begins as follows: 'I would like to inform you that my ***jinsiyyah***[1]...'

jins,[2] ***jinsiyyah, jinsawiyyah,***[3] defining such concepts so as to avoid confusion can be very amusing indeed. For example, the very short term ***jins*** means that act which all creatures, humans included, perform to preserve their own species. However, there is a deterministic outcome to this act: it is this huge number of the unemployed who, like locusts, hang around city cafés and roam the streets. The distinctive feature of these extraordinary creatures is that they are constantly thinking about their existence for which they can advance no justification; sometimes, however, they do think about even more serious matters.

I hear the little girl calling my name again. This time she wants me to clean her. What a job! I notice that her little posterior resembles a small, yellow, ripe apple. I revolve this observation in my mind. I become aware of her presence; she tells me about intestinal worms.

My mother says that my sister and I, too, had worms when we were young, that was why we looked like two 'straying she-cats' – as my father loved to call us. On one February cold evening, my father came home reeking of wine and completely drunk. He was hiding an enema in one of the rear bags of his motorbike (*Salma will feel well and she will burst out laughing*). He filled the enema with salt and water and, having pulled down our pants, he emptied it in our anuses. My mother said that we were bedridden for a whole week, and that when he finished pouring the liquid inside us he kept saying, 'Salt, nothing but salt can kill the worms.'

Today I believe that my Dad's "medical prescription" was efficacious, the fact that

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[1] Nationality. The author intends to play on words here. In Arabic, *jinsiya* (meaning *nationality*) and *jinsawiya* (sexuality) are derived from the word Jins (which can mean either race, or sex). Hence her comment that 'defining such concepts can be very amusing indeed'.

[2] Sex, race

[3] Sexuality

neither of us has had intestinal worms ever since bears witness to this. I am thinking about writing to my sister Salma to inform her that I am not suffering from any stomach ailments and to tell her that I will be spending the *Aid*[4] with her.

'All you need is an enema and a little salt, and all your worms will be killed.' The little girl did not hear me; she was lying in wait for a cockroach that was scurrying along on the carpet. She picked up a shoe and hit the insect with it. Part of the insect's crushed carcass stuck to the bottom of the shoe. Looking at the slime of the insect, the little girl burst into a gale of joyful laughter.

I feel a lump in my throat as I think about all these job applications. It is galling to me to feel that this lump has a lasting touch to it; and it is even more aggravating to find out how impossible it has become for me to think of a situation that is different from the one I am in.

How absurd life is! (*It seems that I have gradually joined the camp of those victims who cherish the illusion of life as having a meaning.*) I feel the pimple which fever has extruded under my lower lip. I must be raving, but despite that things seem intensely absurd.

I fold the job application, and I put it in an envelope. I take another sheet of paper and I write:

> Salma, I intend to apply for a job at a textile factory, just as you had suggested last time. As for the competitive examination I took, I haven't received a reply yet. Anyway, I am not going to allow myself to chase illusions I'd be better off without. I am thinking of spending the *Aid* vacation with you. I say "vacation" because it has now become a habit of mine to use this word with which active people make a difference between workdays and holidays. Yes, I will try to adjust myself to this present situation, just as you have said - I'll do my best. I think I'll need some time before I can decide on some private matters. I have been having some horrible dreams lately. Do you still believe in ghosts?

Ghosts! Why do I remember that she used to believe in ghosts? All children believe in ghosts. When I returned home from school in the evenings during my early school days, I used to call my mother's name aloud asking her to come down so that she would "escort" me to our apartment which was on the fourth floor.

Always ghosts! Does this little one - soft as a she-cat - believe in ghosts, too? She asks original questions, but her crying spoils it all. I hug her, and try to mollify her. I tell her a story, which I make up for the occasion and whisper to her that we should remain calm until Mummy comes, and we'll all go to the zoo. She asks about the lion, the ostrich, the tiger, and the colorful birds. 'Why are birds always chirping? Do they sleep? Is it true that they talk to one another? Tell me, is it true?'

I can be a governess and a nanny (*should I mention this in my job application?*), and

[4] The festive season.

a writer and reader of the letters which my illiterate neighbours receive, as well as a teacher – at home, of course - for all levels, giving free lessons because the pupils are relatives or neighbours. I remember that in one of those old job applications – which I had sent to a cannery – I wrote that my first and last condition was that my wages should be in proportion to my work. In one word, I was selling the force of my labour and, therefore, my wages had to be adequate (*where have I read these words?*).

The little girl wants more details about the zoo. I look at her small black eyes, and I think that they resemble the eyes of a little straying dog. It seems that she has forgotten about intestinal worms. Had my father been with us, he would've emptied in her anus – which is at the center of the yellow ripe apple – a bag of salt, after which he'd retreat to his place in the corner of the room with the bottle of wine between his legs as usual. This was an old habit of his, dating back to the days when he used to get drunk in the government car, a habit for which there was really no justification. Why do matters seem extrinsic to their causes? Is there anyone who can explain to me why is it that for the last two years this surrealistic frenzy of writing out job applications and of sitting for competitive examinations despaired of in advance has gotten the better of me?

In spite of this I do remember that, as a kid, I used to ask Dad, when he was inebriated, about this bad habit of his, the contagion of which was affecting us, the children, and I'd laugh. He would ignore my question, just as I often do with the little girl's questions. He said (*his words are still fresh in my memory as if he had said them only yesterday*) as the rain was tapping the glass window over our heads: 'My two beloved daughters, if I should die, pour a bottle of "Rouge" on my tomb every time you come to visit my grave. This is my commandment to you two, so you'd better not forget it!'

> But there's one dream that keeps haunting me every night. In this dream I see my father as happy as ever chasing, teasing and hugging both of us. He clutches your hair, which you wear in long soft braids - whereas mine is short, like a boy's hair. The three of us laugh and play Blindman's Buff; he hides behind a tree, and we run in all directions looking for him. There is an old cabin there, very similar to the one in which Najiyya al-Jabliyya and we used to rest on our way to the orchard in the Rif. Do you remember that cabin? I still remember it. How can I forget it? Najiyya said that young men used to take young girls there and deflower them. We get tired from running, and we stop suddenly. Then we realize that Dad is not there and that he is nowhere to be found. We get closer to the cabin; Dad told us not to go in. I suggest looking for him inside, but you don't let me. You pull me back from my dress, but I slip away from you and push you away from me. I go in. Little white ghosts! Bats! Then I wake up, terrified.

Why do I remember my Dad again? He knew that his death was imminent, but that did not seem to bother him – he used to drink a lot. The drinking he did all his life did not

quench his thirst. He was always thirsty until he passed away intoxicated. He drank until the very last minute of his life when the bar bouncer thought he was bombed. He shook him violently and was about to throw him out at that very moment, which, I believe the bouncer, revolted by the stinking corps, would never forget. It was a corpse, a real one indeed, for he had died. Does that make sense? The barmaid told us later that my Dad did not finish his last glass.

Was it a tragic end? One thing is sure: he could not have hoped for a more "beautiful" end.

Salma, does it happen to you to think of Dad? Do you see him in your dreams?

Salma will utter the sentence of that German painter which she has been repeating incessantly: 'Would the feast day be more beautiful if it lasted longer?'

Feast day! The black bottles of wine, which my father used to hide in the inside pockets of his overcoat when he came home at night, were his way of dodging his existentialist fate. These happy remembrances are so fresh in my memory as if they happened only yesterday. He would pick up his harmonica and strike up old French and American songs redolent with nostalgia for the past, which my sister and I had memorized with time and which we sang along with him. That moment had a special fragrance to it.

Salma, do you remember how bright Dad's eyes would become when he was drunk? Do you remember his voice? How I love this man!

I loved his disorder, too, all of which he used to cover with a failing artificial organization.

Wasn't it great that both of us had witnessed the life of a man like him in all its wild aspects? He was always colluding with us against our poor mother and against our neighbours' children. Do you remember the day when Shadiyya – Mmi-Habiba's daughter – hurled a stone at you and you came home crying. He was making two wooden chairs for us. Do you remember how he picked up a long piece of wood which he gave you, saying: 'Go and thrash the life out of her.' Are you laughing? But why do I remember him in this way?

I was Dad's favourite, but this did not bother Salma at all, because she was Mum's pet. He always insisted on cutting my hair so that I'd look like a boy – the boy he never had! I was my Dad's favourite boy, however, when he discovered one afternoon that my bosom had began to develop – as I was wearing a tight shirt, proud of my breasts – he laughed and, pulling me from my hair, he planted a kiss on my neck. I understood that he was happy about his "son" who had blossomed.

That was the way he had always kissed me even when I grew tall, well above the

collar of his shirt. Going to the souk[5] with him was fun, grabbing me from the neck. When I grew too tall for him to grab my neck the way he used to, he stopped taking me to the souk with him. Only then did I put an end to my colluding with him against my mother, as I used to do in my childhood. Our heated arguments always ended in slangy matches and door slamming. One day, as the plates were being smashed for both of us were hot with anger, he even threatened to throw me out of "his house". Every thing began when I discovered that my mother had never left the kitchen. She was a proletariat of a very special kind, which was very "natural". We – that is Dad, my sister and I – went on living and enjoying every minute of it while her daily task consisted of making sure that we lived with no worries, a mission which she performed in a machine-like manner. Later on this discovery turned into a wretched awareness. I broached the subject of Mum with him with a surprising placidity at the beginning. He was ready to disbelieve (doubt in) Mary's virginity, but where the "nature of things" (that is, equality between man and woman) was concerned, that for him was "balderdash".

What a woman Mum was! Because of her, he threatened to throw me out. When the dispute turned into a brawl, she would come and stand calmly close by, and then she would nonchalantly put me '*au pied du mur*'[6] as the French would say. 'None of your business,' she would say, 'Do you want to change the world?' And so that the world would not change, she put her little foot in his camp because he was her husband, and because he was wonderful even in his lowness. He would burst out laughing and, just like in those beautiful old days, he would grab me by my neck, pull me towards him and shake me, laughing.

'You little devil,' he would say, 'One day you'll be something or nothing at all.'

Salma, I feel afraid and lonely. Do you think my father's prophecy has come true?

لطيفة باقا

Latifa Baqa is a writer from Morocco. The above short story is from the collection *Mallazi Nafaluhu* (What Are We Doing?), Moroccan Writers' Union Publications, 1999. The collection won the Union's Prize for young writers in 1992.

[5] Marketplace.
[6] With my back to the wall.

MALAK HAJJ OBEID

Translated by ***Ali Azeriah***

On a Cold Day

I said to Saïd and the children, as I was seeing them through, 'Be careful guys! It's a very cold day!' I stood behind the window watching them – Saïd with his slender frame, snow flurries falling profusely upon him; Rana with her coal-black braid hanging down her back from under a hat; and Samir with his lazy gait and wicked idea to skip school today. They waved at me as the car pulled away.

Five years have elapsed since we came to live in New York. Have I grown accustomed to this city? Certainly not! Saïd has been working without respite, which has taken his mind off thinking about the exile he has been living, or which he at least did not feel. After all, he was the one who wanted to live abroad. When I opposed the idea of immigrating to New York, he said, 'What can a person do when he feels stifled in his own country? They will immigrate even to hell.'

'I cannot leave Damascus,' I said, 'Please, I'll work and help you.'

Saïd laughed mockingly and said, 'Doing what, teaching music classes? What kind of living will we be making from these classes? Who cares about music, anyway? Life has become very expensive here, and our income is not enough.'

I was at a loss, for usually I am in the know; but what can one do, except feel pain at leaving one's country? I paced about the house, and I busied myself with house chores; but my imagination carried me on its wing to Damascus, seeking out the faces of relatives and friends, and longing for the morning cup of coffee at one of my neighbours'.

It was a wet day. The rain was giving the trees a wash. It was freezing! But what is the cold season of Damascus compared with that of New York? A light knock on the door awakened me from my absentmindedness. Then the knocking stopped. I laughed inside and said to myself, 'Perhaps it is one of my neighbours who has come to say Hi.' Then I quickly chased the idea away from my mind, for the "law" of the country says 'neighbours are not to visit one another.'

As I resumed my work, I heard that same light knock again on the door, which impelled me to open it. I saw a white kitten mewing and shivering with cold. Hardly had the door opened when the kitten rushed inside; but being fearful of cats and the diseases they are likely to carry, I prevented it from coming in and closed the door. However, it occurred to me that the cat might be hungry, which prompted me to give it a little hot milk in a plastic cup, and I went back to my work.

One hour later, the doorbell rang, which was quite a surprise for me, for what luck

was that that someone should knock at our door without giving advance notice? Even the few times Said's brother visited us, it was only after he had called us in advance. So, what was going on? I opened the door. A tall, blond and elegant lady was standing at the doorstep. She was in her forties. When she saw me, she greeted me with a smile, which brightened up my day. Perhaps she would break the rule and come to visit me often; and who knows, we may even strike up a friendship! I welcomed her warmly, and I invited her in, but she apologized politely and said, 'Madam, your cat must have gone out without you noticing it. I knocked at your door to let her in. Poor thing! It is shivering.'

My joy shriveled inside me, but I did not want to withdraw my smile. I said to her, 'I am really impressed by your noble feelings, Madam, but this cat is not mine!'

'But it's at your doorstep!' She said in bewilderment.

'The cat tapped the door and, knowing that it's hungry, I gave it some milk.' The lady looked at me suspiciously and resentfully, then she walked away.

I went to the kitchen to prepare food; but hardly had I begun when the doorbell was sounded a second time, which surprised me greatly. 'Who could it be this time?'

As I opened the door, the face of a man in his sixties greeted me. I looked at him astonishingly.

'My apologies if I have disturbed you, Madam,' he said, 'But I must draw your attention to the fact that your cat is outside. It's freezing out here, and I fear it will catch a cold.'

'Thank you sir for your kindness, but the cat is not mine! It came to my door only this morning.'

'How cruel can one be to leave their cat outdoors on such a cold day!' He muttered in protest, and walked away.

'I don't know, sir!'

He left without saying goodbye, which made me feel humiliated. Vexed, I went back to the kitchen. I was about to finish cooking when the doorbell rang. I did not know why the thought that it could be a visitor from Damascus crossed my mind, so I rushed to the door.

No sooner had I opened it than my eyes landed on an old lady who, without greeting me, snapped rudely at me, 'Madam,' she said, 'This is unacceptable! How could you allow yourself to kick your poor cat out on such a cold day?'

Taking a grasp of myself, I said to her, anger surging up within me, 'My dear lady, why do you allow yourself to think ill of people? If the cat were mine, I wouldn't leave it outside. But I don't like cats! And if I don't like cats, how can I have one at home?'

The woman glanced at me disdainfully. I thought I had heard her mutter words of abuse against me, 'Barbarians!' How I wished to slam the door shut behind her, but I dismissed the wish and went inside feeling frustrated. To conceal my misery, I turned

on the tape-recorder and Fairuz's voice[1] flowed with the song:

I Love Lebanon;
My country, I love you!
I love your north and your south,
I love your plains.

My eyes brimming with tears, I screamed at the top of my voice: 'I love Lebanon! I love Damascus! I love all these countries!' I got so carried away with the song that I forgot about the cat altogether.

But the doorbell rang for the fourth time. I charged at it, determined to pummel anyone who dared to talk to me about the cat with abuse. I opened the door, ready to pick up a fight, but the sight of the policeman at the door numbed my feet, and I felt my heart sinking inside me.

'Does Mr. Said Dabbagh live here?' the policeman asked.

With great difficulty, I managed to give a nod.

'Are you his wife?'

'Yes,' I said shaking from head to toe, 'What happened? Did my husband have an accident? Death or injury? What about the children?'

I had the impression that his lips were moving and that I heard words whose import I understood to mean that the neighbours had lodged a complaint against me because I had kicked my cat out of the house.

I closed my eyes, and from the depth of my bosom, I heaved a sigh of relief, and I muttered: 'Thank God!'

I stood bolt upright, and with a mocking smile creeping across my mouth, I said, 'Sir, I, too, am thinking of lodging a complaint against my neighbours to charge them of disturbance to residents from the morning until now. It is as if these people have nothing to do, but to harass me. What can I do to prove to you that this cat is not mine, that I have never seen it before, and that I *hate* cats because, when I was a child, I contracted a disease from a cat, from which I suffered a lot and which took a long time to cure. This is why I'd never allow myself to touch a cat or let a cat, however beautiful, cross the threshold of my house. Sir, you and the others have made of the subject of the cat an issue, which is very unkind indeed.'

He looked at me ponderingly as if to gage the veracity of my story and, unable to make a judgment, he nodded and walked away. My body was burning with anger, and my head screaming with questions: 'Is this a scheme to harass us so as to force us out of the building? But why?'

A crushing defeat descended upon me, and I felt a terrible loneliness taking hold of me. I might even be charged with cruelty to animals, and my picture might be in the

[1] Fairuz is a famous Lebanese singer.

newspaper under the headline: *ARAB WOMAN KICKS OUT HER CAT ON A COLD DAY.*

But my thinking was cut short by the doorbell, which rang five times that day. The thought of not answering it crossed my mind, but as the ringing continued unabated for sometime, I opened the door. I tried to appear as cold and contemptuous as I possibly could, but I was taken aback by the sight of two police officers at my door. One thought flashed in my mind: they have come to arrest me, and I will leave the building under the looks of hatred on my neighbours' faces.

'Madam, you said that the cat does not belong to you. Would you please sign this declaration to confirm that the cat is not yours and, therefore, you'll not be able to claim it in the future?'

These words brought a sort of uplift to my despondent spirit, and heaving a sigh of relief, I snatched the pen from the officer's hand. I signed the piece of paper, thanking God that the crisis had ended in this way.

I dropped into a chair completely worn out. What a miserable day! What wretched life will I be living here? The only thing they haven't done yet is to set up the gallows for me.'

I wished Saïd would come home as soon as possible. I yearned for the children's return so that I could tell them about the silly and disturbing story.

I did not know how long I had been lying down in the chair, when I heard voices coming closer to my door and the mewing of a cat. I was certain it was Rana and Samir returning home from school. Perhaps they had the idea of bringing the cat into the house, in which case it would be the proof that the cat was ours, and that I had signed a false declaration.

I opened the door, and saw two new police officers with a cage whose floor had been covered with a pink blanket on which a cat was sleeping. My eyes met theirs, and they smiled. I sensed a scorn in their smile. I did not know why I remembered the picture of a smiling American soldier carrying a basket full of the heads of Vietnamese rebels, of air-raids on refuge camps, of children's throats being slit, and of bulldozers crashing the living and pulverizing human body parts. In that picture I saw men whose lives were being harvested by fire, women falling down on their children, young people in the prime of youth and innocent children braving the bullets of the civilized world with their bare chests. I closed the door quietly, my heart full of rage.

ملك حاج عبيد

Malak Hajj Obeid is a writer from Syria. The above short story is from the collection *Shahrazad Tabuhu Bishujuniha* (Shahrazad Pours out Her Heartaches), Kitab al-Arabi, Book 41, published by *Al-Arabi Magazine*, July 15, 2000.

SAHAB MOHAMMAD AS-SAMMAM

Translated by Ali Azeriah

Timoo

Your Honor! It had never occurred to me that I would be standing in a court of justice, for it is my habit to let myself be guided by my conscience: I give everyone their due rights, and I treat people kindly. Your Honor, you can ask the merchants, the poor and all the beggars of the city about me. They will all say: 'Hajj Abdessabour - a righteous and honorable man, indeed!' I thank God for all the blessings and good fortunes He has bestowed on me, so that I can give to people and help them. I try to be kind to my fellow man so that the Lord of the Heavens will bestow His Mercy on me. My friend, Hajj Ahmad, laughed. All the witnesses have confirmed it. He laughed when he heard that I was to appear in court on theft charges.

Stealing! Your Honor, stealing is a very serious accusation whose weight and burden I just cannot bear. Stealing from what? From a veterinary clinic! I think that even a professional thief would not break into a veterinary clinic. What would he steal from it? An injection? A scalpel? Adhesive tape? No! I don't think anyone in their right mind would even contemplate such a thought.

Your Honor, you say that the night guard caught me red-handed trying to open the door of the clinic. That is true! I myself do not deny it, but it was not for stealing. I assure Your Honor the thought had never crossed my mind, not even for a moment. Let me tell my story from the beginning.

I have been married for twenty years now. The Will of God has decreed that my wife be barren. She cannot have children. We sought the help of tens of doctors here and in France and Germany, but medicine could not encroach upon the Power of God – to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty.

We very much wanted a boy. My wife, Your Honor, cannot see a child without shedding tears or feeling distressed. We could have adopted a child from an orphans' home, but I did not despair of God's mercy. After twenty years of living on hope – the hope of having a child - we adopted a puppy. I can see Your Honor smiling. It's OK! it's OK! The matter may be amusing indeed. My wife grew very fond of the dog. It was small, black, with curly hair, but it was a beautiful little dog.

Well, then! I'll be brief and say that I must talk about Timoo - which is the name my wife had given him – because he is the reason why I had to be at Dr. Abdulfattah's clinic in the first place. We took good care of him, showering him with love and affection, as if he was our child. He ate his meals regularly, and his bed in the living room was always clean and tidy. We would take him out on his daily walk, and give him his bath once a week. We even used to give him a daily lesson. Yes, Your Honor,

we taught him how to behave himself, how to open and close the door, and how to buy vegetables, fruits and meat. I used to put a small basket around his neck and send him to Abdu's, the butcher, after I had ordered these goods from him by phone.

Ask Abdu, Your Honor; he'll tell you. He would put the meat in the basket, along with some bones as food for Timoo. The latter would bring it home without touching its contents, knowing all too well that the bones were for him. Never did he take one single bone by himself. He would wait until we gave it to him.

Please, Your Honor, let me finish, for Timoo is the central issue here. Your Honor will not understand the motive for my going to the veterinarian's clinic unless you have heard the real story about Timoo. Thank you, Your Honor, thank you!

Then Timoo was taken ill. He hasn't been feeling well for a year now. He's lost appetite, and he no longer goes to Abdu's or opens the door. He secludes himself in the kitchen, moaning and suffering. Your Honor would perhaps appreciate the extent of the suffering my wife and I had endured.

He's lost weight. He's become pallid and, once in a while, he gives faint and sporadic barks, as though to entreat us to cure him of his ailment. So, I took him to the veterinary's - Dr. Abdulfattah – I locked my shop and took Timoo to him, as if I were chasing away my own sustenance. Commerce, Your Honor, compels you to treat people politely, courteously, calmly, and with a smile which should never disappear from one's face. I felt I just could not behave toward people politely, courteously and calmly, or smile so long as Timoo was sick. My suffering for him could affect my behavior toward people, which might cause me to harm them; and I do not wish to hurt anybody, for I fear God – the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

The doctor examined Timoo and prescribed some medicine for him. I went to the drugstore to purchase it. Al-Hikma Drugstore sold the last pack they had a week ago; Ashifa Drugstore does not carry animal drugs; the chemist at Al-Amal Drugstore had never heard of the prescription; and the central drug depot was closed for refurbishment and décor. I went to all the drugstores in the city, even to the Center for Veterinary Medicine. I even looked for it in Aleppo, in Homs, in Dir az-Zour, and in all other districts and I still could not find the medicine.

So I went back to Dr. Abdulfattah hoping I'd find the drug with him or that he'd prescribe another drug for Timoo, one that is available in the market. He told me – and he is here to confirm every word I say – 'I only have two packs, but I cannot give them to you because I am keeping them for the cat of Colonel Moussa al-Azhari's daughter.

Your Honor, the cat that belongs to Colonel Moussa al-Azhari's daughter was not sick then. She is in good health even as I speak. I tried to buy the medicine from Dr. Abdulfattah, offering him fifty liras, seventy, one-hundred, two-hundred liras. Two-hundred Syrian liras for one pack of medicine, can you believe it? He still wouldn't budge. Isn't that right, Dr. Abdulfattah?

Yes, yes, Your Honor! I got you! I'll address myself to no one else but Your Honor.

I went back home sad and crestfallen, cursing medicine, the drug, the drugstores and dogs; but I did not imprecate Dr. Abdulfattah. I swear I didn't.

I watched Timoo. It was nighttime. My wife was crying and plucking out her hair. Timoo was lying on the floor, foaming at the mouth. His chest heaved violently. My wife begged me to do something. What could I do? It was the Will of God – be He exalted. I cannot object to His Will. ﴿*When their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation)*﴾.[1]

But Timoo's condition rent my heart. Your Honor, just imagine how I felt when I saw him in that state! What is the feeling of a father who watches his son die? Yes, his son! Timoo was *my son*. I can see Your Honor chuckling; but despite everything, I'm proud of my being Timoo's father. I went to my room and performed a two-prostration prayer, asking God's forgiveness and invoking Him for a long time without being aware of it. By the time I finished praying, it was already midnight. I heard a faint bark that sounded like the crying of a hungry child that beseeches his mother to breastfeed him. I also heard my wife sobbing, so I went out of the house for it was more than I could bear. I wandered aimlessly about.

I said to myself that I should not oppose God's Will. It might be God's Will which impelled me to be on Avenue Al-Hurriya and commanded me to stand in front of the veterinarian's clinic. I swear to God I did not think, even for a second, of breaking into the clinic. Not at all! I felt like a child who takes up position in front of the TV before children's programs begin, knowing that his favorite cartoons are in this box that is in front of him; or like a … – I don't know what they call my condition in psychology – But I had never thought of stealing. With childhood innocence, I turned the knob of the door of the clinic, hoping that it would open and that I'd find the medicine right there in front of me - the drug that would help *my son*, Timoo, to recover. Right at that moment, the night guard came and arrested me. I believe that any father would have behaved the way I did should the same thing happen to him. Your Honor, would you have behaved differently if you had been in my shoes?

I do know that I am to be punished, and I am ready for it – for any punishment: a prison sentence, a fine, whatever! The only thing I ask of Your Honor is not to sentence me on the basis of a theft charge.

سحاب محمد الصمام

Sahab Mohammad as-Sammam is a writer from Syria. The above short story is from the collection *Shahrazad Tabuhu Bishujuniha* (Shahrazad Pours out Her Heartaches), Kitab al-Arabi, Book 41, published by *Al-Arabi Magazine*, July 15, 2000.

[1] Koranic Verse. Youssef Ali' s translation.

L. E. SCOTT

Awatere – A Soldier's Story

By **Arapeta Awatere**
Edited by Hinemoa Ruataupare Awatere
Huia Publishers

It is an old cliché but one that still sucks human blood: of those to whom the gods give much, much is demanded. Arapeta Awatere, of the Ngati Porou tribe, was born in 1910 on the East Coast of Aotearoa/New Zealand and he was touched by the gods. From an early age his people saw him as a toa (warrior) and the elders taught him the traditional arts of Maori warfare.

This gifted son of the Ngati Porou grew up totally immersed in his own Maori culture and language. He also had a keen intellect and a gift for languages and became fluent in English, German, Latin and Russian. He enlisted in the army when World War Two broke out and his reputation as a fierce fighter grew on the battlefields of North Africa and Europe. He rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and took command of the 28th Maori Battalion. By the end of the war, Lieutenant-Colonel Arapeta Awatere had carved out a place not only in the Maori world but also in the Pakeha world, which was far from divested of its colonial and racist attitudes towards the indigenous people.

After demobilisation, Arapeta Awatere set about waging a different war, this time on behalf of his own people. The campaigns he fought in this war sought to preserve and protect all things Maori, to create an environment in which Maori culture could flourish and find its rightful place in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and to insist that the government properly recognise the Treaty of Waitangi, the treaty between Maori and the Crown signed in 1840.

Awatere's tireless work on behalf of his people made him a much loved and admired public figure. But on August 3, 1969, the gods came to demand their due from this war hero, community leader, teacher, scholar and historian. "In 1965 he began an extramarital relationship with Tuini Hakaraia, whom he considered to be his de facto wife, although he continued to regard Elsie as his de jure wife. In Maori terms, the relationship with Elsie was that of the wahine matua (senior wife) and Tuini was the wahine punarua, or junior wife. It was still, however, a clandestine affair – no one

knew except his wife. Awatere continued to live with Elsie and their youngest daughter, Donna, and he would call on Tuini at her house, for brief visits. Publicly, Awatere and Tuini were regarded as close friends, and as colleagues in Maori welfare work. In 1969 Tuini took up with Hendrik Vunderink, a relationship of three weeks duration. Awatere was unaware of their relationship, and he continued to see Tuini as his de facto wife. On 2 August Awatere experienced several rehu (premonitions) which gave him a terrible sense of foreboding.... Early on the morning of 3 August, unable to sleep, Awatere went to Tuini's home in Te Atatu to deliver a love letter. He arrived through the back door noisily, rousing Tuini and Vunderink, and walked through the house. Awatere was met by Tuini at the bedroom door, whereupon he told her that he wanted to give her a letter. The bedroom door opened, and Vunderink was standing beside the bed. Awatere said that Vunderink advanced upon him. During an altercation, through which Awatere maintained he blacked out, he stabbed Vunderink with a knife he was carrying in his overcoat. Awatere was charged with murder."

Arapeta Awatere was convicted of murder and given a life sentence, which at that time meant a prison term of seven years. He would never taste freedom again. Shortly before he was due to be released from prison, he died of a heart attack.

It would be easy to see in this warrior's life a 'flawed hero' of Shakespearean dimensions. But during the years of his incarceration (and despite his strong belief that his was a case of self-defence, not murder) he did not breathe the air of bitterness. He reached out to his fellow inmates to share his knowledge with them, particularly the Maori inmates. Maori, then as now, formed a disproportionately large percentage of the prison population.

Arapeta Awatere also wrote prolifically during his time in prison, producing many essays, poems and scholarly papers, as well as his autobiography. On his death, all his papers and manuscripts were turned over to his family by the prison authorities. It was his family's wish at that time that they not be made available for publication.

Twenty-seven years after his death, Arapeta Awatere's granddaughter, Hinemoa Ruataupare Awatere, has collated many of these papers, including the autobiography manuscript, and produced *Awatere: A Soldier's Story*. There is much pain reflected in the book, both personal pain and the pain and hurt felt by others whose lives were touched by Awatere. But this is not a book recording the events of a great man's tragic life. Rather, it is a book about and by a man who met each challenge that fate and destiny threw his way. And what this book tells us is that in times of crisis, all we have is our conduct. This man fought on the battlefields of World War Two and conducted himself with courage and honour. He came home and fought for his people with courage and honour. And when his personal life was caught in the fires of passion, he faced the consequences of his actions with courage and honour. This is the story of a life that did not just strut and fret. This is the story of a life truly lived.

KHALID ZIADÉ

Friday, Sunday – Chapters from a Biography of a City on the Mediterranean

Translated by ***Raghid Nahhas***

Images and Thoughts

Images are an important component of our memories and thoughts. During special occasions and festivities, many calico posters carried pictures of certain identities next to short slogans written in red or black or both colours in large bold fonts. The terminology used was almost always the same despite the different occasions that seemed to arouse the same feelings. These occasions were too many, so perhaps there was a mix-up in the use of terms. There were funerals, anti-government demonstrations or celebrations of certain victories using the same means and instruments of expression.

My early memory goes back to countless occasions since 1956, or possibly that many of these scenes and memories were developed later. I only remember posters picturing busts of people, during both national and local celebrations. These were quickly hoisted during the night, by tying them to strings forming a rope hanging the posters between the two sides of the street. The whole arrangement formed a canopy covering our daily passage underneath. A canopy of posters, billboards and victory arches, depending on the importance of the occasion, to give us a sense of celebration during times such as the British-French-Israeli aggression on Egypt in 1956, the elections during the following year, the union between Egypt and Syria in 1958, the Algerian independence and the revolution in Iraq... Ten years of posters during many occasions and glorious days, followed by another ten years of billboards and slogans.

The first poster that comes to mind was in colour, of a young military officer with blue eyes. The poster was present in many places in the streets and the city. It appeared in newspapers and was distributed by hand. It was a poster of an officer whose assassination summed up the whole Arab nationalist cause, and created a schism between us and some minorities we considered our rivals and enemies. Another poster of another officer wearing military uniform followed. This was an officer who was killed during the battle for the Suez Canal, an example of a heroism that can only be complete by martyrdom.

This was one way of expressing principles and ideas through human symbols of unification. This is why these posters found their place inside homes and shops, occupying prominent places on the walls. They were often framed by silver or golden frames, and sometimes surrounded by artificial flowers. The pictures often changed. Posters of local leaders were restricted to election times once every four years, giving

way to posters of heroes who occupied a more lasting presence in the hearts and minds of people.

The habit of displaying pictures was recent in our environment. Families displayed photos of their elders in prominent places in their homes. The oldest of these photos go back to the beginning of the twentieth century when Armenian and French photographers introduced their massive cameras that stood on tripods and looked like metallic animals. Men, not women, usually had their pictures taken and exhibited at home. Some pious and religious people refused to have their pictures taken. Generally, there was only one picture for a person taken over his lifetime. It became a valuable item, particularly after his death. It was placed over a cloth embroidered with silk and the whole thing framed in a glass and silver frame. During the nineteen fifties, Armenian photographers spread in the square of the modern city, sitting on high stools behind their tripod cameras.

Photographs and posters were not merely of politicians. The photograph started to occupy a position between the person and the person's soul; everyone wanted to have a commemorative photograph taken. This type of photographs entered the life of the city from its public square where mobile photographers spread offering their services to children, women and men who were eager to have their photograph taken. *Carpis* was the only photographer who kept an archive of over three thousand films of photographs he took between the end of the 1940's and the beginning of the 1960's. His son, who inherited the profession, showed me the films kept in their small yellow boxes and asked me what could he do with them. I had no satisfactory answer.

There is no doubt that the presence of unveiled women gave the public square a new setting: they came with their husbands or friends to have a commemorative photograph taken. It was often kept among dear items or framed and exhibited.

Photographs were valuable items, no matter what their subject was: kings, leaders or the elders of the family. Personal portraits only, without scenery or landscape occupied a prominent place at home as they were exhibited among Koranic verses and wall mats carrying pictures of Mecca and its Kaaba.

Pictures were valuable things deserving preservation and care. This is why the owner of the glassware shop at the entrance to *Khan al-Khayyateen* kept all the pictures he inherited from his father and those he came across. He was very proud of his collection that he felt possessed a great value, but equally generous in showing it to others. Every day he would hang the pictures around his shop and collect them again in the evening. Half a century of photographs, through which we deciphered the codes of history: the two sultans Abdulhamid and Mohammed Rashad, King Ahmad Fuad, Prince Faisal on his horseback and pictures of forgotten kings and persons. There were also imaginary characters such as *Antara bin Shaddad*. Some of the pictures were huge, representing the natural size of their subjects, while others were small. There were a few pictures of the shop-owner, wearing his moustaches, along with some known and unknown identities. Most of the photographs were in black and white, but some were coloured by hand.

Whenever possible, I used to deliberately make my way via the glassware shop so that I stop and contemplate the pictures. I could not identify the people in them, nevertheless I could have a sense of the time-span they represented. The unique ritual the shopkeeper followed in hanging the pictures with their wooden, silver and golden frames every morning only to remove them again when he closed, amazed me. He became known for this all around town. The villagers who came downtown used to stand in front of his shop to contemplate the pictures with bewilderment. He used to show a lot of satisfaction when one of the passers-by recognised his presence in the pictures, with his moustaches and Turkish calpac as if he had never departed the past.

Sheikh Hassan, the owner of the bookshop at the entrance to the perfume market, did not exhibit any personal photographs. He was a pious man whose beliefs made him reject the idea of photographs, and opt for his own slogans that bear no relation to any party or association. He wrote with white chalk on brown carton paper. Every slogan contained at least one word extracted from the word "Arab". He was a zealous Arabist, with the slogan of "United Arab States" and others dominating his work. On some occasions he wore one slogan on his chest and the other on his back and walked up and down the street repeating the slogan with a loud voice. His piety and religion were, however, stronger than his Arab nationalism. He alone observed the habit of *Takbir* (exclaiming "*allahu akbar*" or "god is great" in a prayer-like voice) during the days that preceded the *Adha* feast. Every now and then and during times of prayers he wandered the street, calling people to the prayer.

His bookshop contained all sorts of books, and covered a century of Arab publishing. When the value of the contents of his bookshop became public, book collectors or sellers drained it of its most valuable and rare volumes. He then opted for lending novels and magazines to schoolchildren at a very low charge.

By the time I became a schoolboy, one poster carrying the picture of one person had replaced all other posters. It was displayed on all occasions such that any other poster vanished and became forgotten.

The picture of Gamal Abdul Nassir summarised it all. In black and white, in colour, in civilian dress, in military uniform, thinking or smiling, the picture was there in many sizes and places. I am not sure how one of these pictures in a silver frame was hung in a prominent place in our home. Some of my brothers went to Damascus when Nasser personally visited Syria upon announcing the United Arab Republic, comprising Syria and Egypt. Once my mother took me with her on a family visit to Homs, Syria, when I was only seven, she bought one of Nasser's coloured posters for me when we stopped at the border.

During the year Nasser visited Damascus, *Eid al-Fitre*[1] occurred during spring. A timber model[2] of Nasser was erected in the public square. My brother and I went to have our pictures taken next to the model. The photograph was a source of our joy and pride, showing it to whoever came to visit us.

We had no other pictures on our walls. No landscapes or portraits. One picture moved with us from home to home. Only the Koran in its cloth case was hung over my father's bed.

Our early upbringing was among the pictures and slogans of Arab nationalism, and its rhetoric in the media and poems recited using loudspeakers during festivals, inside closed doors or in public squares. Slogans attracted us due to the ease of memorising them, particularly that we often chanted them as we cheered during demonstrations and festivals. We inhaled Arab nationalism at home, inside our classrooms, in the district and the street we passed from home to school. Some of our teachers were active partisans. They were few in number but their influence was noticeable. They spoke little about patriotism, probably due to our young age, but a few words were enough, particularly that they turned a blind eye to our strikes and absence from school during national events.

We were Arabs, but also Moslems deep down. Everything depended on how priorities were set. Parents mixed Arabism with Islam in a similar way to the glassware shopkeeper who mixed pictures of Ottoman sultans with princes of the Arab revolt, ignoring that the revolt was by the princes against the sultans. Or in a way similar to Sheikh Hassan, the bookshop owner, in his making Arabism part of his piety and faith.

Arab nationalism was our natural environment and an extension to our beliefs. It infiltrated all aspects of our life: family, neighbours, markets, school and the city. It influenced subsequent generations who felt that it was relevant. The generation of the

[1] The festivity marking the conclusion of Ramadan, the Moslems' month of fasting. (*Fitre* means "breaking the fast", and *eid* means "festivity" or "celebration".)

[2] This would have usually been a life-size cardboard display.

sons and daughters wanted to give it priority on a national level. This created misunderstanding between parents and children about which slogans and expressions to adopt. However, the one picture of Nasser continued to be a guarantee for the continuation of some consensus.

Our revolt after the 1967 Arab defeat was not aimed at Arab nationalism but at its symbols that undermined its essence. This is why I, with my own hands, removed Nasser's picture off the wall that became bare for the first time for over a decade.

We wanted to replace pictures by thoughts and analysis, particularly objective analysis. We spent our days in meetings full of discussions, and our nights reading into the depth of books. We carried our thoughts and expressions to peoples' gatherings and groups leaving behind all pictures and symbols, or thus it seemed to us.

It was not possible to tie thoughts and books by strings from one side of the street to the other. New pictures and slogans had to replace the old ones. These were now glued to walls all over the city.

Poster upon poster covered the walls of the city and covered one another. Colours were mixed, and it became difficult to distinguish pictures from symbols and thoughts in that odd combination on the walls of the city.

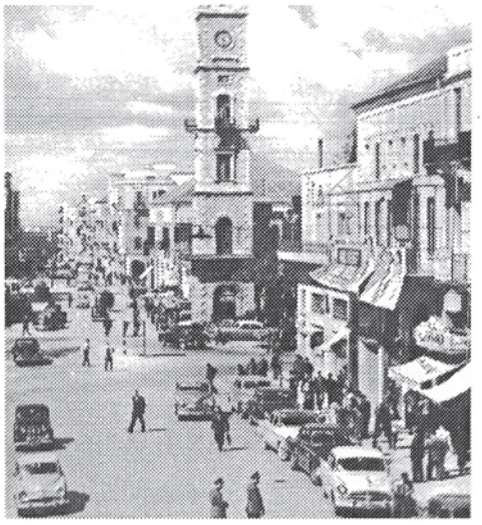
City Streets

I knew the old city and its long *souk*[3] ardently. The souk connected its two sides. Many lanes, alleys and internal narrow streets branched off this long thoroughfare. We, the young boys, were able to discover our way through those dark serpentine lanes to the *Qal'a*,[4] the *Mallaha*[5] or the *Dabbagha*[6] on the riverbank. Roofed souks linked large spaces surrounded by houses with front-yards.

We mostly frequented the the Qal'a during spring. It was separated from our school by roofed pathways and stairs. This exercise gave us the feeling that we were entering and leaving houses without anyone discovering us. In the spacious yard in front of the huge gate of the Qal'a, we used to play and catch coloured beetles. The high walls of the Qal'a incited us to play war games using bows and arrows, but we did not give much thought to the impact of long history on these souks and innermost lanes. We had no conception of the many generations that dwelt in those spots. This varied life-style, with its intricate pattern of intermingling worlds without clear-cut boundaries attracted

[3] A narrow street in the heart of old Middle-Eastern cities being its business and shopping centre.
[4] The citadel
[5] A name of a location indicating the possibility of its original use as a salt mill.
[6] The tannery.

us. It was a mixture of people, professions, odours and voices. The souk was our environment where we lived and took things for granted.



As boys of the hara[7] (not as schoolboys), we were attracted to the other side of the city, particularly during spring times when we could cross Old Beirut Road through groves of olive trees to the Boulevard, the new highway to Beirut under construction. We would stop at the point where a bridge was being constructed.

Our journey would stop at the outskirts of the city and we would return to its inner quarters. I used only to visit the modern centre of the city during occasions, festivities or consultations with doctors who established their clinics outside the old souk in high-rise edifices.

In years that followed, when I was able to go to school on my own, I was able to take several alternative routes. Some passed parallel to the old souk, and others passed through the main square of the modern city. I generally chose the street full of printing houses. It connected to Rahbat Street that led to Nejmeh Square. This is the environment where I had originally been raised. Crossing Zahiria Street, I used to meet the girls' high-school pupils wearing their olive uniforms. In the straight Rahbat Street, I used to meet the girls from the Rahbat[8] School wearing their blue uniforms. The school's high wall extended over three quarters of one side of the street. The school gate was in the middle of that high wall. I used to walk slowly whenever I arrived at the start of the street, allowing myself the opportunity to examine the faces of the school girls among whom I soon found myself searching for one particular face which attracted my attention. Meeting her every morning became my main concern. She used to leave her home at 7:20 and arrive at school by 7:30.

I fell in love with the girl from the Rahbat School. My source of information about her was a classmate of mine. During holidays, I frequented her quarter in order to have a glimpse of her. I took all routes leading to her home, and became an expert on all pavements, shops and faces.

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[7] The traditional lane in the old quarters of a city, with all its social and demographic implications.

[8] *Rahbat* is Arabic for "nuns". Some schools were referred to as "Rahbat" schools because they were run by nuns, even though the official name of the school could have been different.

Her street became familiar to me. I expanded my circle of exploration arriving at her building from a different direction every time: the Rahbat Street, the opposite direction whereon Alajam Street was located and even from the Daftardar Square linked to the old souk eastward. My passion about her was intensely associated with my love for hanging about in the streets and the lanes surrounding her home. I strengthened as much as possible my friendships with boys from her locality to give me enough excuses to be present there.

It was a first love that I did not know what to do with, particularly as she did not take notice of my roving. I was merely one of the many boys who used to crowd her street.

I gradually started to forget the Rahbat School girl when I turned my attention to a neighbour. She was the most beautiful girl in the street. She had a kind of a Grecian beauty and a kind of mystery I was unable to determine. For a full summer I stayed at home. If I went out, it was for a very short period. My mother thought I was sick, or very depressed. I used to watch her from a window that overlooked her balcony. We exchanged glances, gestures and a silent love. When we met in the street, we muttered some greeting or words and shivered and blushed. Maybe she expected that I would reveal my love to her first, but I dared not.

I could not dare stand in front of her in the middle of the street and tell her in a clear voice. I could not dare follow her to her building, to hold her hand and tell her that I loved her. I was afraid, particularly of the ridicule of my friends in the street or at school. The culture reigned in our male circle that every boy would express his passion for more than one girl, sometimes in a very obscene way, by recounting some made-up stories about their sexual adventures. If we saw a boy talking to a girl in a corner of a street, he became subject to ridicule. This is why we avoided befriending our female relatives to avoid talking to them in the street, as if talking to the opposite sex would degrade our manhood.

The possible relationship between boys and girls during our teenage years was the subject of much contradictory feelings. On the one hand, it was a source of pride. On the other, it was a source of derision. A young man's feeling of pride in such a relationship is equated by his fear of his friends who might debase his passion and his involvement with one lover. When the relationship becomes serious, the youth in question will be the subject of pity.

I forgot our Grecian-faced neighbour as I did the Rahbat School girl. I forgot her amidst my friendship with mates, a relationship of boys who compensated for the acquaintance of girls by merely talking about them. I was no longer able to stay at home awaiting my neighbour's presence on her balcony. I went out continuously. We followed school-girls in every street and from any school at any time. I met girls whose images matched the one I had in mind about my ideal girl. I was particularly attracted to the girls from the American School and from the Rahbat of Ibrin School. I became

familiar with the routes of school buses that took the girls from their homes to school. Many girls attracted our attention in a short period of time. We exchanged information about the times they left their homes, the times of their return from school, their names, their ages, their hobbies and other information.

This is how I discovered and explored the modern side of the city. Streets not previously known to me, discovered mainly thanks to my personal efforts and to those of my friends. Our main stage was that long street which had been cut through the citrus orchards in the beginning of the twentieth century, out of which many other streets branched. These were quiet, elegant and clean streets in which all the girls we admired and sought were present. This was the only thing we searched for in those "female" streets.

The passion for our phantom girls was confused with our passion for those streets we roamed, window-shopping to pass time. We memorised all names, people and places, and became experts on shops, buildings, their inhabitants and visitors who competed with us for the same purpose.

We aimlessly roamed the place, all day long and in all seasons. Neither winter rain nor the humidity of the summer stopped us. The most beautiful period of the year, however, was during the time schools resumed their activity in October, as well as during the short spring season.

All of my imaginary girlfriends who were the same age as me, had short names. They were easily pronounced names, indicating the fervent struggle for modernity. Girls were called "Nada", "Hiba", "Hana", "Zena", "Rima" and "Maha". These were names with the same musical sounds, indicative of a generation that was going to immerse itself in the modernity and openness of the nineteen sixties.

I spent three to four happy teenage years in tracking the girls. This allowed me to get expert knowledge of the streets of the modern city. But all of a sudden everything was put to an end. I became preoccupied with student activities and with my new partisan life. I distributed pamphlets, organised demonstrations and strikes. I spent many hours in meetings that seemed endless, meetings without the presence of any girls.

It was not merely a change in interests, but also a change in norms and ideas. We neglected our appearance and stopped listening to western music. We substituted the life that was as naive as our relationship with girls with a more serious one, or so we thought as we embarked on chain-smoking, long-term meetings, thick books and staying awake until the early hours of the morning. We grew up many years within a few months between one autumn and the beginning of the summer that followed it.

It was not simply a change in habits and ideas, but also a change of places. Partisanship would not have survived in those open wide streets. We had to operate in old poor public streets at the edge of the city. This made me discover new areas in which I had never set foot before. The outer stretches of the city and its innermost

streets were the stage for communications, meetings and establishing contacts with workers and professionals.

It was a harsh partisan life that severely excluded women in order to maintain its revolutionary purity. We could not bear that so we made frequenting "school gates" part of our activities. But our female comrades came from public schools rather than the schools we used to like. They were less elegant and took less notice of their make-up.

In reality, all parts of the city became our stage... Some streets were for our struggle and others for hanging about. Male streets and others for the females. Poor streets and affluent streets. Places, streets, quarters and cafes are like memories. You frequently resort to some of them, others you only recall occasionally and the rest you forget forever.

The Transition to the Sixties

The nineteen sixties started and finished early in our city. They lasted eight or nine years between 1958 and 1967, i.e. they fell between a local revolt and a regional war. They were one way of dividing time into eras between fateful events. Writers of history take care of these events that are basically focal points in the memory of two or three of the city's generations. These events take as special meaning in the life of the city, because each one of them can be realised differently by the different people remembering it. The different interpretations of the same event accumulate as if they add more strata over those of the buildings, suburbs and streets.

There were other events that had taken place in the previous two decades but lingered on in the memories of the nineteen sixties. Every suburb or family seemed to have its own version of the same event that was relived by consecutive generations as if they were present when it occurred. For example, the incident in 1947 that relates to the famous leader al-Qawiqji and the flood of the river in 1955. People like myself who were born during the first incident and were in their early years of life during the second, can see the details of either incidents as if they were there when the incidents happened.

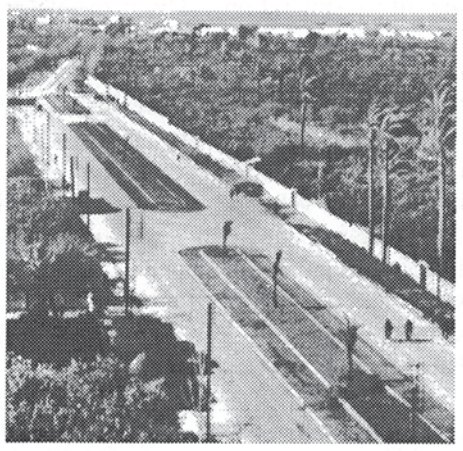
Every decade registers at least one distinguished event, but there are some decades that are crammed with events, preserved in the memory as landmarks for the turning of time.

Surely, when history quickly or slowly passes an event, it intensifies a group of unseen or unread patterns. The al-Qawiqji incident was a crossing between the effects of war in Palestine, where he was the leader of the *Inqaz Army* (army of deliverance), and the complexity of Lebanese politics, contradictions in local leaderships and their fights in the city. The return of the leader of the Inqaz Army to his city caused a

massacre that tinted the following years. The effect of the flood, however, was of a different nature: it triggered the turnabout of the people of the city over their historical line demarking their traditional space, and their flight outside it.

The revolt of 1958 represented, for the city's population, a belated last confrontation with the authorities. It was a confrontation with the remnants of the Mandate model in society and state. The 1958 revolt had its intersections. It came at the climax of nationalistic resurgence. It expressed regional problems and the involvement with their conflicts. This is why the "fuel" for the revolutionaries came from the *Northern Iqlim* (territory, namely Syria) of the United Arab Republic. The revolt was also a Lebanese event because it witnessed a confrontation among leaders of the different sects. At the depth of local consciousness, however, the city- with its people resistance and army defiance, was reclaiming its recent and particular history. The revolt was like a long strike over the summer period. Public utilities came to a halt and people stayed in their homes as they did during the forty-day strike of 1936. In their confrontation with armoured vehicles, they were rekindling the memory of the 1943 battle of independence, when French tanks ran over some demonstrators in the main square and its surrounds. There is a revenge of sorts when mass subconsciousness associates events that belong to different times.

The city said all it wanted to say during the summer of 1958, and put its words into action, as if it was letting out a congestion of many previous years. When the *ahdath* ("events"- the other name given for the revolt) were over, the page was turned and the whole thing was forgotten. It was as if the city had avenged itself, and followed that by a long-term reconciliation with the *fait accompli* that resulted from those events.



The end of troubles marked the end of two types of isolation: the isolation imposed by confrontation during the summer months, and a chronic isolation dating back to a long past, embraced by the city as if it were its only fate, but now the city decided to abandon it as if it was leaving its fate to take care of its own fate.

We were at the verge of recognising ourselves within the auspices of state during the modernisation of the early sixties. State and modernisation were, anyway, linked. The state was the door to modernity and the road to it. Later, its name will be associated

with roads, networks, planning, electricity and establishing organisations and institutes. All of this happened in the early nineteen sixties.

Planning and building straight roads was an important factor in allowing the old city to be unleashed. It had a decisive role in the distribution of wealth and the spreading of modern constructions. Land prices rose gradually as the land became for building rather than planting citrus trees.

The inhabitants went out from inside their city to the modern quarters inhabited by a majority of people who arrived in the city during the Mandate or independence. When the army withdrew from the city in the autumn, the city symbolically owned the modern quarter and considered it its quarter after a long period of caution against it.

If the state was the door to modernity, opening this door remained a local issue. Families rushed to leave the old for the emerging new, and buildings in the modern quarter flourished. This happened gradually and experimentally, first to the outskirts of the old town then to more modern streets. The fever of moving prevailed, i.e. moving to where the flood poses no threat. This was where the distinguished relationship between the flood and the revolt as means of abandoning two systems, the natural and the social, came from. The two events contributed for the city to depart itself and its history.

The people left their old town and abandoned homes where their parents and grandparents had lived for generations. Those who could afford it, and those who obtained compensations for their lands after the flood or after road building or the establishment of the international fair, all sought this change equally. A change in the standard and style of living came about. This led to a partial change in understanding wealth and the method of its utilisation. Wealth was revealed after people tried to carefully conceal it. It became a value, subject to exchange, utilisation and enjoyment.

This departure was a factor of time rather than space. The displacement occurred within a few hundred metres, but the move was from an era to another. It was from the time-style of the Inner city, i.e. the timing of the inner souk that closed in the afternoon and before sunset, to a timing created by departments, banks and movie shows and evening cafés. It was a departure from the nineteen fifties burdened with the past to the nineteen-sixties promising with the future.

This was accompanied by building new roads inside the old city without anyone caring about the demolition of seven-century-old Mamluki buildings. In addition, many roads were built amidst the fields: straight, wide, unhindered streets. There was a wide two-lane boulevard that cannot be compared to the old winding narrow lanes. The new streets opened the way to an expansion in modern buildings that attracted the inhabitants of the old town. Demolitions increased around the river area where along its banks the Mamluki city once reigned supreme. It was a revenge of sort, that aimed at widening the riverbed to accommodate ten times its size. Two main streets were built, each on one side of the river. The authorities were excessive in their demolition practice. The inhabitants turned a blind eye, due to their wish of departing the past with

its traditions and humid streets (that actually had a pleasant atmosphere), to the wide streets with their concrete multi-story buildings. The coppersmiths market was removed, and the echoes of their working hammers were lost forever.

This affair was not without courage, not only in removing the old streets and souks, but also in changing the features of the environment and manipulating it. It was as if modernity was synonymous with power and will. The construction of the port required reclaiming a large coastal area by landfill. The waterfront area became a collection of buildings, establishments and flat roads. The beach became distant from the railway station. The Crusader tower lost its function of watching the sea that disappeared as if it never had been. The whole thing seemed like a change of the map of the sea, a manipulation of nature. It was as if passing to the age of the modern world required such a sacrifice as a minimum condition. We all built our hopes on the benefits that our city would gain from building the port which would receive ships from every other Mediterranean port, and other faraway places, bringing with them prosperity and allowing us to enter the new age equipped with its appropriate tools, conditions and requirements.

It was a unique feeling to walk on what was a short while before deep seawater. We wandered a lot in that space that kept expanding day after day, and made it our field of play. Families came during holidays to have fun and explore the consequences of the bulldozers' actions. We were able to go further over the rocky head covered with cement and crossed the water like a straight line. When we reached the end, we would watch the city that rested at the distant slope, separated from us with a deep sea awaiting the arrival of ships.

We witnessed the arrival of the first cargo ship, and we climbed on board to its towers and cabins, and so did many other boys who came for fun. Shortly afterwards we were prevented from entering the port by a wire-gate. We countered this by stealthily entering from the side of a nearby swimming pool, using the rocks that ran across the stretch of the headland.

On the other side of the city they started chopping trees, completing the environmental change that allowed the accommodation of more buildings. Thousands of citrus trees were uprooted, leaving a barren land before the concrete buildings were erected promising openness and participation in an international move. These were the promises of the beginnings of the nineteen sixties.

Beirut was the role model. It was the model of modernity and belonging to the State. Our discovery of Beirut as the centre of politics, business, finance and education had been recent. Access to Beirut improved, thanks to two bus companies that were established at the time to carry students, public servants and professionals. The services were popular with many commuters leaving to pursue signing official papers, medical consultations, shopping, hanging about, watching the movies or spending the evening. The busiest times for transport to Beirut were Sunday afternoon to allow people to

spend the evening having fun in the capital, Monday morning to take university students back to the city after the weekend and Friday afternoon returning students and others home for the weekend. The Burj Square in Beirut and the Tal Square in Tripoli were the two centres for these trips between the two cities. Returning home at the end of the week was a ritual of longing and belonging to a world that still kept its major characteristics. Access to Beirut also took place through television that was established in the early nineteen sixties. Through television, Beirut was presented as a place of modernity, fun and affluence.

Change took several paths. The school became a means of modernisation, a role it undertook since the nineteen forties, but during the sixties, the public school became a fertile medium for social integration, based on mixing between the countryside and the city, and among students of different religious sects. The movies, our second school in those days, played a similar role with its large elegant halls, particularly those located in the heart of the city. There were two types of cinemas: the first carried foreign names and showed European and American movies. The second carried Arabic names and showed Egyptian movies or what had already been shown in the other movies. Cinemas were frequented by boys in the afternoon. For us, the movie in the late nineteen fifties was the movie of bewilderment: an imaginary affair that did not relate to reality in any way. Its heroes were the likes of Tarzan and Hercules. It took us to the worlds of Troy, the jungles of Africa or to Baghdad with Sindbad. In the nineteen sixties, the cinema identified more with our life, feelings and dreams. It became the movie of our daily life-taking us to a world we thought was the world of adventure as lived by the west in the stories of love and opulence. It represented the world of people who resembled us, or that of people we liked to resemble. The cinema started having a deeper effect on our life, behaviour and feelings. In the middle of the nineteen sixties, the cinema became a local social ritual. Youths of both sexes dated during the afternoon shows. Husbands and wives went to the evening shows, after nine and stayed out till midnight. A new schedule emerged for the city and its nightly active rhythm. Sandwich, cigarette and some grocer shops stayed open until after the end of the evening shows. Taxis awaited the last patrons to return them home.

Cafés adapted their existence in harmony with movie shows, and eventually developed their own rhythm. Three or four cafés opened near cinema houses in the years following 1958. Others opened later in areas of urban expansion. Patrons changed between the morning and the evening. The café was a meeting place for city and country, crowded with morning coffee drinkers before they left for work, but the cafés of the nineteen sixties adopted modern habits, catering for drinks and western meals during lunch and dinner, and welcoming patrons from both sexes. They launched Saturday night parties where women, without realising it, participated in the modernisation of this city scene that changed its habits and norms.

Meaningful changes occurred in the direction of modernising the city's features. The Mayor, who left a remarkable reputation, was strict in keeping order. He prohibited mule-driven transport carriages, paving the way for the age of taxis. But deeper changes occurred, such as the disappearance of homemade bread in the early sixties. Housewives used to prepare the daw at home and male children would take it to the bakeries, but now the whole process took place at the bakery. Initially, the city dwellers loathed this ready bread, but urban development and the hasty movement from the old town to modern suburbia abolished the habit of homemade bread, partially liberating women from some burdens.

The veil retreated with this move outside the old town. In their old quarters, where family, relatives and neighbours watched, women could not dare unveil their faces. Moving to another area provided an avenue for reconsidering one's priorities. The new generation of girls uncovered their faces and lifted the rest of their veil completely. The change was fast, and the social scene changed in an amazing way.

It was a new order of values that included the way of life. But inside these changes, the social institutions meaningfully kept their stability. Civil record departments still associated one with one's parents' place of birth. It linked later generations with quarters and streets they had never known. It was also meaningful that the family as a unit preserved itself as a social and moral institution. It was a peaceful move to modernity, allowing the city dwellers to assimilate in the new guise after comprehending and adapting to it, without causing real damage in their steadfastness.

The nineteen sixties was the period of reconciliation of tradition with modernity. This can only be understood in the light of what was in the past and what followed. During the Mandate, modernity was imposed hastily in a society that resisted an expression that was robbing it of its identity. During the sixties, there was some truce and harmony between the different models and contradicting values. It was a happy period in the eyes of those who considered what happened was parallel to advancement, optimism and hope. But the sixties passed quickly: they came early and maybe finished prematurely.

Dr. Khalid Ziadé is a Lebanese academic and author. These chapters conclude our translation of his book *Friday, Sunday* into English. The footnotes above are the translator's. For more information, or for previous chapters, please see previous English issues of *Kalimat*. The translated work will be published in a book.

كلمات

Kalimat

تهدف كلمات إلى الاحتفاء بالإبداع وتعزيز التواصل الثقافي بين الناطقين بالإنكليزية والناطقين بالعربية، وهي مجلة ذات نفع عام، ولا تسعى إلى الربح. يصدر منها عددان باللغة الإنكليزية كل عام (مارس/اذار وسبتمبر/أيلول)، وعددان بالعربية (يونيو/حزيران وديسمبر/كانون الاول).

ترحب كلمات بكل المساهمات الخلاّقة، وترجو المساهمين إرسال أعمالهم **قبل أربعة أشهر** على الأقل من موعد صدور العدد الذي يمكن لموادهم أن تنشر فيه، مع إرفاقها بالعناوين ووسائل الاتصال كاملة، **بما في ذلك أرقام الهواتف**، ونسخة عن السيرة الذاتية للمؤلف/المؤلفة، أو بضعة أسطر تلخص منجزاته/منجزاتها.

تنشر كلمات النثر والشعر والدراسات والقصة والفنون باللغة العربية أو الإنكليزية وفق طريقتين أساسين:

أولاً ـ **المواد الأصيلة** التي لم يسبق نشرها مطلقاً بأية لغة.

ثانياً ـ **المواد المترجمة**، أو التي يتقدم بها المؤلف لتقوم كلمات بترجمتها. وهذه يجب أن تكون منشورة سابقاً بلغتها الاصلية، ولم تسبق ترجمتها. وتقدم كلمات خدمة الترجمة مجاناً للذين تقبل أعمالهم. (الاعمال التي تاتي مترجمة سلفاً قد يتوفر لها حظ أكبر بالنشر نظراً لضغط العمل لدينا.) يجب تزويدنا بالمرجع الذي تم النشر فيه، بما في ذلك اسم الناشر، والسنة، ورقم المجلد، والعدد في حال الدوريات. جميع المواد المقدمة للنشر تخضع لتقييم قبل قبولها.

يحصل المتقدمون بأعمالهم الأصيلة إلى كلمات على الافضلية في إمكانية ترجمة أعمالهم لاحقاً ونشرها في كلمات أو مشاريع أخرى يتبناها الناشر. ونحن نعتبر هذا مكافاة عينية على جهودهم. كما يتلقى من نشر في كلمات اشتراكاً لمدة سنة واحدة مجاناً. وتعتذر كلمات عن تقديم أية تعويضات أخرى في الوقت الحاضر.

المؤازرة (الرعاية المادية)

مفتوحة للمنظمات والافراد الذين يؤمنون بأهمية الرسالة الحضارية والجمالية للمجلة، مع العلم أنها لا تخوّل من يقدمها وضع أية شروط كلمات أو الحصول على أية حقوق أو مزايا، بما في ذلك أفضلية النشر.

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(نصف القيمة للاشتراك بإحدى اللغتين فقط.)

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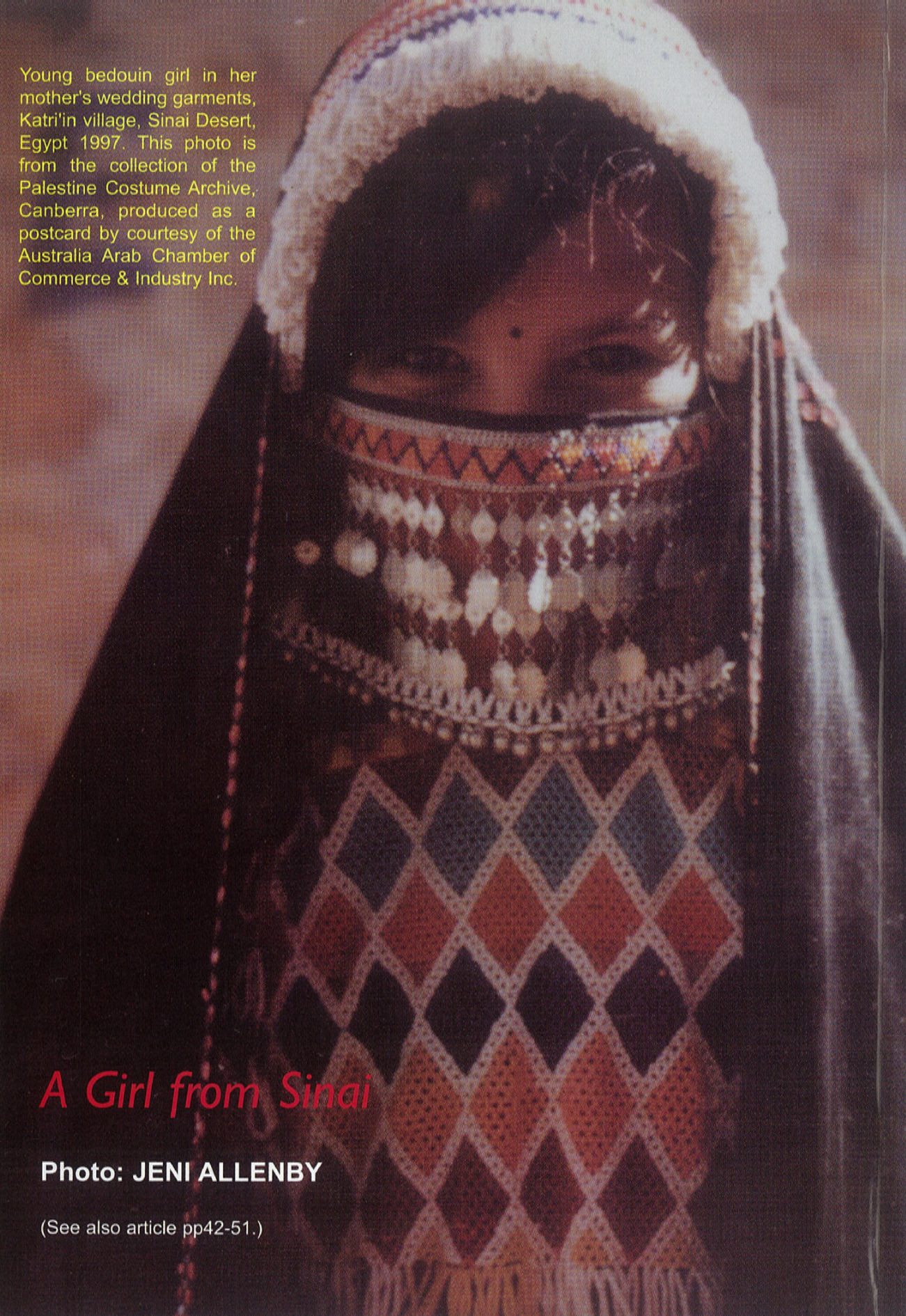

Young bedouin girl in her mother's wedding garments, Katri'in village, Sinai Desert, Egypt 1997. This photo is from the collection of the Palestine Costume Archive, Canberra, produced as a postcard by courtesy of the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc.

A Girl from Sinai

Photo: JENI ALLENBY

(See also article pp42-51.)