

Volume 1 Issue 1 Winter 2013

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

## Sukoon is:

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

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

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

## Contents

Volume 1, Issue 1, Winter 2013

## **INTRODUCTION & INTERVIEWS**

		Naomi Shihab Nye
1	Rewa Zeinati	Editor's Note
13	Rewa Zeinati	An interview with

Losing the

#### Ρ 3 Frank Dullaahan

5	FIGHK Dulidgham	
4	Frank Dullaaban	Language In a Place of
4	Frank Dullaghan	Darkness
5	Helen Wing	Attrition
6	Helen Wing	She Looks at
0	Helen Wing	her Love
8	Helen Wing	Misrata Dawn
18	Steven Schreiner	Jesus Slept Here
19	Zeina Hashem Beck	The Language
1,		of Salaam
20	Farah Chamma	l am no
		Palestinian
21	Kenneth E. Harrison, Jr	Witness
22	Hind Shoufani	Manifesto
23	Louay Khraish	Vola
24	Hajer Abdulsalam	Birthday Wishes
26	Steven Schreiner	Death May Take
26	Becky Kilsby	Henna Days
27	Becky Kilsby	#Trending
28	Zeina Hashem Beck	A Few Love Lines to
		Beirut
29	Naomi Shihab Nye	Exhaustion
30	Dorian "Paul D" Rogers	Festival of Buzzards
31	Dana Sleiman	For Syria, My Love
31	Emer Davis	Migration
33	Naomi Shihab Nye	Democracy
33	Naomi Shihab Nye	On the Plane
		of Men Without
		Legs

34	Nicholas Karavatos	Traitors are
		Translators
35	Hind Shoufani	Pick Me Up
37	The Amazin' Sardine	I am your driver for
		tonight
38	Dorian "Paul D" Rogers	McChurch
41	Nicholas KAravatos	Nooh
42	Nicholas Karavatos	(The Story of
		Our Romance)

## **STORIES, CREATIVE NON-FICTION & ESSAYS**

9	Marian Haddad	Krak des Chevalier,
		Kalaa't al Hussen
15	Nour Ali Youssef	So You Think You're
		Arab?
39	Helen Wing	The Split

## **VISUAL ART**

3	Arz Azar	Photography
5	Arz Azar	Photography
8	Majid Alyousef	Calligraphy
12	Majid Alyousef	Calligraphy
15	Omran Ali Alowais	Photography
18	Marie Dullaghan	Photogrpahy
21	Marie Dullaghan	Photogrpahy
25	Omran Ali Alowais	Photogrpahy
27	Arz Azar	Photography
28	Marie Dullaghan	Photography
32	Majid Alyousef	Calligraphy
34	Marie Dullaghan	Photography
40	Arz Azar	Photgraphy
42	Majid Alyousef	Calligraphy

## **BIO's**

43 Contributors' bios

Sukoon would like to thank the following people for their boundless support, patience and creativity, in logo & layout design as well as web development, achieved through countless back and forth emails, and an infinite number of conversations over coffee (and the occasional hookah): Hassan el Chami, Majid Alyousef and Arz Azar.

## **Editor's note:**

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

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

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

All these cultures in between are poles apart yet they are each rich in their own way. And they all speak Arabic, each region/country/even village, pronouncing its very own dialect. Sukoon wants to highlight this cultural wealth, this diversity as well as this unified experience. We all say we are "Arabs," making us easy to clump into one large and limited stereotype. Is this fair? I don't think so.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perhaps we, who come from an Arabspeaking world, should be more like this oak tree; our experiences just as vital to document and communicate, even if they aren't necessarily expressed in Arabic; and maybe especially.

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

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

## REWA ZEINATI

## Losing the Language

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

Those first years in Birmingham you would call me at work from the headache of your desk, your concerns wrapped in a melody that could not be decoded by your listening colleagues or boss. And I knew enough of it still to respond in a mongrel tongue.

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

FRANK DULLAGHAN



Full Moon- UAE Photo by ARZ AZAR

## **In a Place of Darkness**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When war came, it came all the way inside and then nothing was quiet ever again. The birds are fighting. They stab and slash at each other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FRANK DULLAGHAN



## Tuna Fishing- Hatta, UAE Photo by ARZ AZAR

## **Attrition**

ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant

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

When we walk our steps are soft like biting into pears, feet crunching through beaches of ash and bone. Peace comes when there is quite simply no other option, when there is nothing left to burn and we can no longer live here anyway.

HELEN WING





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

## She looks at her love

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

Do I have to admit I am ordinary?

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

6

Do I have to admit I am ordinary?

I don't want you to know I have sores on the soles of my feet. I only want you to think that I can dance with the strength of a horse, that I am all the flavours of the wind, that frankincense and aniseed are mere whispers of who I could be for you who stand there pawing the ground with your abashed and square-edged foot, you, with the cinder eyes of a brandishing khan, you, with your apple hand letting the jute bag drop flump, to the firm, ample earth, you, my love, stre...eee...etching to touch

#### Ah!

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

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

different.

HELEN WING



## **"No," acrylic on canvas calligraphy** by MAJID ALYOUSEF

## **Misrata Dawn**

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

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

Souad makes fatoush on Thursdays, while I accompany Latifeh and my mother to the mall. I buy Baklava and Mini Rose and carry them home on a cardboard tray wrapped in wax paper tied with string. Maryam makes the coffee for my father and myself. I like to steep my cup in full four spoons of sugar and stir the grains ten times clockwise and ten times back and sip and bite into the dainty Mini Rose with my sweet and silent tooth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bryan urged, "Wait here till we're done."

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One up the hill, not far at all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





12

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

## "Poetry flourishes in the margins" Interview with Naomi Shihab Nye

## **BY REWA ZEINATI**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13

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

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

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

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

## NSN: I don't think you have to make a living out of something for it to be crucial. No one makes a living out of staring at the sky, but what would life be like, if we

**couldn't do that?** A lot of people make a living out of making war, making and selling weapons, and how great is that? I have never been bothered by the sidelining of poetry - **poetry flourishes in the margins.** Reading Walt Whitman - will restore all the hope anyone has lost.

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

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

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

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





Dubai Skyline Photo by OMRAN ALI ALOWAIS

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

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

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

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

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

#### 1- Get on Allah's good side

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

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

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

## 2- Hate on the Jews

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

#### Again, bad, bad West.

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

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

#### 4- Kick a ball around

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

## **Jesus Slept Here**

You know that thing I do, a woman walks into the picture and the day is reborn, like finally finding out where you are on a map that reveals its secret. It was hard not to notice her among the ancient stone, her hair was so black against all that gray like one of the hieroglyphs come to life from the frozen faces. She stepped from a stele into the Egyptian Museum, another person wandering alone among the tour groups. We circled the same great chamber together and time after time stood closer than two married statues. I had stopped reading the exhibits long ago. Now I felt exhumed and unable to speak to her. We stood opposite one more mummy. Mummy mummy mummy was all I could think. Outside was Tahrir Square which I had avoided on advice; I'd waded through traffic to stare down at the rocking feluccas blaring dance music to no one. The Nile still flowed north. So what, I thought.

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

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

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

STEVEN SCHREINER

## The Language of Salaam

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

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

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

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

#### ZEINA HASHEM BECK

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

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



#### I am no Palestinian

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

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

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

FARAH CHAMMA



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

## **WITNESS**

Who walks the briefest light smooth-hummed each smoke-grey sleep

& tuft of thistledown, who took our mouths

to the highway's slacked sides, no diplomatic relations since 1979

& signed legislation to rush economic rescue, all goddamned white people

imposed new sanctions & meddle in Lebanon's sovereignty

when you are gone, fine-looking little coffeehouses when you are gone,

the lines of wet clothes across kitchens so beautiful

when you're a child, the salt & the bread already a thousand corpses

through your arms. What's left. Hezbollah threat echoing

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

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

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

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

KENNETH E. HARRISON, JR

## **MANIFESTO**

Beirut, 04/2008

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

HIND SHOUFANI

## Vola

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

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

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

I wonder If you still get scared Every time A door is slammed Or one of us kids cry Thinking of bombs Jumping on your feet Calling Jesus Mary And never forgetting Saint Joseph

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

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

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

23

LOUAY KHRAISH

## **Birthday Wishes**

- The girls ask for gifts Surprise us mom They say We love surprises And their eyes open wide Fields of almond Honey soaked knuckles A universe of tan lines Dimples And pierced belly buttons Mine
- I gave you the best gift of all I say No brothers No clenched fists No teeth gritting No one to tell you no But you Your bodies Minds And hearts Yours
- I let you be And paved the way wide For your mistakes To blossom Into triumphs Against the seeds I aborted In the bathtub When you were sleeping And Latifa was nine months old Whimpering in her crib Waiting for her midnight feeding And once again When she was one
- How dare a boy attempt To steal Latifa's milk? The arrogance of a Y chromosome Even before it draws its first breath Its need to dominate
- I let your voices sing loud With tequila shots And paid for your fake IDs And painted your ceilings pink And listened to Xena fall apart

- Over the abs of a 22 year old boy Who grilled hot dogs for her on the Fourth of July Your high school crushes Prom dates We shared secrets loves Diets Laughter Midnight snacking Mistakes Lip gloss Heart aches Nail polish Strapless bras Sometimes we didn't even know We were sharing I gave you books to read In all languages but mine Uprooted you Orphaned you Saluted you Respected you Burnt all the straightjackets Into which I was born And let Arabic rust on your tongues So words like
- عيب
- عار

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



**Dubai Skyline** Photo by OMRAN ALI ALOWAIS

## **Death May Have**

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

#### STEVEN SCHREINER

## **Henna Days**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BECKY KILSBY



Burj Khalifa Background- Dubai, UAE Photo by ARZ AZAR

## **#Trending**

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

Toolkit for citizens: smartphone heady Reuter feeds, hot blogs. Net-savvy Arab Spring. Live. Steel strong web filigree, cradling aspiration. Forty tweets a minute earthquake stasis.

Digichorale: instant constituencies out-holler Charlie Sheen. Change, YouTube-sprung, Flickrs.

BECKY KILSBY



## A Few Love Lines to Beirut

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

Memories. They age faster than us, die sooner, disappear silently like hair, without a passing date, a suicide note, a last vowel. And what are we then? What are we then? Surely a memory, the memory of a memory could be remembered again. Surely the shadow of a memory, the memory of a shadow...

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

ZEINA HASHEM BECK



"Measureless" - Ad Infinitum Photo by MARIE DULLAGHAN

## **Exhaustion**

#### 1

It is not fine to say We are in a time of war if you started the war. In Arabic this is called Haki Fawthi – empty talk.

As if war were weather you couldn't stop. Snowing this morning, get your cap! To make it seem you're doing the right thing. To justify.

#### 2

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

#### 3

A word called "progress" can never be applied to war. Nor a word called "success."

These are crimes against language. You will have to be silent for a year if you commit them.

#### 4

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

#### 4

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

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

#### 5

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

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

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

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

#### 6

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

#### 5

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

You may have something there, I said.

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

What can we do about it?

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

## Festival of Buzzards (Sestina for Ahmed)

I have this recurring dream. My eyes are suffering from slurred speech. Every time they try to tell my brain, "See!", all that comes out is this hissing sound enveloped in dark space. Two black holes made of the mass and spin of black holes. It is easier being blind when you know you can't see. Every year in Hinckley, Ohio, there's this Festival of Buzzards where every one comes to see these scavengers come descend like the REM stage of a dream.

Where the maggots of carrion cower deep down in their holes.

After dawn when the official buzzard spotter gives his speech,

the onlookers, on cue, back away, and give these birds of opportunity their space.

As everyone in awe makes no sound.

Can you imagine the sound

made by rubber bullets impacting the eye? Through a magnified scope, the sniper can see.

Accurate to the square inch in Tahrir Square, the gunman keeps his space.

One by one, he unflinchingly aims at destroying each revolutionary's dream.

A one-gun dictator, he dictates not through speech,

but through the emptiness where he burrows his holes.

These buzzards swarm and make partial of what is whole.

In Tahrir square where ideologies converge like the Puget Sound.

The most humbling sensory loss is sight not speech.

Not taste, smell, nor touch. A revolutionary needs to see.

How else may he dream

with all of this black space?

Ahmed El-Belasy still returns with one working eye and a rubber bullet in the space

where the other once saw, just trying to make Egypt whole.

He wishes it was all a dream

when the buzzard came and took his other eye. He knew it when he heard the sound,

the splat of the bullet against his sea,

The hissing of the eye's slurred speech.

You can hear the rhetoric in speech.

Can detect the propaganda through the space

of each word. Like a C-

section, discernment splits open the lies that they hold.

You don't have to make a sound.

We can all hear your dream.

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



## For Syria, My Love

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

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

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

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

We watch in horror as fears talked about in voices skeptical of a situation manifesting in reality take form. What can now quiet down a blood rage half of it mad with hate the other mad for revenge?

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

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

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

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

DANA SLEIMAN

## **Migration**

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

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

EMER DAVIS



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

33

## **On the Plane of Men Without Legs**

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

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE


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

# **Traitors Are Translators**

Pocahontas said I put my whole life in danger. I dian't imagine it was going to be like this. Sacagawea said Anybody associated with the Coalition, they're all seen as traitors by the militias. Hiawatha said They can't make exceptions for us despite the enormous sacrifices we have made.

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS

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

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

- and emails become your heirlooms of jewels
- 35

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

#### well,

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

#### you

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

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

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

37

HIND SHOUFANI

# I AM YOUR DRIVER FOR TONIGHT

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

THE AMAZIN' SARDINE

### **McChurch**

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

Read me scriptures at a drive thru window, short ones like John 11:35 or 1 Thessalonians 5:16. Make sure you put enough grape juice and crackers in the bag with my straws and napkins. I know Jesus is on the main line but. what's your customer service number? I'm calling your manager. Preach me a sermon on how I can save my money. Tell the choir to sing forte so they can drown out what's left of this conscience of mine. Anything else is preaching to the proverbial choir. If God loves me, he will bless me with a Bentley. What did I deserve to get this Kia? What curse was put on my forefathers that made me have to work this 9 to 5? What Eddie Long and Catholic priests do to little boys has nothing to do with me just as long as they intercede for me to get my bills paid on time.

Pray for me in text message language, though,

for football comes on in one hour

and the roast is in the oven.

I may burn in hell but I'll be damned

if the supper is over-cooked.

I may burn in hell but I'll be damned

if the supper is over-cooked.

WWJD? I have no inkling of a clue.

That's why I'm tithing the bishop,

rook, or whatever title men use to make themselves

feel holier than me.

All I want is to be more than a pawn

because lately I have only been able to make one move at a time.

Service is too long.

Let me hold someone's sleeping baby

so I can pinch it to give me a good excuse

to walk out of service.

Make a website so I can fellowship

from the comfort of my computer screen.

I can multi-task during worship.

I can finish my to-do list during prayer and still remember the sick and shut-in list.

So shut up before I shut down altogether

and visit the atheist congregation I call my living room.

Forgive me until I'm washed to a prune.

Allow me to destroy myself until it hurts.

Let me live happy with my legend of demons.

DORIAN "PAUL D" ROGERS

## The Split by HELEN WING

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

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

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

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

I am no one and yet I am multitudes in my Dubai desert daze. If you let me go I will remember all those people I never got to know because I have been blinded and shriveled by the sun all year. I'll remember the Scottish Trotskyite, who moved to Russia to be a Communist, who is now stuck in his retail nemesis with a train wreck of a marriage to his Caucasian mountain wife; I'll remember the South African Indian magnate who keeps a tiger as a pet, retailing the wild and endangered and marketing his success whilst his alter ego withers in its concrete tomb; I'll remember the Filipina who said `in the Philippines all the women lose,' which is why she's here and far from her estranged daughters who have been told by her husband that their mother has left them, and thus he moves his lover into the house. She sends them money every month and lives above the beauty parlor with eight other girls in their forties. I'll remember her boss and her pointy nose and wrinkled lips; I'll remember the Indian Marya, widowed at twenty six, who works for school fees and a dowry for her daughter and fears her own mother will sell off her child before she gets back to Kerala. She likes it here because she can use her given name, which her mother-in-law and dead husband refused to use. They changed her name to Yasmeen; I'll remember the happy Yemeni taxi driver who loves the British because the only history book he has seen about his country, the most beautiful country in the world, was written by a Brit. He has been here for six years paying off a loan for a tractor that he bought with the bank's money. The farm he bought it for is on the side of a most beautiful hill where the best coffee and fruit in the world is grown, he said. His farm was entirely washed away in a flash flood. He laughed, 'And I still have a tractor.' He called me 'Habibi' and was far more engaging with his unruly joy than anything that went on at the literary festival I was attending at the time; I'll remember the smile-or-die prozac poppers who play tennis everyday at the Dubai Ladies Club who 39

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

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

Whatever you decide, I am vanishing.

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



Beirut Streets Photo by ARZ AZAR

### Nooh

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

When did I fall asleep?

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

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

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

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

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS

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

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

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

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

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

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

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS



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

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

### **HAJER ABDULSALAM**

I am Palestinian. I am a mother. I am a poet. Everything else is irrelevant.

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

B'uit Satwa: representing the past and the current architecture The photos were taken in Dubai with a 35mm Film Camera, with 50mm f0.95 lens.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**REWA ZEINATI** is **founder, editor and publisher of Sukoon magazine**. Lebanese-American poet and writer, Rewa Zeinati was raised in Lebanon, UAE and USA. She studied English Literature at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, and earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, USA. Several of her poems, essays and translations have been published in literary journals and anthologies in the USA, UK, the Levant and online. Sukoon is a fetus she's been carrying for years. She lives in Dubai, UAE, with her husband, and constantly worries over the fragile health of her growing garden herb, Basil.

