COORDINATES

Where is home, when all I know is war?

35+ STORIES
30+ CONTRIBUTORS

A COLLABORATIVE ISSUE

About Coordinates

The word Coordinates brings to mind maps, movement, and fleeting junctures along a journey – like signposts of place and memory. This theme explores the multifaceted notion of 'home,' shaped as much by both physical and emotional geographies, especially in times of displacement and conflict.

This issue looks at how war can unsettle, uproot, and even erase the places we once called home. It also honors the migrations that ripple through generations, each one a testament to how home is not always found, but forged again and again. It asks: where do we find ourselves on the map when home is gone? And how do we re-draw our own coordinates in the aftermath?

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Coordinates is the result of the inaugural collaboration between The Sahira Collective and World BEYOND War. We were blown away by the number of written and visual submissions received from contributors around the world in response to our collective call-out in the late summer of 2025. What began as a proposal for a collaborative mini-issue blossomed into a full-length 100-page magazine.

The Sahira Collective and World BEYOND War are here to resist and reclaim. For this issue, we welcomed the kind of work the world often turns away from — to display the meaning of home, especially when it has been overpowered, or distorted, by war. We were deeply moved by the responses from writers and artists who bared their hearts in their submissions.

This has been a labor of love over many months to bring you Coordinates.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

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Founded in April 2025, The Sahira Collective is an independent multimedia publisher committed to justice, truth, and culture. It exists to stand with the oppressed and amplify voices that carry substance and purpose through art and other forms of media.

Founded in 2014, World BEYOND War is a global grassroots network of chapters and affiliated organizations working to abolish the institution of war and establish a just and sustainable peace. Sign the Peace Pledge and get involved at worldbeyondwar.org.

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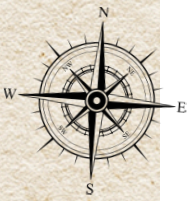

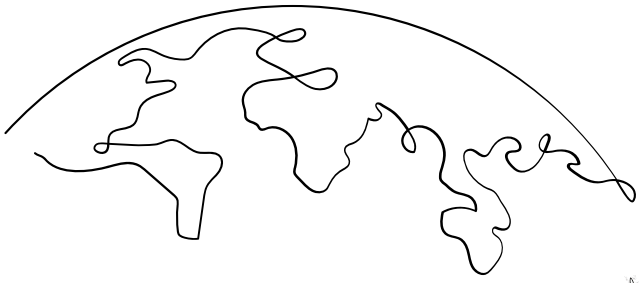

COORDINATES

a collaborative, multi-media issue.

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Rachel Rash

Home should be a sanctuary.
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Between us, or with us.
Now, I realize that when there isn't conflict,
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It can never be too peaceful at home,
Because that's the calm before the storm.
And so, you brought the war home with you.
These days I know better than to take the bait.
I will not be your battlefield.
But I can be your safe haven.
I can be your respite from the storm raging within.
Home is sacred.
So, I build these walls again,
And consecrate these halls once more.

Partition

Karen Haydock

CASTING WARS OUT OF OUR HOME

Yurii Sheliazhenko

I live in an old five-storey brick building in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. My country is attacked every day by the Russian army, and every day, people are dying and homes are being destroyed.

I used to think my home was a safe place, but perhaps it is not so anymore.

My home was shaken after shelling in the first days of full-scale war in 2022, after strikes of ballistic missiles, and when invaders came to the Kyiv vicinity, firing artillery.

This year, a drone flew and collided with an unfinished building behind my window, seconds after the air raid alert siren sounded, when I saved my work on the computer, preparing to hide in the underground parking nearby. It was a horrible flash of explosion, and the glass was broken.

Such things should never happen, and I found relief in the hope that life will prevail once we change this planet for the better, abolishing all wars. The gifts of nature, helping to cope with the first months of the war, were the energetic scent of lilac and chirping in the air. At that time, I expressed my feelings in the short poem entitled "Hope":

Unhappy land,
where songs of birds in spring
are interrupted
by a roar of flying death.
Poor heart, stay calm
and chirp with love and truth.
Your tears and prayers
make new life to blossom.

My whole life, I have had a great hope that there will be a world where everyone refuses to kill, where there will be no wars. This would certainly make our home planet a happier place to live. I shared this hope in prose, poetry, journalism, and research papers. When lecturing in legal theory and history, I paid special attention to institutions of peace; it was my addition to standard university and college curricula. In 2019, I invited friends to create a pacifist organization that quickly joined international networks of civil society.

So, what we were "chirping" about in the first year of the Russian full-scale invasion was the necessity to resist it nonviolently and protect the human right to conscientious objection to military service. Unfortunately, when I sent our *"Peace Agenda for Ukraine and the World"* to President Zelensky, the reception was hostile: his office reported it to the *Security Service of Ukraine*, which treated pacifism as a crime. One unfortunate day, they came to my home, and seized my computer and smartphone. I was placed under house arrest and formally accused of "justification of Russian aggression," a crime punishable by up to 5 years of prison, and my objections that it is absurd to accuse a pacifist of justification of war in an anti-war statement were ignored.

At least, my legal skills helped me to be heard in matters of technicalities and to soften the effects of pressure; that's why I was not detained in pretrial prison and the prosecutor stopped to insist even on house arrest after half a year. Furthermore, he started to ignore calls to courts after my multiple complaints, several of which were satisfied, but not those related to the substance of the bogus accusation.

Not even one judge of many who considered procedural matters of my

criminal proceedings dared to point out in their decisions the absurd nature of the accusation, even though some of them obviously knew who I am. For example, one judge in the appellate court several times greeted me in an unusually pleasant way, saying "Hello, friend," referring to my membership in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The Kyiv Court of Appeal is a remarkable skyscraper with a statue of Themis near the entrance, surrounded by flower beds with roses. It has the best among all courts I know, spacious, well-lit courtrooms, and the view from the windows is fantastic. It is a relief when you wait several hours for your hearings, which are usually delayed because the court is overloaded.

One day, I saw in the window a shrapnel hole and understood that the palace of justice is, too, under attack. With mixed feelings, I wished the court to survive all attacks and satisfy all those who wait their queue, thirsty for justice.

Like the court, my home country and my home planet are threatened by war and overwhelmed. The whole building of democracy and the rule of law are under threat, not only because the life and welfare of people are in danger, but also because, in war, belligerents forget normal human life. Every day killing is wrongly perceived as a norm, while those who refuse to kill are treated like criminals and traitors. Some are prisoners of conscience, others are forcibly conscripted and treated cruelly. One member of our Meeting of Friends of Ukraine was compelled to go to the shooting range and, when he refused to take a gun, there was fire in his direction. Despite this threat to his life, he remained true to his conscience. Another Friend saw how people are tortured for refusing to serve in the army and published photos on Facebook, causing a scandal. But people continued to be abducted from the streets into military minibuses, detained, and some of them die in territorial conscription

centers in strange circumstances, when officials say it was a suicide, but nobody believes it.

Many people just sit at home and hope the officers will not come to conscript them, and the war will somehow end.

So I return to the notion of home as a safe space.

Everyone needs it, it is a universal hope. And if you ask me, I dream about a big Friends House in Kyiv where people could worship in silence every week and enjoy a spiritual connection with inward light.

However, dreams and hopes are not coming true if we are not working on them. Faith or belief is dead without deeds, and it would be pointless to meditate, to search conscience, to wait for truth in silence, unless the inspiration comes and guides you.

Whatever home you have, it is a part of a bigger home: the homeland and the planet. Privacy of the apartment is not safe from growing hostility among neighbors and growing stockpiles of explosives on every floor that might detonate and destroy your cozy, quiet flat with the whole building.

Sometimes it is necessary to leave a small, comfortable home to save our bigger home, the Earth, from the scourge of war. Take to the streets and other public spaces, offline and online. Study and practice effective nonviolent action, stopping and preventing violence.

People of different countries half a century ago raised their voices against the Cold War, so it was ended. This generation needs to remember the courage of

the previous one, cast out of Earth all wars, and start to live in love, decency, and common sense as one big family of human beings, as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* suggests.

KRAMATORSK, UKRAINE

Gillian Adsett Cameron

Tuesday 27 June 2023 7.32 pm
another day another year
two hypersonic missiles come hurtling
their timing impeccable

like a bolt of lightning
Ria Pizza transmogrifies into
Dante's dinner rush inferno

ears ringing, dark red blood spattering
screaming and running
bodies buckling

still sitting upright
writer and war crimes researcher
Victoria Amelina

last year she started writing poetry
every word an incendiary device

short sentences, minimal punctuation
that's what war leaves you, she said

she sits upright and so very still
her dining companions think she's unhurt

Friday 30 June 2023
A mother slumped over twin caskets
one hand on each of her 14-year-old daughters
Yuliya and Anna

in wedding dresses
white and gold
as is the custom

for girls who die too young to marry
become angels and go to heaven
to find their other half

Author's Note:
On 27 June 2023 a Russian missile hits Ria Pizza restaurant in Kramatorsk, popular with young people, aid workers, and journalists. Twelve diners are killed including Yuliya and Anna Aksenchenko. Another 60 are injured including Victoria Amelina, who dies of her injuries 4 days later. Anastasia Taylor-Lind re-lives that night in her poem *Ria Pizza, Kramatorsk, 19:32*

HOME AS NIGHTMARE AND NOSTALGIA

Ershad Noorzai Balkhi

Home means different things to different people. Each of us forms a connection to it in our own way, shaped by our experiences and circumstances. For some, home is a place to escape—a past they'd rather leave behind. For others, it's a constant they return to, a refuge they revisit when needed.

But what happens when leaving home isn't a choice, but a necessity — and returning is no longer possible?

This reality redefines what it means to call a place "home." In this context, the relationship with home is shaped by three distinct elements: trauma, coercive integration, and the impossibility of return. These factors distinguish it from other understandings of home. For those forced to flee due to war, conflict, or persecution, home becomes a memory wrapped in pain—no longer a refuge, but a haunting absence. It reshapes the emotional and psychological bond we have with the place we come from, leaving behind a space marked more by loss than by rootedness.

I call this unique relationship "nostalgia bound by nightmare." It's a longing for a place that once was, coupled with the trauma of what it became. For many displaced people, this fractured connection to home becomes a lifelong burden—a sense of belonging forever out of reach.

This is the nature of home for those who flee due to war and security threats —whether from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, or elsewhere. They carry more than just physical belongings; they bear three invisible but deeply felt burdens

that shape their experience as asylum seekers. These burdens often intensify their longing for a home they can no longer return to, while also making it difficult to feel at home in the countries that host them.

Let me explain these three elements.

Trauma

Living in a war zone leaves deep and lasting psychological scars. Constant exposure to violence, destruction, and uncertainty instills a relentless sense of fear and loss. In such conditions, survival becomes the only priority. Many remain trapped, clinging to the fragile hope that they and their loved ones will make it through.

For those who manage to escape, the initial sense of relief is often short-lived. It is quickly replaced by a more profound realization: they haven't just fled a physical place—they've left behind a world. A world of memories, relationships, daily routines, and the emotional anchors that once gave their lives meaning.

Only once they reach relative safety do they begin to fully grasp the weight of what they've lost. That realization often arrives with overwhelming force. The trauma of war, combined with deep homesickness, becomes part of their daily lives in the new country. It's not something they can leave behind—it travels with them.

Those who manage to flee and arrive in a new country—already burdened with trauma and longing—soon face another, often unexpected, struggle: the quiet, corrosive experience of integration.

Coercive Integration

Upon arrival, refugees and asylum seekers are handed a checklist of expectations: learn the language, find a job, become "productive." But integration, as it's often framed, isn't about inclusion on your own terms—it's about assimilation into a system that dictates what kind of job you should accept, regardless of your education, experience, or aspirations. The path is prescribed, not chosen. Deviation is discouraged. You are expected to adapt to society, while society makes little effort to understand or adapt to you. In this context, integration is a one-way road.

I experienced this firsthand while navigating the Finnish integration system. When I was asked what kind of job I hoped to find, I explained my educational background and career goals. The integration officer responded bluntly: "I can't help you with your education or ambitions. I can only help you find the kind of jobs we think are right for you."

Despite holding three master's degrees, I was directed toward vocational training—expected to abandon my academic achievements and start over, as if none of it had ever existed.

This story is not unique. I know many professional Afghan scholars and writers now living in Germany, struggling with depression and anxiety—not because they lack ability or motivation, but because they are being forced to erase who they were. University professors are now taxi drivers. Writers have become pizza delivery workers. They are not failing to integrate; they are being denied the opportunity to do so with dignity.

This forced loss of identity adds another layer to the pain of displacement. It raises a deeper question: what is home? Is it merely a place—or is it the

environment where your worth is recognized, your skills are valued, and your potential is allowed to grow?

If all of that is stripped away—if your past is ignored, your passion, skills, and profession erased—can you truly call that place home? Or are you an exile, punished for being educated?

Carrying the trauma of war and displacement, refugees and asylum seekers are then met with the harsh reality of coercive integration—deepening their suffering. What makes this even more alarming is the lack of mental health support available to those under immense pressure to "integrate."

I know friends who have gone to their workplaces and local health centers, begging for help, clearly expressing their need for mental health support. One of them was turned away simply because he didn't speak fluent German.

One of the most painful effects of coercive integration is what I call self-alienation. This doesn't end when you say goodbye to your previous career or education—it goes much deeper. It continues through the erosion of language, identity, and the way others perceive and define you. Over time, you begin to lose touch with the person you once were, just to meet the expectations of a system that rarely sees you as whole.

In a new society, many refugees become projections of other people's imaginations. To some, we are seen as radicals or invaders. To others, we are here to steal jobs. And for those in power, we are reduced to tools of cheap labour—or pitied as helpless beings in need of rescue.

In such a system, asylum seekers are forced to become alien not only to their

past, but also to themselves. When I speak of language, I don't mean Arabic or Ukrainian—I mean the language that allows you to speak your truth, to express your real self. That language gets replaced with what the system wants to hear.

You must constantly explain your country, your story, your pain—filtered through a lens that makes sense to others. You are expected to narrate your life in ways that align with their expectations. To the bureaucracy, you must use the right keywords—the terms that make your claim acceptable—even if those words feel meaningless or false to you. Still, you keep repeating them, because your future depends on it.

Meanwhile, everyone around you constructs their own version of who you are—based on assumptions, fears, or fantasies. And in this constant performance, you risk forgetting the person you once were.

I remember when the war in Ukraine began. Several of my European friends told me—without hesitation—*"You know, Ukrainians stay and fight. Afghans just flee."*

In moments like that, you're expected to become a lecturer—explaining your country, your history, your trauma—over and over again. You explain even when you're exhausted, even when you know most of them don't really want to understand. Their biases are already set, and your words bounce off like rain on stone.

I remember replying to one friend: *"The war in Afghanistan began before you were even born. And it's still going. Isn't that enough?"*

The saddest part is this: to them, you become a machine—an endless source of information, expected to educate them about a war-torn country shaped by decades of complex politics. But for someone who has lived through it, it's not just news. It's not just history. Every time you're asked to explain, to recount, to give context, it reopens wounds you've tried so hard to close.

Still, you're forced to speak. You must defend yourself, justify your presence, correct their assumptions—all by reliving what you've been trying to survive. The emotional toll is immense. It triggers anxiety, retraumatizes you, and drains your spirit. But they will never understand that.

Centuries ago, Rumi—the Persian poet born in what is now Afghanistan—captured this experience perfectly:

In every crowd, my mournful voice would rise,
With joyful hearts and sorrowed souls I'd ties.
Each called me friend, by guess and fantasy—
None sought the truth that dwelled inside of me.

This becomes the story of many who are forced to flee home. The state, the system, society—even friends—construct their own image of you. You become a canvas for their fantasies, their judgments, their pity. But rarely does anyone ask who you actually are.

A poet from my hometown of Balkh—himself a migrant and asylum seeker in Europe—captures the weight of trauma carried from home, and the struggle to be understood in a new land, through his powerful poetry.

Here is a translation from the original Persian:

I am a refugee!

See — This Fate Is Written on My Forehead!
I am a refugee — look at my distress, see!

I am a refugee! My breath is an everlasting cloud —
In all four seasons, I am endless rain, see!

The meaning of "border" is anxiety; of "road," it's patience.
And "war" — what does it mean? My ruins explain, see!

I am a refugee — my homeland rides on my shoulders...
A burden as vast as my disarray, see!

Oh beloved! Come with your spring-like gaze —
Look at the fate of my wintry days, see!

I am a refugee, and you — you're not one.
Still, hear me out — look at my hidden being, see!

I am a refugee! You are not — and I know
That you know nothing of me — but try to see.

Dear neighbour! Our hearts, our lives, our blood — they're one.
To hell with race and colour! My humanity, see!

I am a refugee! For what crime, in this whole world,
I am imprisoned each day — without a trial, see?

Though my history is madness and disgust,
It's no ancestral pride I carry — see!

A scorched land, a geography of fate —
That's what I've inherited, such a cost — see!

I am a refugee in this filthy game —
Just a victim — the victim itself — see!

No wings, no tongue, exiled from my home, a stranger —
Yet still I live! Look at the weight of my survival, see![1]

— Suhrab Sirat

Inability to Return Home

The final element in this relationship to home is the inability to return—even when you desperately want to, even when you are homesick. This is a phenomenon that many cannot relate to, and as a result, they don't fully understand what home truly means for those in exile.

Around the world, people travel for study, work, or tourism—and whenever they wish, they return home. But for those coming from war zones, the desire to return is met with an impossible barrier. Home becomes a form of nostalgia that can never be fulfilled. It becomes a land you keep dreaming of —sometimes even seeing in your dreams—but can never touch.

As one Afghan poet, longing to return despite the impossibility, writes (translation from Persian):

Wish

Take my eyes to beautiful Balkh
Take my hands to touch *Baba*[2]
Take the ashes of my heart, scorched by exile
To the grieving chest of *Bakwa*[3]

Let my body flow in the *Amu*[4]
Or take my soul to the body of the sea
The fire lodged in my blood, the ache in my soul—
Take it to the balm of *Kandahar*, without me

Make bricks and clay and stone from my bones
And build the future of *Kabul*
Carry a hundred kisses of my love
To the stony face of the mountains

Handful by handful, take my blooming poetry
To the beauty of the desert's tulips[5]

— Bahar Sa'ad

Being forced to leave your country against your will—and knowing you may never return—completely transforms your sense of home and belonging. Between fleeing and the impossibility of return, you find yourself caught in the process of so-called integration, which often leads to deeper self-alienation.

For many in this situation, home becomes both a source of trauma and a wellspring of nostalgia. It's something you ache for, yet something that haunts you. This duality doesn't stay confined to waking life—it follows you into your dreams. Some nights, you are filled with joy, reliving childhood memories and walking familiar streets. Other nights, you wake in terror, reliving the wars and conflicts you escaped.

Those forced to leave their homes due to war and violence live suspended between nightmare and nostalgia, clinging to the hope that it's all just a dream—and that one day, they will wake up back in the place they once called home.

Footnotes

[1] Translation by Ershad Noorzai Balkhi. See the original text and the poem recited by the poet here: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=485702340830663

[2] A shrine in Kandahar

[3] A desert in the West of Afghanistan

[4] A river in the North of Afghanistan

[5] Translation by Ershad Noorzai Balkhi. For the original text, see here: https://www.khorasanzameen.net/php/read.php?id=84

Max

Lawrence Montgomery

The painting 'Max' is from Lawrence's series entitled 'There But For Fortune,' a continuation of the artist's goal to paint images that inspire reflection and conversation concerning issues of social justice. Store windows become a stage to present the contradictions that lay plainly before us on our individual journeys through life.

FOR A HAZARA, WHERE IS HOME AMID INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA?

Basir Bita

As a Hazara from Afghanistan, the story of displacement and survival has lived in my blood for generations. My great-great-great-grandfather was just slightly older than puberty when Abdul Rahman Khan—the Pashtun king of Afghanistan, supported by the British Empire—launched a mass campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Hazara people starting in 1880, a campaign whose echoes still reverberate today, carried out by the descendants of the same groups (Hakimi, 2023).

Home is the protection of lives that matter beyond saving lives.

At that time, my ancestors were forcibly uprooted from their ancestral homeland in Kandahar—a land that Westerners often assume as a Pashtun settlement. He was among the thousands of Hazara families who were driven out by violence, dispossession, and deep ethnic hatred. This was not a one-time trauma; it was the beginning of a generational pattern of displacement—what I now call a "beautiful" pattern. Beautiful, not because of what was done to us, but because of what we have done in return: survived. Every generation in my family has carried with it the wisdom of lived experience, the strength of resistance, the power of resilience, and the quiet endurance that speaks without words.

Rather than remain in Kandahar to engage in armed resistance over the loss of their ancestral land, my ancestors made a deliberate and difficult choice. They moved—migrating north to the central highlands of Afghanistan, a region defined by its towering mountains and brutal winters that can plunge to minus 40 degrees Celsius. They could have chosen to stay and fight, but

instead, they said “no” to violence and “yes” to survival. They chose the harder path—nonviolence. And in doing so, they redefined strength in the face of annihilation.

After this migration, my great-great-grandfather's fate took a cruel turn. He became enslaved by a wealthy Pashtun family, working for them for eight years. At the end of those eight years, he was forcibly displaced and immigrated to Kabul City to escape persecution. His master, a military commander, subjected him to daily indignities—forced labor, physical abuse, and repeated sexual assaults. He was told by his master, “You are a fucking bastard because my grandfathers screwed your grandmothers.” That kind of dehumanization was not just his personal experience —it is a generational pattern that furthered pain, yet it transformed to bodily and mental wisdom, which made Hazara choose education over violence during the 20 years of the US occupation of Afghanistan. That pattern also speaks to the systematic attempt to erase a collective identity, collective dignity, and collective history.

Home is a space where soul and body settle in peace.

The displacement didn’t stop there. In 1981, when war and persecution intensified in Kabul under the Soviet invasion, my father once again chose to say “no” to violence. Raised in the dense neighborhoods of Kabul—where people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds lived side by side—my parents, both relatives and neighbors to one another, found themselves at a crossroads. They had to decide: join the growing armed resistance against the Soviet-backed regime or say no to growing violence by migrating to Iran, a country where the Hazara people shared religious and cultural roots.

Choosing migration again, they left Afghanistan with the hope that Iran

would offer safety and dignity. But for my father, that journey came with overwhelmingly painful layers of physical, emotional, and psychological hardship. As a refugee in Iran, he was treated as less than—marginalized, humiliated, and forced to survive in a country that simultaneously mirrored his identity and rejected his existence.

Home is the conjunction of hope for finding a space where love can be lengthened.

I was born in that in-between space—Iran. I grew up in a world where I did not see myself as separate from my Iranian classmates or neighbors. I spoke their language. I ate their food. I walked their streets. And yet, I belonged to something invisible—something unspoken at home. My parents rarely brought up our identity directly. But through the rhythm of our home life, the way they preserved the Hazaragi dialect, and the quiet stories passed from one generation to the next, they kept the heartbeat of our heritage alive.

Then came 2021. The US military pulled out of Afghanistan after two decades of what many—including myself—considered a careless and deeply irresponsible occupation. That event marked yet another cycle in our family's journey of choosing nonviolence through migration. This time, the decision was mine. I had stayed in Afghanistan, working for over 15 years on US government–funded projects, believing in the promise of change. I never imagined that one day I would leave.

During those years, a new kind of light entered my life: I became involved with a group of youth volunteers who practiced nonviolence in profoundly radical and life-affirming ways. We organized, we created, we built spaces for healing and hope. That collective experience reshaped me. It opened my

heart, allowing me to see love and peace not just as ideas, but as actions. And behind all of that, there was Sufism—quietly teaching me what nonviolence truly means: not only the refusal to harm, but the commitment to love in the face of pain, and to move forward with dignity, even when history tries to pull you back.

My son, Barbod, was 5 years old when he encountered, and still sometimes reencounters in his dreams and daydreams, the Taliban. In our daily conversation (2016-2021 before Barbod comes to Canada), I whispered to him different stories of home, immigration, identity, love, and nonviolence. Now in Canada he attempts, with struggles, to bridge what he carries with him since birth and before (the wisdom and wounds of his ancestors including me) with the mainstream culture of a country who participated in the 20 years of US occupation.

Home is the connection between one's lingering wishes and their practice of "let go".

This journey took an unexpected turn, leading me to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the United States, where I completed a Master's degree in Clinical Counselling—an achievement made possible through the unwavering support of a wonderful family and their community network. After a long flight from Vancouver, Canada, I landed in Chicago, where a friend—who had recently returned from visiting Afghanistan—picked me up and drove me to Milwaukee. I spent the next year there, immersed in the work: supporting clients across the city and volunteering at a local medical clinic that served former Afghan military personnel. I provided them with mental health support, often bridging language, culture, and trauma in ways that reminded me how connected we are in both our suffering and our resilience.

As we entered Milwaukee, the city offered me its first lesson before I even unpacked my bags. I noticed it immediately—maybe because my mind is trained to spot inequality. One block was lined with luxury cars and boutique cafés, and the next, a young Black woman wobbled drunkenly on the corner beside a worn-down pub. That visual contrast struck me. I whispered to myself: perhaps this place isn't so different from East Hastings in Vancouver, where hundreds of drug users live pressed against one another, unseen and unheard by the world moving around them.

As I settled into Milwaukee, I began to understand more about the city's layered history. I learned that "Milwaukee," like the names of many other local counties and neighborhoods, is derived from Native American languages. And yet, despite this heritage, the city has long been ranked among the most segregated metropolitan areas in the United States (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 2019). This place—home to hundreds of thousands of people from nearly every part of the world—became a mirror reflecting how systemic structures grant privilege to some while invisibly wounding others.

Through my internship at a local agency, I worked closely with individuals carrying heavy stories: refugees, veterans, mothers, addicts, survivors of complex trauma, and those silently battling the pain of dislocation and despair, and a thirst to seek their identity whether it be the horn of Africa or deep down in Mexico. Many of them suffered from PTSD, addiction, generational trauma, and the lingering ache of immigration. In their voices, I heard echoes of people I knew back home. And in those rooms—beautifully designed to appear therapeutically safe, yet small, cluttered, sometimes lit by nothing more than vulnerability—I witnessed something sacred: the human spirit rising, even if trembling, to try again.

Home is the place where suffering and healing dance together weaving pain into tenderness and silence into strength.

Now, working in Vancouver with clients from all over the world who are categorized as refugees, I find myself confused when it comes to the concept of "home", if it is a place and space, or if it's a time I live/d, or something I'm inherited, or what I build out of bricks of my experiences. Supporting this population in Canada, I swing between, underneath and above all this, and I realize that my "home" is a borderfree love for myself, not created by my ego, but the overflow of an expansive love that a part of me will feel the ache if a kid in Gaza deals with hunger everyday, the daily bombs in Kiev, women who long to work and study in Afghanistan, Mexican pregnant woman doubting to sneak into the US border from underneath the barb wires, the Sudanese elder leaving his past to distaste the war, yet I don't live their experiences vicariously.

In our home we share stories every day to invite our memories of pain, laughter, playfulness, improvising moves in the body, and the quiet strength we didn't know we inherited, become an anchor connecting generations in a place. Metaphorically, where we are born and grew up, or choose to move is considered home where birds built their nests. Sometimes home is not made of what is visible but what is felt: the rhythm of a language shared across kitchens, the warmth of a hand placed silently on the back, the unspoken permission to be broken and whole at once. We carry these homes within us, like songs we hum without realizing—soft tunes that recall a sense of safety, belonging, and return.

Home is both personal and collective—a wave of drops in the ocean of a past, present, and future continuum, where a single place once tenderly chosen or

inherited begins to hold space for something much larger than itself. It begins with one body gathering other bodies who share things in common to build a communal foundation enlarging their existence and experiences. This extends and more stories get sown together and gets bigger and bigger, and suddenly, the entire lineage is present, alive in the room. A personal memory unfolds into a shared rhythm, a private corner becomes a communal shore.

Each drop of this ocean carries its own story: a child's laughter echoing in a hallway, a grandmother's silence before prayer, a father's worn hands shaping the edges of a day. But in home, the drop dissolves into the ripple, the ripple into the wave, and the wave into the ocean—where it becomes impossible to distinguish one from the other. Every drop contributes to the motion, the memory, the meaning.

And in that motion, home becomes a living ocean—vast, fluid, and deeply connected—where the individual no longer asks whether they are a drop, a ripple, a wave, or the sea itself, but simply belongs to all of it at once. Home, then, is not only where we return but what we carry forward—tides of memory, identity, and love that swell and shift with us, always becoming.

Resources

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SHOES

Basir Bita

Size reminds me of the pain of thousands of kilometers I walked
Outsole brings me the exhilaration of hope – that it will be the first who kisses Canada
Topline represents the ebbs and flows of oceans and seas I was about to sink into
Vamp gives me the joy of leaning on one of my legs shouldering my son for a quick rest
Vents tells me the story of the time when I was told "No Hazara leaves the country!"
Eyelets puts me in a labyrinth of days I could not ask for a dry piece of bread
Thread stitches the seams of a tapestry filled with resilience, bravery and boldness.
Collar wraps around the ache of farewells, a tender embrace where my heart still dwells.
Feather edge was my pillow at dark cold nights when I had to keep the family warm
Tongue was the time tunnel counting down stresses, mode swings, explosions, anxieties
Lace reminds of mountains that I passed
Quarter makes me feel sliced into four – my wife, my daughter, my son, and myself
Heel lets me hold on to relief
Shoes – Solo Home Of Emigrating Souls

Demolished Mosque, Khirbet Yarsa

Sara avMaat

"The accompaniment team had heard of demolitions in the Jordan Valley and Near Tubas and were on their way there. The checkpoint was closed so we had to walk the last half hour on a rough rocky farm track. We were told the soldiers had come at 6:00 that morning and demolished the mosque, one house and 7 sheep sheds. It was prayer time so the men spread carpets on the rubble and prayed. And then they served us tea."

And Then They Served Us Tea

Sara avMaat

"Everywhere I went in the West Bank I was offered unfailing hospitality. One of the most striking occasions for me was arriving at Khirbet Yarsa just a few hours after demolitions had taken place that morning. The men said prayers on the ruins of the demolished mosque and then immediately a tray of glasses appeared, was positioned on a convenient rock and tea was poured for all of us."

THE IRREPLACEABLE PALESTINIAN

Alia Mohammed

A beautiful couple

Two children

A love so visible

More powerful than bombs

How to tell the parents they're so lucky

When they're trying to survive genocide

They suffer and starve

I donate

Disgusted by the world's inaction

I donate

Ashamed to watch good people in agony

I donate

Robbed of a dream-filled life

I donate

Trying to make what's left of a home bearable

I donate

A futile effort at substitution

I donate

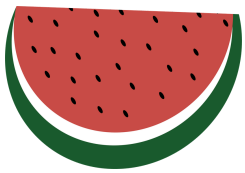
Now they have some food
Now they have some medicine
Now they stay sheltered
Home has become pain
Home is wisps of nostalgia
Home is bulldozed dreams

I say I'm sorry
I have no more to give
And they respond:
My dear, we do not want you to suffer
Let us give what we have to you

The heart and soul of the Palestinian
The offer to give when nothing is to be had
The world does not realize these people are irreplaceable

Everything destroyed
I offer a home in my heart for the displaced
Instead, their hearts welcome my pained soul to its first home in ages

Watermelon Airways



TEHMINA KHAN

Peace be upon you and welcome to Watermelon Airways, where Mediterranean warmth meets Pacific Ocean cool. The time here in Ohloneland is 1:00pm, and we thank the Ohlone people for welcoming our aircraft onto their runway. We wish to acknowledge our shared history of colonization, resistance, and, at long last, liberation. And we also acknowledge that liberation is never complete -- that the revolution must keep on revolutionizing, and so we commit ourselves to the continued struggle for the liberation of all people and all nonhuman sentient beings.

We acknowledge that we are speaking the language of the colonizer, a language that does not come from us and is not part of our heritage. Rather, it was imposed upon us through violence. As we speak this language, we pay reverence to our martyrs who were killed for keeping our languages and stories alive -- journalists and storytellers, poets and artists -- and we commit to learning and passing along our words, our sounds, our ancient rhythms that live in our bones. We also honor the survivors who put their bodies, hearts, and minds on the line in the work of liberation and commit to joining you as we all continue in this work. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to listening to the ancestors of this land, the land of our destination, and all the lands in between.

At the same time, we acknowledge that this language allows Ohlone to speak to Falasteen and for travellers and guests to speak to each other. As we speak to each other, we will change this language from one of pain and violence to one of shared struggle and solidarity. We create language. Language does not create us.

As we fly across Turtle Island, follow along on the interactive map, which will name the lands and peoples on the ground beneath us. Touch the screen to hear stories and songs, to see artwork, plants, and animals. Know that these are lands rich in beauty, ecological diversity, and human and nonhuman culture. We commit to walking softly on this earth and tasting her bounty with reverence. At the same time, we acknowledge the harm we are causing by burning fossil fuels to power this aircraft. While we are grateful that it can connect us from Ohloneland to Falasteen, we commit to doing better. Our aircraft engineers are working hard to harness clean technology that is more efficient and less harmful, but we are not there yet. We also commit to flying less and with greater purpose.

To our guests who are descendants of our former colonizers, we welcome you, and we encourage you to reach back into your pre-colonial heritage. What are your ancient stories? Who were you before some of your people became thieves, conquistadors, and slavemasters? Certainly you, too, were harmed by colonialism. Certainly, you also need to heal from those times of pain and trauma. We commit ourselves to your liberation too -- to our collective liberation.

Fasten your seatbelts, friends and comrades! I am Aliya, your captain. The time is now ten minutes past Zuhr. If you wish to invoke the Four Directions, we are facing Due East. If you wish to pray towards Mecca Hurra, the qibla is forty-five degrees to your left. Please pray for our safe and joyful flight.

Our global crew hail from Ohloneland, Muscogeeland, Cherokeeland, Aztlán, Kashmir, Guandong, Vietnam, and, of course, Falasteen. We will serve delicious fusion snacks and beverages, including acorn bread with olives and hummus, goat cheese with dates, black tea with Ohlone sage, cold hibiscus infusion, and chocolate from Mexico. Once we take flight, our crew will come around and introduce themselves by name. They will offer toys, games, and books for people of all ages -- puppets and puzzles, toy animals and building blocks.

On this flight, we welcome all generations, all genders, all languages, all faith traditions, all abilities, and all ethnicities. We are all skilled in offering care. We are here to help you care for yourselves and your loved ones. Let us know what you need -- blankets, pillows, ear plugs, fidgets, or assistance with the restroom. Elders, we cherish you. Let us know how we can keep you comfortable. Children, we love you and want you to play and have fun. In case of emergency, we keep each other safe. We understand your impulse to place the oxygen mask on your children first, but we urge you to place yours first so you can better assist your loved ones. We are all here together to keep each other safe and happy.

Here on Watermelon Airways, we travel on an ethic of love that presupposes that all of us have the right to live freely and well. Our quote of the day is 'Remember, you are all people and all people are you. You are this universe and this universe is you' from the poet Joy Harjo. We invite you to turn towards your companions next to you and reflect on what this means to you. We are not strangers here. We are each other. So welcome, everyone, on this flight from Ohloneland to Falasteen. May we revel in this journey. May it be a joy!

Peace be upon you.

Peace with Justice and Oneness-Love

DurgaMata Chaudhuri

DurgaMata Chaudhuri creates Peace-With-Justice-And-Oneness-Love Freedom Cards to sell to raise funds for families in Gaza facing starvation and genocide. DurgaMata paints on silk - doves, hearts, flowers, and kites - mainly using the colours of the Palestine flag plus purple as it holds or represents courage, nobility, and spiritual power.

HOW FAR WILL WE GO IN THE NAME OF TERRITORY?

Rina Malagayo Alluri

women holding life in their bellies
wondering if they will carry to term,
vehicles of tyranny
holding future threats to hegemon

premature babies
reliant on life support
plugs being pulled
electricity shortages

injured children
searching for parents
youth caretakers
of the newly orphaned

families trapped onto
small strips of land,
human shields
or direct targets

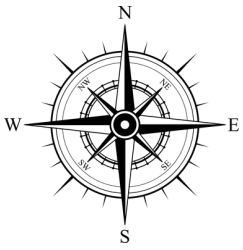
searching for water, food,
fuel, medicine,
protection, shelter,
schools, homes

civilians and armed groups
sewn into fabric of
communities and histories,
terrorists or freedom fighters

we have lost
our moral compass
our care for humanity
our responsibility to protect

children
being de-childed
unchilded from homelands,
handed over weapons of revenge

NAVIGATING HOME
Gillian



I asked my Canadian father, Did you sign up to help stop Hitler from killing the Jews? He made his signature dismissive Pfft sound then said, No, I didn't really think about it. He was twenty years old.

I asked my British mother, Why are you like this? She zoned out again, flashing back to her baby brother asking which branch of the Forces he should sign up for and her youthful answer, The RA has the best parties. He was flattened by a tank in Tunisia. He was nineteen years old.

Home was WWII.

Dad told mostly funny stories of flyboy hi-jinx and the odd tidbit about strafing or how a camera captured his Spitfire's six seconds of fire. In his trunk was a machete, a cyanide pill and the Burma Star.

Mum told mostly horror stories of pulling bodies out of bombed buildings, decapitated children and herding frightened folks down, down, down into the depths of the Tube. In her trunk were letters, china and the Perspex from a Canadian pilot's plane (not my dad's) carved into a heart shape for his lover.

Home was WWII.

I grew up frightened in a mining town and it wasn't until watching Margaret's Museum as an adult and hearing once again that sound, that sound, that sound that my mother had always said was an air raid warning,

that I realized it actually meant there'd been an accident at the mine. I was thirty-nine years old.

Home? If home is where the heart is, the co-ordinates of my childhood home mark the mid-point on the arc of the great circle joining London, England to Chatsworth, Ontario.

Home was WWII.

REMOTE CONTROL

Stephen Fournier

When we kill by remote control
We sometimes must unload
On ground that's well beyond the hole
Bombs make when they explode.

It's excess blood and excess gore
And takes a mental toll:
Part of our esprit de corps,
Who kill by remote control

A cute device, almost a toy
A battery and motor.
A pretty craft for a girl or boy,
A mesmerizing rotor.

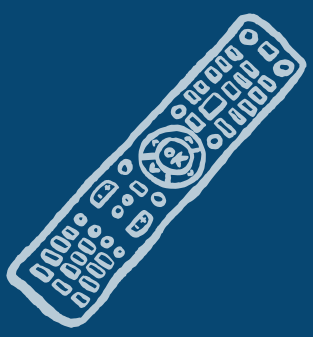
It orbits and it hovers high
In blue skies or in pink
The area it covers, why,
It's wider than you think.

The people on the ground below
Can't risk a morning stroll,
When we so rudely let them know
Stark fear by remote control.

Not heavy hearts but unfurled flags
Here greet each grim patrol.
The terrorized, their heads in rags,
Risk death by remote control.

No lives are lost when the missiles boom,
No lives that really matter,
When airmen kill from a comfy room,
So far from splash and splatter.

Don't look for valor in all this
That's not a GI's role.
But do give honor a good-bye kiss,
If you kill by remote control.



SOLDIER BOY

Victoria Koch

Ettrick Alvo Koch came home from World War II to bury his German-born father, who was killed by a hit and run drunk driver. Nearing the end of high school, I began to understand how this war, and his experiences fighting on the front lines in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe, buried the gentle, sensitive man who would be my father. I am a baby boomer, born a few years after my father's return. He met my mother before the war at the Glendale Star newspaper office in California. She was petite and well groomed, with dark hair and blue eyes. He was six feet tall with, according to my mother, a John Wayne swagger and charm. Unfortunately, my mother was engaged to marry her high school sweetheart, Rex. When my father came home with broken bones and malaria, my mother visited him in the hospital. During the four years my father was on the front lines, my mother had married, been unhappy, divorced, and given up her first-born.

I realize now my parents' union was based on a foundation of deep sadness and loss. They created a marriage and family to rescue themselves. The heart of my father was family; this was all he talked about: how important it was for a family to stick together against the dog-eat-dog world. With the help of his father-in-law, he built a solid cement wall around our entire backyard. Our corner lot with the three-bedroom home became his kingdom and we children became part of his spiraling, dysfunctional web. When my siblings and I were young, he was a loving, devoted man. As we inched towards adolescence, all the anger compressed inside gushed out. Dad wanted home, family, security, understanding and sympathy for his pain. But the older I got, the unhappier my father became.

Beginning in elementary school, Dad often took us to the local rifle range for target practice. He was an excellent marksman. While we excitedly tried to shoot and make a mark anywhere on the target, Dad consistently hit a bull's eye.

My father started sharing war stories. His favorite, the one about the tomatoes, began during a soupy black night. His 30th Infantry was slogging through the European countryside. Mortar fire echoed off the hillsides. As my dad relived these moments, the cigarette, dangling at the corner of his mouth, lit up the raging purpose in his eyes. We leaned in close to my father and couldn't wait to hear what happened next.

It had rained the day before and my father shivered as he hiked through the field. His pack was heavy, his gun loaded, his nerves on survival mode. As his feet squished through the dark dirt, he stopped and looked down. He noticed something red beside his mud splattered boots. He reached and touched a gooey, soft roundness. To his amazement he was walking through a tomato garden. Lagging behind the other soldiers, my dad picked tomatoes and shoved them one by one in his mouth. The juice rolled down his grinning, weary face. He picked more tomatoes and shoved them into his pack. Soon dad's comrades turned and saw dad's tomato stained smile and the tomatoes he carried to share with them. It became a tomato feast with everyone happily stuffing themselves. Dad always said this was one of the best days of his life.

While telling this story, my father became young again. Though mentioning The War brought an intense and nervous gravity to my father's demeanor, the tomato story revealed his humorous optimism. No matter how much we plagued our father to tell us more war stories, he never told stories about shooting or killing. To hear Dad talk about The War we would never have

known that he fired a gun. He only spoke about the awful rations, the closeness of he and his buddies, the time he stood at attention and saw Winston Churchill stroll by. Mostly, he expressed amazement at his survival.

As I entered adulthood, I saw the damage that The War had done to my father's soul. He worked hard as a self-employed gardener, came home, showered, put on a suit and constantly talked to himself in the bathroom mirror: "Goddamn bastards...world's gone to hell...what am I to do?" Before becoming a gardener, he had worked for the Los Angeles Water and Power Company. There, he also occasionally talked to himself. He was a harmless, lonely, disillusioned young man who had difficulty transitioning from soldier to family man. His co-workers became brutal rather than supportive. For his self-talk, they had him committed to a stay at a mental hospital. As a child I wondered what had happened to my father when he was gone for several weeks. After a series of involuntary shock treatments, my father was deemed "normal," and allowed to come home. But with his unemployment, we were poverty-stricken. My mother had my two-year-old brother taken care of by her parents during the week so she could begin working at our local savings and loan.

This hospital incident was a turning point in my father's life. His brain had been cracked open, and the result was despondency and periodic violent outbursts. Through the years his work with the earth as a gardener gave him back the grounding he had lost. But he was never the same. His humor, his storytelling flattened. Unhappiness swelled and put a depressive damper on our household. Whenever the truck pulled into the driveway at the end of his work day, we anxiously cringed, not knowing his mood.

War movies, preaching and storytelling soothed my father. He desperately

wanted to love his children and to give them “a better life” but he didn’t know how. As we left to lead our own lives, he frantically clung to us. He would show up at my college apartment unannounced to take me out to dinner. I would dutifully sit with him and soak up the sadness he exuded. But I was entering my rebellious phase and wanted little to do with this depressed man.

After a year studying abroad, I remember my father meeting me at the Los Angeles Airport at three in the morning. His tan, weather-worn face was wrinkled, his hair disheveled, his formerly tall, thin body was overweight and bent. As he timidly walked towards me, I felt a stab of emotional pain: my father had gotten old! His shyness in sharing his feelings was pushed aside in the predawn darkness as he told me, “I missed you so much.”

By his sixth decade, Dad's softened anger allowed him to accept his humble fate. He loved nothing more than working in his garden or on his house. He remained the king of his small kingdom, but now he treated Mom with respect. He frequently told me how much he loved her and how much he loved me. His life had betrayed him, and he never fully understood why. Although he died before the Gulf War, the War on Terror and the Iraqi invasion, he never knew what to make of Vietnam.

We placed his ashes in a small garden at Forest Lawn. I cried more than I have ever cried before. I cried for the young, sensitive, intellectually curious boy my father lost and I cried for the mellowed, older gentleman he became. The one object I wanted was his Bible. He never attended church, but this Bible became his memory book. Inside were collected magazine and newspaper clippings, pictures of us children, report cards, personal ramblings and a few school essays we had written. I opened this treasured book and carefully

unfolded the brown stained articles. They included statements about the perils and futility of war:

"...Man, biologically considered, and whatever else he may be into the bargain, is the most formidable of all beasts of prey, and, indeed, the only one that preys systematically on his own species." From The Philosophy of William James

"...The 3rd Infantry Division (my father's division) had suffered more casualties than any other division in the entire American Army. You don't celebrate things like that." My father had double-underscored the last line above: *"You don't celebrate things like that."*

When, in the early eighties, I visited Russia as part of a Women's Journey for Peace, we were welcomed at a special ceremonial luncheon by the Mayor of Minsk. "I met and fought with American soldiers and they became my friends, my compatriots. I will never forget them and I hope we will eventually learn the lessons of war."

Emotionally responding to the Mayor's simple words, and without realizing what I was doing, I stood up. The Mayor smiled and leaned forward. "My father fought in The War," I said, "and I am touched by your words and honored to be here."

Stepping down from the podium, the Mayor reached into his pocket. "Your father was a brave man." He shook my hand and handed me a small silver bison. "This," he said, "is my city's symbol of courage and bravery and I give it to you as a token of remembrance."

The silver bison stands on the bookshelf as I write these words. Tears flow as I

relive this experience, and as I reread a typed note written in response to one of my high school essays and tucked inside my father's Bible:

B10 English, Students Victoria, 15 and Dad, 45. Subject: Simple Enjoyment

Our Blanket of Stars
...and the sky of blue mist with its hem of woven stars that often seems so wonderful to you and me, Dad.
We find endless beauty as we look up and lift our eyes to a golden sunset...a fluff of clouds...a thunderhead of majestic importance...how fast the sky's expression changes with the power of a storm.
I enjoy your phrase, 'hem of woven stars,' Victoria. The sky is a magic lighted highway...a parade of lasting beauty. I even enjoyed it during the war...with bombs bursting in air...I looked to see if 'our' sky was still there.
Let's be thankful this miracle of miracles has been enjoyed by you and me.

Collateral Damage

Sallie Latch

SHE WEEPS

Forced to flee her home and meager land
held by the opposing forces
her feet trod an unknown path
her chest engorged with fear
baby in her arms
rooting for breast
void of milk
she weeps
dirt.

Mona Mehas

THE IRISH AND PALESTINE; THE GUILT AND THE GRÁ*

Caroline Hurley

Since the Norman knight, Strongbow, with 1,200 troops, was invited in 1170 to subdue rebellious regional chiefs, before marrying the winning king's daughter, Princess Aoife, in Waterford Cathedral, Ireland suffered 700+ years of subjugation until gaining independence in 1922. In stages, the English brought Plantations, Penal Laws, evictions, famine, emigration, land-grabs and depopulation. Irish sympathy with the Palestinian plight is often attributed to this traumatic national saga. Both people know what dispossession feels like, threatened and actual.

Before English rule took effect in Ireland, all was not rosy for everyone. Society was quite hierarchical, reflected in indigenous Brehon Laws that meted out punishments differentially depending on family and social status. But collective tribal identities are strong, wherever on the rung each is born.

What I know about my maternal ancestors is that they faced certain slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. They must have kept in with the more powerful Irish chieftains who either evaded or cooperated with the invaders because one of them, Geoffrey O' Donoghue, was granted extensive lands in the late fifteenth century, on the outskirts of Killarney, Co. Kerry. Signalling his importance, he built Killaha Castle at a site chosen to defend the route pass through the valley of the River Flesk. He turned his estate into the hereditary seat of the O' Donoghues of the Glen.

Fame spread of lavish entertaining banquets, and of his fine poetry (still in print today); assuring him posterity as one of the Four Kerry Poets, commemorated on a stone wall plaque in Muckross Abbey. The first Irish poem set to music, *Sad Is My State*, still sung variably as *iombó agus iombó*;

and wrought in his usual 'impossible metre', was a tribute to his dog, Druimin, who choked to death when a mouse jumped into his mouth! He was referred to variously as Bard/Chieftain/Prince, or Lord, of the Glen; Geoffrey of the Mansion, or *Séafraidh Uí Dhonnchadha an Ghleanna*.

One of the last Irish strongholds standing during the Cromwellian Roundhead invasions of 1650, the castle was finally toppled by General Ludlow's cannon-fire. Geoffrey retreated to a house in the woods, refusing to cede ownership under the 1652 Act of Settlement. His holding, of over twenty thousand acres, according to the Down Survey, was largely rocky and barren, an additional challenge to occupying newcomers. After the death of his first wife, from a local rebel family, he more controversially married Alice Coppinger, from Cork, whose father had negotiated beneficial land deals with settlers. People compromise to get by. As Oscar Wilde said, "the truth is rarely pure and never simple."

Geoffrey died in 1677, survived by at least one child, Daniel. His progeny came and went, evading capture, and eking out livelihoods. My grandfather was born in Glenflesk in the late 1800s, not long after the Great Famine. Letters recovered, written by him, were signed, John O' Donoghue of the Glen. He emigrated to America to work with his brother but, unusually, returned, at a time when travel was a major ordeal. He met my grandmother from an adjoining townland and joined the police; meaning employment at Her Majesty's Service, in the Royal Irish Constabulary, as Ireland was still under direct English rule. He was an easy-going peace-loving man, glad to immerse himself in hometown duties, and to accept the adequate pension offered when the Force disbanded in 1922 on the introduction of Irish self-government (though civil war raged on for some years).

It came as a shock to learn, from Sean Gannon's research for The Irish Story, that many of those former RIC officers, a third Irish-born men, ended up in

Palestine:

"On the 30 April 1922, 760 recently disbanded members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and its Auxiliary Division (ADRIC) disembarked at Haifa in Palestine.

They arrived there as the British Section of the Palestine Gendarmerie, a strike force and riot squad recruited at the instigation of the secretary of state for the colonies, Winston Churchill.

This British Gendarmerie was the start of a strong association between Ireland and the police of the British Mandate of Palestine that would last until the British withdrew in 1948."

That article addresses criticism about assignment of the new gendarmerie, 85 per cent of whose members were former ADRIC; also known as Black and Tans, after gaining infamy for extreme arbitrary brutality and murder during the Irish revolutionary wars. Despite efforts to conceal origins, their reputation went before them. Fortunately, trouble was rare, and the new Palestinian police were often idle. This changed from 1933 with anti-Zionist revolts in Arab society. Opposition to the British government's preferential Jewish immigration policy drove the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-1939. The shrinking Irish contingent must have then felt most keenly their General Tudor's remarks about them having to leave Ireland because of the principle of Irish self-determination, only to be sent to Palestine to resist the Arab attempt at self-determination. As Gannon writes, "those recruited in the 1920s and 1930s found themselves forming the British imperial frontline against an anticolonial insurgency, the Great Arab Revolt, which saw the emergence of Black and Tannery in the Palestine Police."

In the mid-1940s it was the Jews who rose up to get rid of the British; who in

turn drafted in thousands more officers to deal with the Zionist insurgency. But rather than crush those rebels, the Empire met their demands for an independent Jewish state and end of the Mandate. The Arabs made room, however grudgingly. What a mistake, gazing on Gaza 2025.

Overviews of First World War imperial land losses and conquests position Palestine as attractive territory. Descended from northern Irish stock, the High Commissioner of Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon corresponded in 1915-6 with Sharif Hussein bin Ali, ruler of Mecca and the Hejaz. McMahon was initially receptive to Hussein's offer of help in overthrowing the Ottomans on condition a pan-Arab state made up of Ottoman Arab lands in the Middle East was established. The letter from McMahon to Hussein dated 24 October 1915 in particular has been cited since 1920 as a legally-enforceable argument, continually refined since, confirming that Britain irrevocably promised Palestine to the Arabs, nullifying subsequent treaties - 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1948 Balfour Declaration etc. "Great Britain is prepared to recognise and uphold the independence of the Arabs in all the regions lying within the frontiers proposed by the Sharif of Mecca," the letter concluded. Perhaps trust that this agreement would be honoured was why Palestinians practiced such restraint for two more decades. This episode is redolent of so-called 'rules-based order' manoeuvring.

My mother and uncles emigrated in the 1950s to Britain for work, as the Irish economy stagnated. One uncle became a barrister, and identified more strongly with his adopted country's politics until he retired, when he started writing a book about Ireland and, from rare visits, seemed to regain a belated yearning for his homeland. He never made it back to live. My mother and other uncles did. How different things would have been if my grandfather had signed up for service in Palestine!

Andreas Malm wrote a trenchant long-form essay for Verso in April 2024,

even then surmising, from the cooperation Israel was receiving from the US and UK, that the latter pair must want Palestinians to die too. This essay, called The Destruction of Palestine is the Destruction of the Earth, discloses more influences shared with Ireland. From the 1820s, the British empire broke its dependence on nature's temperamentality by harnessing fossil fuel; to better chase even more trade markets. Successful Arab industries were seen as obstructions, especially by Lord Palmerston, foreign secretary and chief British Empire architect of the nineteenth century; later, two-term UK Prime Minister, and a figure intimately connected to Ireland. In 1840, he ordered a Royal Navy fleet, aboard the earliest steamships, to bombard Beirut and coastal towns, as far as the civilian Palestinian port of Akka (Acre), which was levelled to rubble, leaving at least 2,000 dead. "There was no refuge anywhere."

On 25 November, 1840 — 57 years before the first Zionist congress, 77 years before the Balfour declaration, 107 years before the partition plan — Palmerston wrote to Ponsonby, ambassador in Istanbul, proposing that Jews colonise Palestine. He envisaged their presence as buffers against Arab demands, and opportunities for wealth creation in the name of 'the march of civilisation'. This structure, first imagined, became manifest – in parallel with global warming. Malm views both peace processes and COP meetings largely as circuses. Capitalism elicits expansion.

Related to Palmerston, the Earl of Shaftesbury had started preaching Christian Zionism from the 1830s, which soon caught on in America. Zionism was imperial before becoming Jewish. Most Jews wanted to stay put; not feel hounded to a spoken-for land. If Israel has not captured Western governments, especially American, but remains merely a tool of post-colonial empire, they are arguably only secondarily guilty for Palestinian genocides.

Palmerston also participated in the culminating act of Irish genocide, often

cited as the world's first genocide. As non-interventionist Whig/Tory landlord of a huge estate in County Sligo when the Great Famine began in 1845, he booked boat passages to British colonies in Canada, forcibly emigrating 2,000 starving tenants and their families, allowing him to consolidate land holdings. Sailing conditions were so bad, and so many arrived dead, that the vessels became known as 'coffin ships': atrocities experienced in living memory for my grandfather. Potato crops may have failed, but huge harvests of grain were being exported at high profit; dynamics inspiring Sinead O' Connor's song, Famine, and Damian Dempsey's song, Colony. Professor Rashid Khalidi identified many tactics first tested and implemented in Ireland that transferred to Palestine. "Ireland served as a template for the expansion of the British Empire over its long history." With ongoing EU pressure to drop military neutrality and maintain trade, US threats of tariffs for boycotts or even for regulating digi-tech and financial behaviour, and war planes let refuel at Shannon airport, Ireland is still straining under industrial-imperial yokes, despite narratives of sovereignty and freedom.

Just as nothing except political will and expediency prevented England over centuries from declaring Ireland an independent republic, Palestine's distinct statehood, with associated rights, could be readily recognised by key powers, like 140 countries have already done; as defined, for example, by non-binding criteria in Article I of the 1933 Montevideo Convention:

"The State as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other States."

But legal argument about Palestine is notoriously partisan and illogical. Indefatigable blogger Caitlin Johnstone believes, "the unjust system upon which the Zionist state is based has proved... it can never exist without

nonstop violence and abuse, so that system needs to be dismantled and replaced with something radically different, just as was the case with Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa [for which] external pressures will probably need to play a role." As Ireland needed too.

Of Irish blood, English heart, songwriter Smith Morrissey wrote a complex song called Israel on his 2017 album, Low In High School, which strives to understand that nation's drive to survive in a world that "is just one big asylum." He admires the lust for life of ordinary Israelis; differentiates them from their armies, and ends by noting, "they who rain abuse upon you / they are jealous of you as well / Love yourselves as you should / Israel." He surely would not write such a song now, after, like millions of people, having his eyes opened to horrifyingly malign intent in both government and populace to a previously unexpected extent. Acknowledging that the settler-colonial programme enables comfortable lifestyles may seem shallow, but esteemed figures like Jason Heckel confirm this truth. Modern lifestyles eternise exploitations that unmoor others from modest stations. How much Western civilisation rests on violence, extraction, and destruction is hard and sobering to fathom.

The erosion of the commons over centuries, with borders inflicting privatization, militarization, and capitalist expansion, is no longer disputed. Impacts on social fabric and power structures, as cooperation is replaced by competition, shared care by exclusion, and land, labour and natural resources gets commodified, are also studied. These forces are intensively alive in Palestine. If common spaces could be reclaimed, alternative relationships grounded in reciprocity, cooperation, and shared responsibility would hopefully re-emerge, whether that be in Palestine, Ireland or anywhere, on a planet whose ecological boundaries are being breached. And one thing shared by the 8 billion-plus human beings currently alive is the reality that, for the foreseeable future, this planet is our eco-home (in Greek, *oikos*).

On the Morrissey album cited is another song called, Home Is A Question Mark, dealing directly with what coordinates of home might mean. “Is it just a word / or is it something you carry within you?” Reflecting how so many are rent from families and neighbourhoods, forced to move, leave, run and hide, this question of what home signifies can never be taken for granted.

The year before the 1916 Easter Rising, Irish leader Pádraig Pearse gave a graveside oration at Fenian Jeremiah O Donovan Rossa’s funeral, which, 110 years later, Palestinians may well appreciate: ‘They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! They have left us our Fenian dead, and, while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.’

Violence guarantees ravages. Systems currently favour self-vaunting hoarders, even though there is enough for everyone if commodities were distributed equitably. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh taught about interbeing, evident in the interconnected nature of reality and the human experience, and in the dependence of phenomena on all other phenomena. Just as members of functional families trust each other, healthy groups operate by mutual reliance. From my ancestral parish, philosopher John Moriarty wrote a celebrated book called Nostos, Greek for homesickness, about the imperative to return to our roots in earth, art, spirit, and heart. A line from Somali-British poet Warsan Shire’s poem, Home, goes: “no one leaves home unless/ home is the mouth of a shark”.

Genocide signals extreme breakdown of faith, betrayal of universal basic needs, rights and laws, and refusal to respect humanity. Palestine was the birth-place of Jesus Christ, who advised, instead of judging and punishing, to ‘do unto others as you would have them do onto you.’ Ethics bring home the power of individual behaviour and eventuality of some sacrifices to accommodate others. Without collective awakening to impel nonviolent

conflict resolution and justice, from top echelons to village dwellers, not only Holy Land natives, but all, are damned.

(*Grá = Irish for 'love')

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MERCY

Mona Mehas

Please don't take my boy
My son's old enough to go to war
His hands are soft when they touch my cheek
He laughs while playing with his sisters.

Please don't take my daughters
They cry each night praying for uncles
Their hearts break in fear for their brother
Do not make them yours.

Have mercy on my family
You torched our home when you came through
We exist alone in gutters
Please don't take my children.

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BETWEEN BORDERS, HOLDING ON TO HOPE: AN AFGHAN GIRL'S STORY OF DISPLACEMENT AND RESILIENCE

Amena Sediqi-Aini

Aarizo only knew Iran as a place where she called home. She was born 16 years ago, after her parents fled Afghanistan as refugees to Iran in search of safety and work. The small apartment they lived in the outskirts of Tehran was small and cramped and never really theirs, but that was home for her, where she learned to walk and talk for the first time. Being around her family in that small apartment was where she experienced a sense of safety and belonging.

School, however, was a different story. She was reminded daily that she was not really Iranian. "Afghani girl," some classmates would whisper, as if it were an insult. The teachers didn't always hide their bias either. Aarizo would consciously make an effort to prove that she belonged and that she was simply another girl, a human being just like her Iranian peers who loved books, volleyball, and drawing. But, despite her efforts to belong, the feeling of being an outsider constantly nagged at her.

Then, one afternoon, everything changed. Without any warning, her father returned from work with a look she had never seen before. He told them the government had ordered their deportation. They had days, and maybe hours, to leave Iran. No chance to sell the few belongings they had gathered over two decades. There was no time to say goodbye to her friends. Aarizo's mother wept quietly as they packed their entire lives into a handful of bags and headed toward Afghanistan.

In a matter of just a few days, the only home Aarizo had known was gone.

When they crossed into Herat, Afghanistan, Aarizo expected to find some trace of her parents' past, some shelter, or any form of welcome. Instead, they were directed, along with tens of thousands of other returnees, to a sprawling camp outside Herat.

Once at the camp, what she experienced was something she was not quite prepared for.

The camp was crowded with people and tents as far as the eye could see. The air was shimmering like boiling water in the relentless heat of the desert sun. There was dust everywhere filling their lungs and eyes. There were children crying from hunger and thirst, mothers desperate to keep their babies cool, and fathers standing in long lines for water, which was not enough for a family with children.

The tent they stayed at didn't offer much relief from the harsh elements of the desert either. It felt like an oven inside. The canvas walls of the tent trapped heat turning the inside into a sauna, suffocating them. Food rations were often not enough, some rice and lentils if they were lucky. At times they would only get some bread that had hardened so much that they had to soak it in water to be able to swallow.

One of the scariest experiences she had in the camp was when her little brother collapsed one day, with pale face and cracked lips, barely gasping for air. The camp doctor said it was heat exhaustion. He told her mother this was a common occurrence among the younger children in the camp. Aarizo's mom was holding on tight to her little boy, frantically fanning him, with tears streaming down her face. Aarizo watched all of this in horror, quietly whispering a prayer for her brother's health. That evening, as her brother was laying down beside her, weak and without any energy, she realized how much she missed their cramped apartment in Tehran. That old and dingy apartment with noisy neighbors was the safest place she had known. In that moment she realized how much it had been home to her.

And yet, Afghanistan was supposed to be their true home. But, the house her parents had sold before leaving 20 years ago no longer belonged to them. The camp didn't feel like home either, far from it. Worst of all, Aarizo knew that girls her age were forbidden from going to school in Afghanistan. It made her sick to her stomach realizing that at sixteen, her education was over. The notebooks she had carried from Iran, filled with poems, math problems, and sketches, felt like relics of a future slipping out of reach.

It was hard to sleep at nights in the camp with the sounds of coughs, wails, and whispered prayers around her. As she lay awake, she wondered where is home if not here in Afghanistan? Where do I belong if not in Iran?

Her parents often talked about finding another place to take refuge in, but didn't know where. They knew that the other neighboring country besides Iran was Pakistan, which was also forcing all the refugees to go back to Afghanistan. They had nowhere else to go. She felt caught between two countries, and belonging to neither. But despite the fact that her entire world as she knew it had fallen apart, there was still a sense of hope and determination in her. She knew she could not go to school to study, but what if she could find a way to study in secret? It didn't matter if she could not call either country her home, she can forge a new definition of home within her heart. She thought to herself, what if home is a memory, an act of resilience, and a persistent act of daring to dream while the world tries to erase her future dreams. Afterall, her name Aarizo meant hope and longing.

She knew that the road ahead was uncertain, but one thing that was certain for Aarizo was that home was not a single place on a map. It was something she would have to redraw again and again, until it finally made space for her.

Young Afghan Girl Fleeing her Country

Mahnaz, 16-year-old Afghan artist in Pakistan

"This artwork was inspired by my dream of becoming an astronaut and exploring the universe, far from the darkness that surrounds my country. Since I cannot find a place that feels safe, free, and peaceful in which I can soar, I painted my desire to escape war and ignorance and enter an imagined world of glowing galaxies."

Urban Vision (My Ideal City)

Mahnaz, 16-year-old Afghan artist in Pakistan

"In a world that often turns away from war-affected communities, this piece focuses on seeing us - not through the lens of tragedy, but through the possibility of growth and dignity. The women in the park, the children playing, the school welcoming students, all are symbols of the life we deserve but have been denied. This painting speaks to the theme of courage in the face of external forces, and it dares to imagine a future where Afghan girls are not only present but also thriving. I painted with intention, to show what peace could look like, not just in policy, but in our daily life."

IN-BETWEEN HOME AND HOUSE

Upul Lekamge

‘Living at our home
at this moment is dangerous;
We have to move as quickly as possible,’ Papa said.
Mama was not in a good mood.
‘How can we’ was in her mind, but not expressed.
We, the children, did not have any idea.

Finally, we had to.
Not knowing how we will be accepted there in our new home!

Mother had one last gasp when we left
Our ancestral home.
She summarised all her attachments
in one solemn breath.
I did not want to look at
That house again.

My younger brother and sister
waiting to see their new home.
I was anxious .....
Will it be another house after some time?

At last, eight hours of a hectic journey
bringing us to our destination.

Well-received,
skin colour, language, religion
immaterial at first.
Taken to a temporary home
Food, drink, shelter, warmth in cooler
conditions were basic privileges.

School for three of us
Job for my Papa – got those.
As usual, Mama stayed at home.

At school, fellow students had other ideas
Teachers friendly, caretakers different
Diverse people, diverse treatments.

Protest rallies, marches, demonstrations
Papa and Mama not interested
but forcibly taken into
display solidarity, brotherhood and fraternity.

Human rights, self-determination,
territorial integrity, diaspora, illegal immigrants,
new vocabulary.....
the cooler conditions getting regularly heated.

From a home converted to a house,
Fearing the new home
going to be another house
sooner or later.

When and where will we have
our permanent Home?

A JOURNEY THROUGH SHADOWS

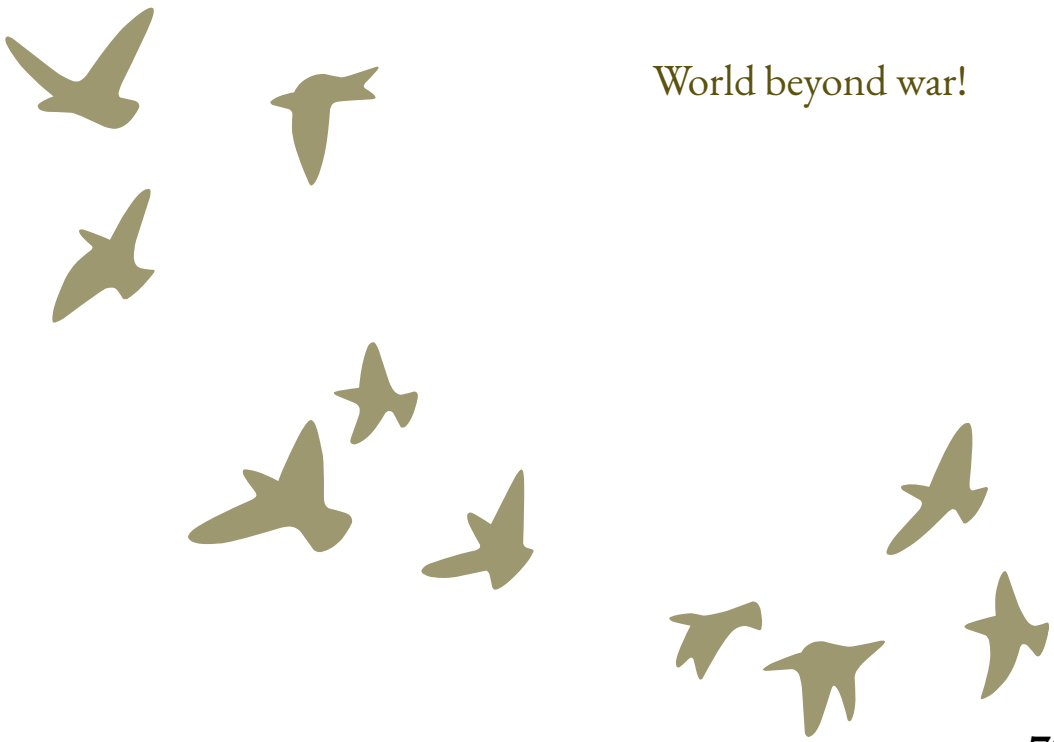
Tesfay Equar Kidanu

My name is Tesfay Equar Kidanu, and my story is one woven with threads of resilience, hope, and the harsh realities of war. I was born and raised in the beautiful region of Tigray, northern Ethiopia, a land rich in culture and history, where the mountains touch the sky and the rivers sing the songs of our ancestors. Nevertheless, the tranquility of my life was shattered when internal conflict between TPLF and the EDF federal government erupted, transforming my world into a landscape of fear and uncertainty, as all electric power and networking switched off with zero communication. The war began suddenly, like a storm that darkens the horizon without warning. It was a time when friends turned into strangers, and neighbors became adversaries. I remember the day it all changed; the echoes of gunfire replaced the laughter of children playing in the streets. Families were torn apart, and many were forced to flee their homes, leaving behind everything they had ever known.

As the violence escalated, my family and I made the heart-wrenching decision to leave our home in Tigray. We packed what little we could carry: a few clothes, some food, and cherished memories before embarking on a treacherous journey to safety. The roads were filled with others like us, displaced and desperate, seeking refuge from the chaos. We walked for days, often at night to avoid detection, our hearts heavy with fear and uncertainty. After an arduous journey, we arrived at Raya Kobo, a town that would become our new home, albeit temporarily. The transition was jarring; the unfamiliar streets of Raya Kobo replaced the familiar landscapes of Tigray. As internally displaced persons (IDPs) after a three-day journey on foot reached a temporary concentrated camp at Haik in Desie, we faced numerous challenges finding shelter, accessing food, and coping with the trauma of our experiences. The makeshift camps were crowded, but they offered a semblance of safety amidst the turmoil.

In Haik, I found solace in community. Other IDPs Afar in Awash 7 shared their stories of loss, survival, and resilience. We supported one another, forming bonds that transcended our individual struggles. Together, we organized small gatherings where we could share our experiences through storytelling and music. In those moments, we reclaimed a part of ourselves that war had tried to steal away. Despite the hardships, I held onto hope. I began volunteering at a local NGO that assisted displaced families. It was a way for me to give back to a community that had welcomed us in our time of need. Through this work, I learned about the power of unity and compassion. We were all survivors, and together we could rebuild our lives. As I reflect on my journey during a war from Tigray-Ray Kobo-Haik (desie)- Afar-Awash 7 to Jimma, I recognize that all my past and my present have shaped my identity. I am a son of Tigray, a survivor of war, and an advocate for peace. Though the scars of conflict remain, they serve as reminders of my strength and resilience. I dream of a day when the sounds of laughter will return to Tigray, where families can gather without fear and children can play freely in the sun. Until that day comes, I will continue to stand with my community, sharing our stories and working towards healing and reconciliation. War may have taken much from us, but it cannot extinguish the light of hope that burns within us all. Together, we will rise again.

World beyond war!



A SANCTUARY OF PEACE

Home

Jive Lubbungu

Home—where whispers curl like smoke in the air,
a place stitched together with love and wear.
Here, hearts slow their racing, find rest from the fight,
a shelter where all roads lead back at night.

Together, we hum our uneven song,
and though we clash, it never lasts long.
Fingers knot at the table, rough and lined,
breaking bread like some quiet kind of prayer.

No other walls hold this kind of grace,
no door swings wider, no light so warm on a face.
But war slinks in—a thief with sharpened teeth,
gnawing the bones of the peace beneath.

Oh, war, you bitter, unyielding ghost,
you twist the hands that held us close.
Brothers splinter, fathers fall,
mothers hollow, sisters' voices small.

You starve the earth, snap every thread,
leave only echoes where laughter bled.
Mocking, merciless, grinding us thin,
until all that's left is the ache of what was and when.

And yet—we dream. Of windows lit gold,
of hands relearning the stories they hold.
War scrapes deep, but love digs deeper,
and home, someday, will stitch us back sweeter,
A place like no other!

INHERITING THE WEIGHT OF BIAFRA: HOME, MEMORIES AND REALITY

Ugochukwu Chrysantus Asiogu

I was not born when the Biafran War ended in January 1970, but its impact still resonates with me. Like many young Igbo people, I inherited the legacy of a conflict that happened before I was born. Like many young Igbo people, I inherited the pain of a war I never witnessed. I carry scars from a conflict that shaped my country before I breathed first.

My uncle hardly spoke about the war. When he did, his eyes becomes still, and he would gaze into the distance. He would relay bits of his experience, how families fled their village as federal troops approached, how they survived on cassava and hope, and how children died from starvation not bullets. These stories were not meant to entertain; they were a legacy, passed down to remind us, the younger generation, of what happened to a people whose only crime was wanting freedom from hate.

The war ended, but it changed how people from other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria saw Ndi Igbo (Igbo people). We became the people who betrayed Nigeria. The tribe that engineered the 1966 coup. The community that could never be trusted. These labels stuck on us like scars in school, offices, political institutions and religious gatherings. They whispered about us in government. They spoke our names with suspicions during elections. We were defined by a war that broke out prior to our birth, rather than by our achievements or aspirations.

Growing up in Nigeria meant scaling through invisible hurdles that were more rigid than physical borders. I faced unwelcome gazes because of my name and missed opportunities despite my qualifications. Conversations

stopped when I walked into rooms. The federal character policy, meant to promote national unity, felt like a glass ceiling. No matter how hard I worked or what I achieved, I was always seen as Igbo first and Nigerian second.

I watched my classmates, talented and focused, lose faith in Nigeria's future. In secondary school and at the university, we passionately debated about being the change that Nigeria needs. But upon graduation, the conversation shifted to finding ways to leave and seek better opportunities elsewhere. This was not just about money. It was about escaping the weight of inherited guilt and suspicion.

As a people of Igbo tribe, we are being accused of not being patriotic enough, but when we tried to participate fully in national affairs, old suspicion blocked our path. When we succeeded in business, they called us greedy. When we invested in education, they said we thought we were better than others. We are seen as superior. When we moved to other parts of Nigeria for opportunities, they called us settlers and attacked our families.

The Civil War did not create Nigeria's tribal divisions, but it made them worse. It turned differences into instruments of manipulation and suspicion into government policy. Nigeria's diverse languages, religions, and cultures, which should have been the peoples' strengths, became fault lines that politicians took advantage of. Instead, politicians learned to use them as tools for exerting influence.

I inherited these divisions as a young man. Christian and Muslim, North and South, majority and minority, became not just labels but fault lines. Every conflict, election dispute, and economic challenge was attributed to these deep-seated divisions. Nigerians stopped seeing themselves as a people from diverse backgrounds but as different groups

compelled to coexist. Religion, which should bring people together, became another source of division. I watched friends fight and troll each other because their pastors and imams taught them to be suspicious. Finding a job or renting a house became difficult due to religious differences.

These divisions affected and continue to affect every aspect of life - how resources are allocated, where development projects are sited, and who gets opportunities. Interestingly, in the country today, in other to survive, most young people hide their indigenous names on job applications. Others change their religion for scholarships, or liaise with people from "preferred groups" to start businesses.

The problem of Nigerians is not only from within. As I grew older, I recognised how foreign countries amplified the civil war. Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and America did not just watch from the sidelines, they picked sides based on their respective economic interests. The same countries that partitioned Africa decades earlier helped tear Nigeria apart during the war. They made sure that no matter which side gained victory, the country would still rely on them for economic support and validation.

Shell kept pumping oil while people died fighting over the oil fields. Arms dealers made money selling weapons to both sides of the war. International aid groups used pictures of starving children from Biafra to raise money but did little to solve the real problems. This pattern did not end the war. As a Nigerian youth today, I see the same patterns everywhere. Nigeria's oil flows freely to rich countries while young people fail to secure jobs. The brightest students get recruited to European and American universities while our schools are abandoned. Foreign companies take our natural resources and give nearly nothing back to local communities.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund tell our government to cut spending and sell our national companies. Meanwhile, the children of Western leaders attend the best schools while ours sometimes study under trees because teachers strike for unpaid salaries. We have political freedom but remain economically exploited.

The most difficult part of being a Nigerian youth is being aware of what Nigeria could have become if not for bad governance aided by external influences. With our large population, natural resources, talented youth, and diversity, Nigeria should lead the world. I think about young Nigerians who write code used in Silicon Valley but struggle to secure tech jobs in Lagos. Entrepreneurs with brilliant ideas cannot secure loans because they lack connections, or worse still, do not belong to certain religious and ethnic groups.

The unemployment statistics tell only a shredded part of the story. Many talented people work far below their abilities. Doctors become security guards and Engineers sell phone recharge cards on streets. Our elite founded a political system that frustrates human talent, where family background matters more than ability, where who you know matters more than what you can produce.

In Nigeria, poverty is not only about lacking money. It is about having no opportunities, no hope for the future. The youth learn early that being good at something is not enough, that working hard is great, but not a guarantee for success. The system rewards personal connections over competence. This breeds fury that destroys trust in society.

In all, it is my conviction that irrespective of the challenges we face as a country, there is a brighter future for Nigeria. The youth have an in-depth understanding of the

country's problems. They are fully aware of the political gimmicks employed by politicians to distract the citizens, and they know that the country's diversity can be a strength if the people embrace it. The legacy of Biafra is sacrosanct. It should be respected and the peoples' choice prioritised. A conviction for which a people are willing to die for is worth living for. Nigeria's greatness depends on unity and equality among all ethnic groups, with autonomy over their affairs and no favouritism. If this unity cannot be achieved, peaceful separation proves to be a better option.

The Kyangwali Singing Tree to Heal the Trauma of War

Facilitated by Emma Kavuma (Uganda)

The Singing Tree Mural Project began in 1999 when an 8-year-old girl asked "What if the whole world made a painting together?" 148 murals have been co-created with over 27,000 people from 52 countries, including this piece from Uganda.

Artist Emma Kavuma worked with Kanizius Nsabimana, an organizer in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda, who came up with the theme for the Singing Tree of Healing the Trauma of War. Artist Emma Kavuma helped to facilitate 22 refugees from 11 villages in the UN refugee settlement to co-create "The Kyangwali Singing Tree to Heal the Trauma of War." 95% of the refugees who live in the UN settlement in northern Uganda have come from the Congo.

The Singing Tree process is a collective way for feelings to be expressed and stories to be shared - a necessary step in healing. Learn more about the project at unitythroughcreativity.org.

Settler Colony, Fourth Grade

TEHMINA KHAN

We build mini missions
of clay and sugar cubes,
take a field trip to Mission San Juan Bautista
to watch reenactments of bread baking
and gardening

At school, we pretend
we have come to California in covered wagons
and swish dirt in shallow pans
to see if we can find glittery bits.

Mrs. Lewis reads us
Island of the Blue Dolphins
chapter by chapter
about an Indigenous girl
alone on an island called Santa Cruz,
that looks like a fish.

Why is she alone?

Then she reads us
Ishi: Last of his Tribe

Why is he the last?

Questions but no answers

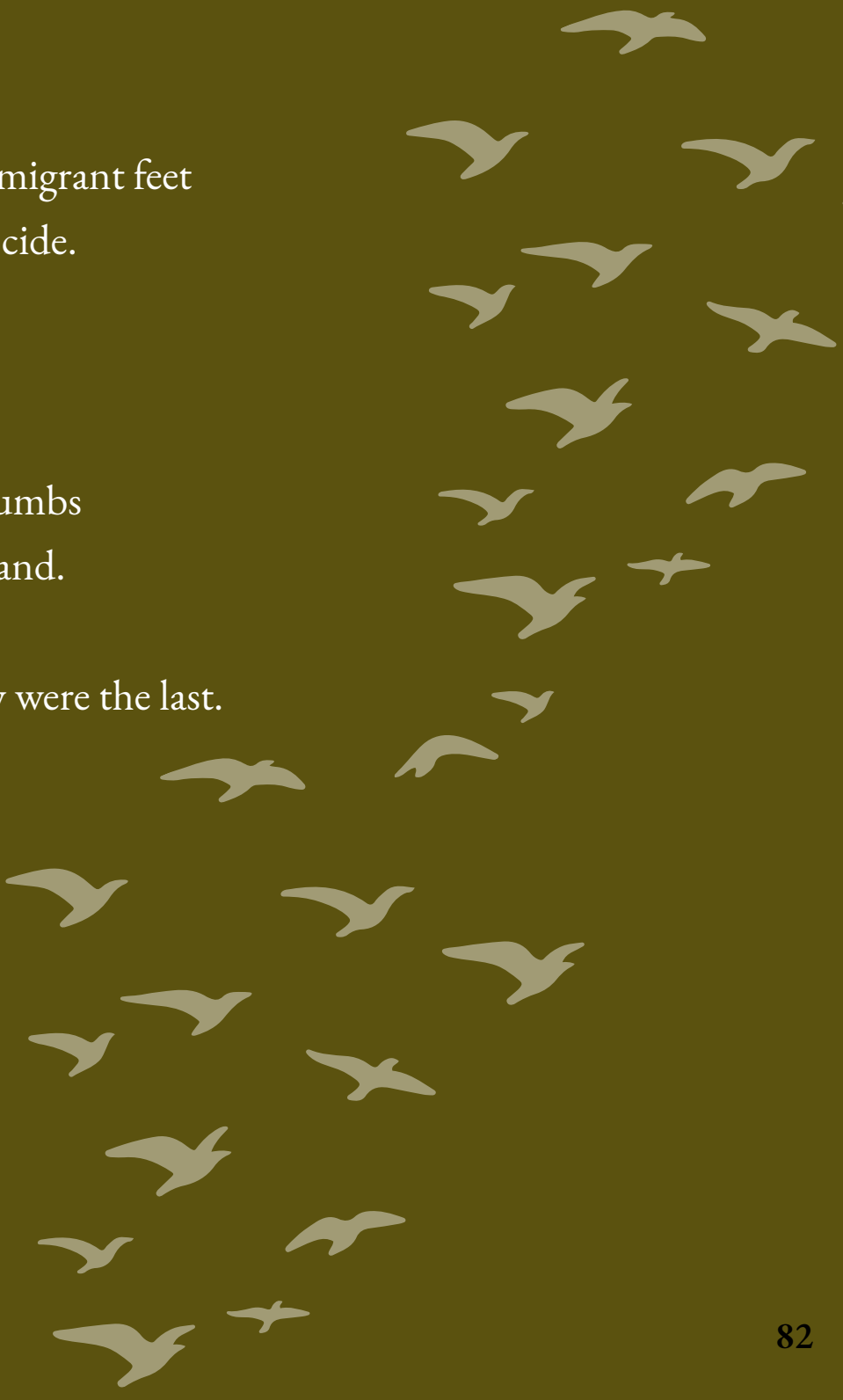
until decades in the future
when the words
California and genocide
come together.

And I think about my immigrant feet
that stand upon this genocide.

California dreaming
on such a winter's day,
brushing off the eraser crumbs
from this earth where I stand.

Everyone knows why they were the last.

Everyone knows now
as we watch
genocide on our screens
in real time
as we pay for it.



BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: REFLECTIONS FROM MY VISIT TO THE DMZ

Beatrice de Salles

Two weeks ago, I visited one of the most symbolic and emotionally charged places in the world: the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea. It is a place that embodies both division and possibility, history and longing.

What struck me most upon arrival was the sight of the United Nations Flag standing tall at the border. Against the backdrop photo billboards with mists on the top of the wall where we can view the empty guard posts and barbed wire, it carried a meaning far beyond protocol. For me, it symbolized the world's shared responsibility to preserve peace even in places where peace seems fragile, suspended between two worlds.

Our group walked all the way to one of the four underground tunnels secretly built beneath the DMZ. These tunnels, once intended for infiltration, now stand as stark reminders of the unresolved tensions of the Korean War. I chose not to descend inside, but I went with the group up to the entrance. Even from above, the weight of those tunnels, dug in silence, with dreams of reunification and strategies of survival, was heavy to consider.

Later, we traveled to the Reunification Village, a place where hope and daily life intersect. There, I experienced a lighter moment of contrast: enjoying a delicious soybean ice cream on a very warm afternoon. That simple act, sharing laughter with fellow travelers while holding something so ordinary, felt strangely profound against the heaviness of history. It reminded me that even in places defined by conflict, life continues, small joys exist, and humanity quietly resists despair.

But the moment that marked me most deeply came through the words of our guide, Lina. She spoke about her grandmother, who had been separated from her family during the Korean War and never saw them again. For her family, the DMZ is not just a historic site, it is an open wound, passed down across generations.

She shared this story with a mixture of sorrow and resilience. What struck me most was her observation that the younger generation in Korea is slowly losing the tradition of visiting the DMZ. The emotional pull is weakening with time, and the urgency of memory risks being lost. For her, telling her grandmother's story was a way to keep that memory alive, to honor a past that should not be forgotten, and to make sure the pain of separation does not vanish into silence.

Lina's family story reminded me that borders are not just lines drawn on maps, but they cut through families, cultures, and traditions. They can erase rituals and weaken memory if we do not protect them.

Standing there, between silence, heat, and symbolism, I felt both the weight of division and the resilience of hope. The UN flag in front of me through the glass was not just a marker of international oversight, it was a call to action. It asked me, as someone devoted to cultural diplomacy and global leadership, to continue the work of building bridges, protecting stories, and reminding future generations that peace is not guaranteed: it must be nurtured, kept alive, and passed on.

The DMZ visit left me with a renewed sense of responsibility: to honor those who were separated, to amplify the voices of those who remember, and to keep faith in reconciliation, even when division seems permanent. After all, if a flag of peace can stand between two worlds, perhaps so can we.

ECOLOGY OF NORTH AMERICAN ARCHOSAURS

Suhaa Sheikh

You got a kid? You sure?
Lakers fan, faker, what's a kid to do in
an apartment in Scarborough without a defense?
Velociraptors got teeth, see, got sickle claws,
pack tactics advantage, social carnivores
stealing offspring from nests and devouring them.

Detained for the 9th, 11th time in your life.
Cages and partitions are your people's past,
so maybe take a history class.
The visa ain't gonna last
not when you look like that.
Tan as a terrorist.

We got sensors locked on your vehicle.
We got the president up in our cubicle.
Tell a brother that—get ready to be displaced,
shifted, disgraced,
or maybe another juvenile locked up at Gitmo Bay.

You got a kid? You got a family?
Shut your mouth, it's been three days.
Your brother Sammy's gotta stop crying,
some fuckers just can't take the heat.

A *Glassful of* Peace

CATHERINE ANN LOMBARD

On September 11, 2001, my husband and I were living in Giza, Egypt. However, at that moment, we happened to be visiting my family in California. Visiting just in time for what the media described as an "Attack on America." What a strange time to come home ... in time for an attack.

Little did I know that the 'attack' would also be on my understanding of home. And funny enough, in the days that followed, Buzz Lightyear would provide me with the best advice.

As most know, Buzz Lightyear is the star of the animated feature *Toy Story*. He has a broad face with a dimpled chin, no neck, and a constant smile. Encased in a plastic space ranger suit, Buzz is equipped with laser beams that can destroy the deadliest enemy (mainly Emperor Zurg), projectile wings that allow him to "fall with style," and a protective bubble helmet.

Buzz's sidekick is Woody, who is not half as glamorous. Woody is a cowboy who is always losing his hat. He does not own any high-tech weaponry or protective clothing. Woody does not own a gun. All he carries is an empty holster.

More than twenty years ago, my two nephews, Frank (5) and Mark (2-1/2), were in love with Buzz Lightyear. Buzz went to bed with them, traveled in the car with them, and shared long conversations with them. Frank had a Buzz Lightyear costume that he put on daily to replay all the action scenes from the movie. Mark, as the little brother, was relegated to the Woody part and costume. That is, until Frank left for school. Mark would immediately usurp the costume and role of Buzz, laser beam and all.

Both Buzz and Woody have favorite things they like to say. Buzz speaks when you press one of his dazzling buttons, Woody has an old-fashion string that you pull from behind his back. Woody says things like: "You're my favorite Deputy" and "There's a snake in my boot." Buzz sayings include: "To Infinity and beyond!" and "I come in peace."

When I asked my nephews if they knew what infinity was and what Buzz meant when he says he 'comes in peace,' they grew frustrated with me. Why was I asking these stupid questions? Why wasn't I just playing my part as Zurg and falling dead to the floor?

"Infinity has no beginning and no end. It's like God," I said. "So to say that you are going beyond infinity means that you are going beyond a place with no end. It really doesn't make any sense, does it?"

When I told them that 'to come in peace' is to come to help people, not to hurt them, they stared at me blankly and soon forgot. I kept asking my stupid questions until Mark had the answers, mostly to appease me. Frank, on the other hand, was more interested in having me press the laser beam button on his Buzz Lightyear costume, after which he would jump back and exclaim, "Don't touch that! It's strangely dangerous!"

It all did feel strangely dangerous—Buzz and what he represented that is. What was he teaching my nephews and why was he so powerful an image? What archetype was Buzz for these two small boys? Frankie rejected most food except "power drinks" so he could "grow big muscles like Buzz." And it wasn't just my nephews who were captivated by this action hero, but an entire generation of American boys.

When Bush first called his war on terrorism "Operation Infinite Justice," I had to wonder if the same people working for Disney were writing the President's military slogans. "Operation Infinite Justice" and "To Infinity and beyond," what's the difference? Then America entered "Operation Enduring

Freedom," although I wasn't sure whose freedom we were talking about, certainly not the 21 million Afghans whose country we were about to bomb.

After 11 September, it felt as if my American identity was crashing down inside me. I felt overpowered by the violent reactions of my fellow Americans, their immediate thirst for revenge, their interweaving of religious righteousness and patriotic fervor into a frightening display of anger. I couldn't bear to see how my country was responding, to listen to rescue workers at the World Trade Center chant "USA! USA!" as if they were at a football match, to hear my president call the war a "crusade."

I spent most of the week after 9/11 sick in bed. My identity was fractured, unraveling, dissolving. I simply did not know who I was anymore, where I belonged, or what I should do.

FLAG, CHURCH, WAR AND PEACE

The Friday after September 11th, a vigil was held in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C, Bush climbed to the church pulpit, and declared, "The warm courage of national unity is evident in the American flags which are displayed in pride and wave in defiance."

In the Catholic church that my family attended, the American flag stood next to the altar, its red- and-white stripes carefully wrapped around a statue of the Pietà. These displays of religious imagery were literally intertwined with the symbology captured by the country's flag.

At the end of the final mass I attended in the US, the priest announced the need for catechism instructors followed by the news that the U.S. and U.K. had just begun bombing Afghanistan. The news made me feel sick and I longed to sit in silent prayer, but instead we moved right into the final hymn, a joyous melody whose lyrics were full of Alleluias. How could this be? As the congregation sang the hymn, my soul wretched itself around the words.

I felt alienated from my country and estranged from myself. What kind of American am I? I kept asking myself. Why don't I feel like everyone else? I didn't seem to fit in anywhere and kept hoping my voice would appear somewhere.

There were a few. Barbara Boxer, the only member of Congress to vote against war, urged her colleagues in a dramatic address on the House floor, saying: "Let us not become the evil that we deplore." Rita Lasar, who lost her brother Abe Zelmanowitz on the 27th floor of the World Trade Center. She wrote a letter to *The New York Times* urging Bush not to bomb Afghanistan.

She wrote: "It is in my brother's name and mine that I pray that we, this country that has been so deeply hurt, not do something that will unleash forces we will not have the power to call back."

As my time in California was nearly finished, my husband and I both struggled with our eminent return to Egypt. Then one morning I heard a woman call into a radio talk show. "What can we do?" she pleaded with the panel of experts. "What can *we* do in the short run?" And then I knew. At least, I knew what I could do in the short run. And oddly enough, the answer came from Buzz Lightyear.

I could go in peace. I could go and live with Arabs and Moslems and Egyptians. I could shop in their street markets, ride their buses, walk by their mosques, and visit their homes to drink tea. And I could say, "I come in peace."

Despite all our friends and family begging us not to return to Egypt, that's exactly what I and my husband did. One month after 9/11, we returned in peace. By then, through much soul-work, I had managed to find myself at home, not in any one place, but in the ideals of Truth, Love and Justice.

A NEW WELCOME HOME

After arriving back 'home' in Egypt, Ramadan began, and we were blessed with the special experience of spending an evening with a family for the *Iftar* meal. The days before Ramadan in Cairo are filled with anticipation. Paper and tinsel streamers appear across inner courtyards and wide roads. Lanterns and miniature mosques made of everything from crepe paper to recycled tin are hung and lit at night. Everyone waits for the sliver of moon to appear and to hear the official news announcing the start of the 30-day fast.

"Ten days eating. Ten days cake. Ten days new clothes. This is what they say about Ramadan," Mr. Ashraf told us the night he drove my husband and I to his home for *Iftar*, the evening meal that breaks the daylong fast.

Mr. Ashraf is a sincere and gentle man of immense bulk. He was our preferred taxi driver while we lived in Giza during the year 2001, and my husband and he developed a special friendship while driving through the snarl of Cairo traffic. Even though their worlds, experiences, and way of thinking would always make them strangers to one another, their mutual appreciation and genuine liking became stronger over time.

"You always need three times money during Ramadan," Mr. Ashraf continued that night in the car. "To buy meat. To buy sweets. To buy clothes. You know, everybody likes Ramadan because stomach takes a rest and every night with family. One night with my mother. One night with my brother. One night with the mother of my wife."

"And you, Mr. Kees," he turned to my Dutch husband. "You are like brother to me. Really. I mean this. Tonight we eat with my brother."

The significance of this statement was not lost on any of us. Only three months had passed since the tragedy of September 11th, and the idea that East and West, Christian and Muslim, might be brothers seemed a small miracle in the midst of the world's fear.

Mr. Asraf turned the car down an unpaved narrow street and parked. We entered the dark foyer of an apartment building and carefully climbed the unlit concrete steps to the first floor. Mr. Ashraf opened the door and bid us to enter. “You are welcome.”

We timidly walked into the living room which was furnished with gilded chairs and a sofa out of a Louis XIV decorating showroom. One wall was completely wall-papered with a giant photograph of a river stream. We were then invited into the dining room where we met Mr. Ashraf’s wife, Huwayda, and their son Wusem (15) and daughter Chulut (9). Wusem was a miniature of his father, only without the mustache, with huge hands and feet promising his immanent growth into manhood.

The room was sparsely furnished, and we all took our places at the table which was set with individual portions of chicken, rice, peas and carrots in a tomato sauce, and a dish uniquely Egyptian called *molokkia*. This green slimy soup-like broth is made of minced Jew’s mallow (a leafy herb) and chicken stock. Tablespoons of *molokkia* are poured over rice to flavor it.

We started with a hot bowl of “bird’s tongue soup” so named for the pasta that floats in it has the shape of what birds’ tongues might look like. Huwayda’s hair was completely contained under a chic head wrap and her smooth skin was the color of café latte. Our eyes met across the table and we each seemed to approve of the other. She spoke little English but understood more. “My wife say you bring light into our house,” Mr. Ashraf translated for us.

Using our fingers, we then relished tender baked chicken. Mr. Ashraf kept smacking his lips and saying to me, “Eat. Eat. The chicken is very good.” In fact, that was his ploy all evening, telling us how one thing or another “was very good,” which any polite guest would agree with and then prove by eating all the more.

After the chicken, we were ushered into the bathroom to wash our hands. On the floor in one corner swimming in a basin was a catfish, saved by the little girl the other evening. It had narrowly escaped being part of the *iftar* feast of fresh fish. We then returned to the living room for tea and desert. Every so often, Wusem would appear in the doorway, beaming, "Welcome to Egypt."

Soon the children came to show us with great solemnity their new clothes for Ramadan. I noted the matching pink bows on Chulut's jeans and jacket, and we balked at the size of Wusem's new sneakers.

The finale was mint tea and a plate piled high with *katayef*, a sweet delicacy of fried dough filled with hazelnuts. "The *katayef* are very good," Mr. Ashraf said pointing to the twenty sweets that sat in front of me. What could I do? Of course, I had to overindulge. We washed it all down with two glasses of freshly squeezed orange juice, the second glass only appearing after I agreed that it was "very good."

After all this indulgence and gaiety, Mr. Asraf then became solemn. "My mother learned me one thing," he said. "What you put in a glass, that is what you drink. You put in sugar, you drink sugar. You put in tea, you drink tea. You put in something not good, you drink that. It's the same with your children. It's the same with your life."

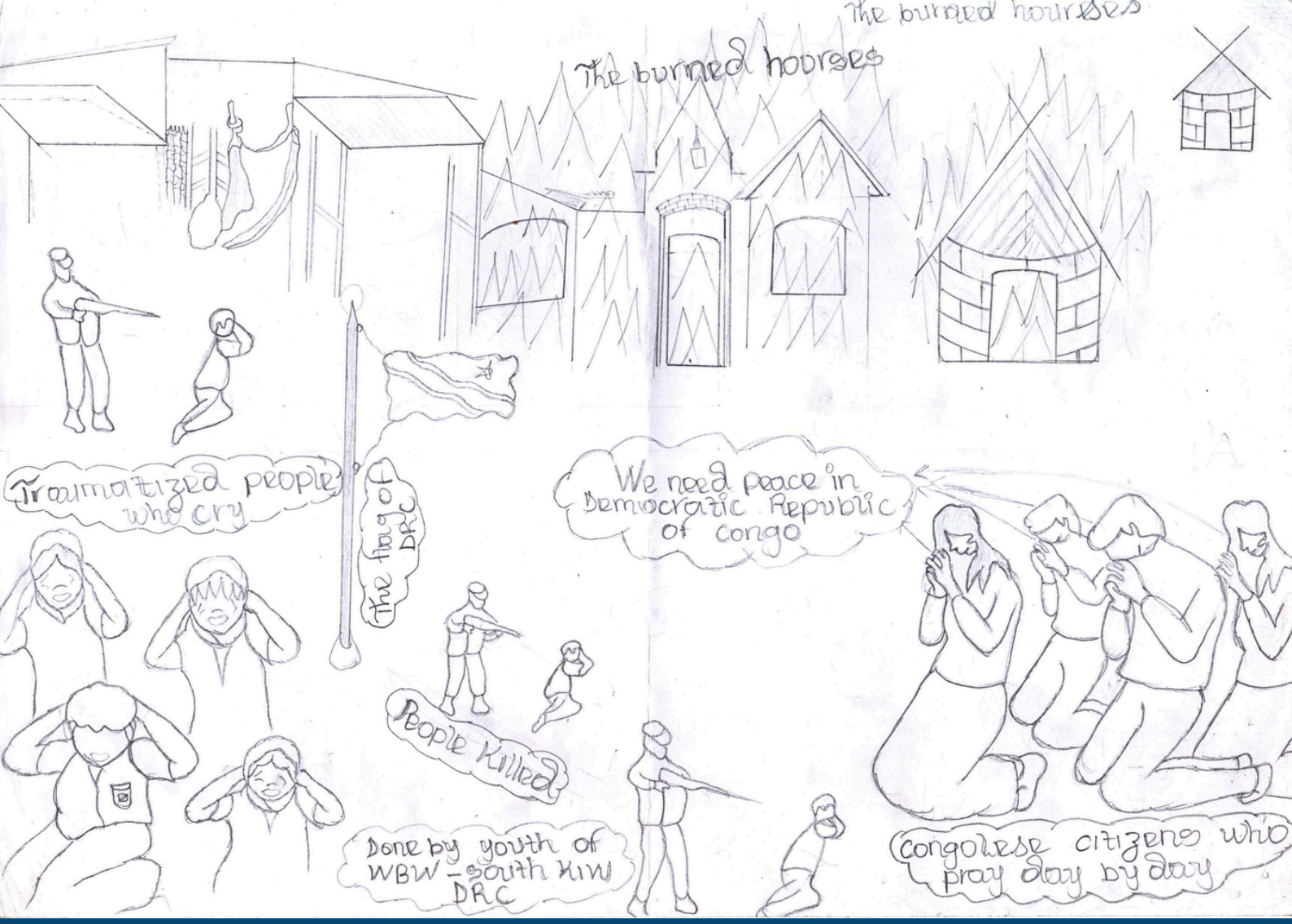
His words seemed to confirm my recent revelations. My glass would forever be filled with peace.

And so, we thanked our kind and generous hosts for an unforgettable evening and said our goodbyes.

HUMAN SPIRITS

Juley Harvey

in the war photos,
ukrainians escape,
hugging, hanging on,
holding to their hearts,
carrying their beloved pets,
peeking out from
their chests, vests,
here a tiny kitty,
a quizzical birdie,
a german shepherd,
under coats of
the overpowering
heavy chainmail armor
of protective care.
back in america, all unaware,
in peace like a prayer,
our people routinely leave
pets, in goodbyes tied to trees,
doors of empty, abandoned apartments,
like so much trash, as they seek new lives,
from throw-aways.
the heroes always show up
and show their stuff,
of what dreams they are made,
as do the unblinking nightmare villains.
what you are follows everywhere,
on a short leash
and peeks out from under
shared coats of faded, fated joy
to proclaim:
i am important to someone.
i am loved, by name. i am a war orphan.
russia took but could not tame.
i will live to know peace another day.
i will not despair. i have my home,
my family all and somewhere,
and share their joy and pain.



Calling for Peace & Nonviolence in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Enock Noé Etando, 16 years old
World BEYOND War South Kivu Chapter
in the Democratic Republic of Congo

I CAME FROM A TIME OF WAR

Jihaad Suhail Abu Zahra

"What's it like to be from a war zone?"

I'm not from a war zone. I was born in a ***time*** of war. I was born, and mostly raised, near Beirut, Lebanon. A city people associate with its images of pock-marked walls, buildings in ruins, and angry men toting machine guns. A city that people who grew up in the late seventies and eighties will equate with war.

The war in Lebanon was called a 'civil' war—a misnomer on two fronts: 1) there's nothing civil about it (war is about tearing cities apart, and civility is the opposite), and 2) a whole lot of governments were involved with this war (namely the US, Israel, the Soviet Union, and Syria): arming the parties, providing the motivation for conflict, providing the information to enable maximum harm, staffing the warring factions—and even showing up and invading Lebanon with their armies (in the case of the Syrian and Israeli armies). It was a war within a country, and also a proxy war.

During this time of war, from afar, I found out that people only seemed to see the war: the pock-marked walls, buildings in ruins, and angry men toting machine guns. However, when those things were not happening, life was happening: people going to work, kids going to school, and people stopping by the grocery store on the way home to pick up a few necessities for dinner. Kids playing in the neighborhood while teenagers wondered to their friends whether their secret crush liked them too. But the backdrop of war seems to take the forefront in the public imagination—we know by contrast, and the reality of armed conflict contrasts strongly with much of what most Americans

know.

So what was it like growing up in a time of war? It made it hard to do homework. But the homework made it easier to live through the wartimes: the normalcy, the work, applying oneself. That little control one has, when one has no control over one's surroundings, having for a little while lost even the freedom to move around safely down city streets—one finds that one can control one's mind's activity. So I did homework. It was not any easier with the sounds of distant bombs and gunshots. But doing the homework made it easier to live through those sounds. I assume it is the same spirit, the same comfort, which took my dad to his workplace, even when snipers were positioned in the neighborhood. (Maybe he just didn't know how close they had gotten...)

I left Lebanon an immigrant at age 15. Just shy of 15, actually. My mother had left Palestine a refugee at age 5. Just shy of age 5. Why do I not say ***I*** was a refugee? My answer has always been, "because we left with our furniture." We left on a comfortable commercial airplane, a planned departure, green cards in hand, and our furniture following us to California in a shipping container.

And so we arrived in Los Angeles in 1990, settled into a nice apartment, and started our lives in a new place. With the help of my aunts and uncles, a close-knit family who had moved to LA years or even decades before us, our road was less bumpy than many other immigrants'. But no sooner had we arrived than did the Berlin wall fall, the Soviet Union's power projection crumbled —and there was no counter-balance to US power in the Middle East. Fshhht--Boom! American rockets launched into Iraq, as George Bush senior picked a bad guy to justify US military invasion. Suddenly, images of rockets lighting up the night skies over Baghdad became interspersed on the evening news—a sort of muted parallel to the sights from our

balcony in Lebanon, overlooking Beirut's fiery fights on certain nights. Muted because the sights were on TV but never became real—the fights were fought on others' lands.

Anyways, we were settled into a nice apartment, starting to settle into a regular life, and I was getting settled into a new high school at the intersection of Venice and Normandy. The muted war went on, on TV. In April 1992, however, the LA uprising happened—the LA riots—starting at Florence and Normandy, just a few miles South from my school. The social and economic underclass of Los Angeles had rebelled, not accepting to be second-class citizens in the legal sense as well, no longer willing to bear having second-class rights. (US law and media speak of Rodney King's "civil rights" being violated, but let's be honest: we're talking about human rights. You could say the topic is labeled "civil" rights to imply it's a violation of civility that's the issue, but really it's a violation of humanity. Being beaten black and blue and almost into a coma is matter of human rights. Human rights denied in the United States.)

So there I was, taking the bus to school through neighborhoods ravaged by fire and destruction—a city at war with itself, a city where arson and bricks thrown through storefronts had tattered many blocks. A city where the governed rebelled against the ruling class. (Once the rioters, moving North, approached Beverly Hills, the police responded with live ammunition and deadly force. LA is a de-facto segregated city, and the underclasses do not live on the same streets as the ruling classes. The LAPD drew a line in the sand—they had chosen a battlefront, and how far they would allow the enemy to advance.)

There I was again in wartime. LA looked like a "war zone". Was the whole world this way? Was it like this all the time?

Things got quiet for a few years, but then George Bush Jr. decided to invade Iraq again. I was driven into action by the notion of the "shock and awe" campaign that was purposefully being planned: PTSD was to be inflicted on a population, on purpose. I was organizing rallies against the war, leading marches in the streets. And there were the police in riot gear—LAPD, LA Sheriff's deputies, other "law enforcement." I found out why they showed up in riot gear—they showed up to riot! They looked like Roman soldiers, only dressed in black plastic armor, with transparent shields which allowed them to see who they were swinging their batons at without exposing their faces. It was war in the streets! War on the people, and we were the people. Clamoring for peace.

I started to understand that the military-industrial complex consisted of literal war machines (tanks, guns, bombs), but also consisted of the poverty draft (conscripting the required soldiers from the impoverished end of the population), and that it consisted of rah-rah jingoism. That last one—the hyped up nationalism—was pounded into us when we stood up in class reciting the pledge of allegiance. And if that didn't work, it was pounded into us with batons in the streets of Los Angeles. For daring to demand peace.

So—yes. I came from a severely torn up area, Lebanon, ravaged by Ottoman occupation, then by French colonialism, then ravaged by the after-effects of the Zionism south of it (that settler version of colonialism). Then I came to LA, and saw that the roots of war came from a country at war with itself, a country whose rulers lorded over the underclasses with squad cars and batons and deadly force if necessary. And now, I see, in every corner of the country, lawless "law enforcement" abducting community members—the most vulnerable, the most unprotected: the immigrants. Due process is sometimes applied, but only after the target is in custody.

Much like classmates and coworkers in L.A. used to tell me about their native El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, it is a very different war-like atmosphere, one where government paramilitaries spread a reign of terror. Where I grew up with foreign-backed militias, they grew up with government-backed militias collecting a government paycheck. And now they are here: the paramilitaries we hear referred to as "law enforcement" (I.C.E. stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement), but who behave like goons. Those forces are backed by the national army, and by the national guard. Guarding against the people of the country, at war with the communities of the country, at war with the workers and their communities.

I am from a city in a time of war. I live in a country whose government has been at war with the world, and is now more openly at war with its population. I'm from a planet, called planet Earth, which has been in a time of war.

THE WHOLE WORLD REMEMBERED

Tamara Kayali Browne

The sound of my mother tongue on the lips of my child
Dabke steps in the feet of a Swede
My national anthem being sung by a Spaniard
A protest in Antarctica
"Free Palestine" being chanted in Korean
My cuisine being cooked by a Ukrainian
A keffiyeh on the shoulders of a Mexican
Students on all continents teaching the teachers what integrity means
Anti-Zionist Jews showing the world what Judaism means
Activists arrested for the sake of my country
A movement for freedom united under my flag
Ben-Gurion said, "The old will die and the young will forget"
But instead
The whole world remembered
And it's not over yet

Contributor Bios

Rina Malagayo Alluri (she/her) (@rinamala) has been rooted, uprooted and replanted in various soils. She is of Filipina and Indian descent, was raised in Nigeria and migrated to Vancouver, BC, Canada (Turtle Island). She is a peace scholar, yoga practitioner and mother to two headstrong children. She is currently based in Austria. Her poetry weaves together experiences of (de)coloniality, diasporic identities and relationships that form/unform. You can find her recent work in: Beyond Words Magazine, Carnation Zine, Frontier Poetry, The Hemlock, Middleground Magazine and Yellow Arrow Publishing.

Ugochukwu Chrysantus Asiogu (@glocal_chrys) is a Social Care professional supporting diverse communities across the UK, with an MSc in Global Security from the University of Glasgow. Born into Nigeria's post-Biafran War generation, Ugochukwu inherited the complicated legacy of ethnic division and trauma that shapes his understanding of health inequalities. His published research on Nigerian development challenges and community resilience stems from lived experience managing systemic limitations as a young Igbo man. This personal background informs his professional work addressing environmental influences of wellness and delivering culturally-competent support. He specialises in connecting local community care with global health security structures, particularly focusing on how historical trauma and cultural identity affect health outcomes in displaced and marginalised populations.

Sara avMaat is a visual artist living in Nova Scotia, Canada. In 2010 she served as an accompanier for the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel.

Ershad Noorzai Balkhi is a PhD candidate at the University of Helsinki, where he specializes in the history of Buddhism in Afghanistan. With an academic background in philosophy and religious studies, his work spans a range of interdisciplinary fields. He writes on subjects including philosophy, history, nonviolence theory and practice, and issues related to social justice.

Basir Bita is a refugee in Canada, working as a clinical counselor, a practitioner of Sufism, and a nonviolence practitioner.

Dr Tamara Kayali Browne (@palestinian.resistance.poetry) is a Palestinian Australian scholar, poet and activist. She is Senior Lecturer in Bioethics at Deakin University. Her publications include Depression and the Self (Cambridge University Press) and articles in outlets such as The ABC, The Guardian, The Conversation and Mondoweiss. She is also a member of Canberra Palestine and Climate Justice and Climate Activists for Palestine, as well as a Gaza Representative and member of the ACT Activist Leadership Committee with Amnesty International Australia.

Gillian Adsett Cameron lives in Aotearoa New Zealand and writes poetry, creative non-fiction and essays.

DurgaMata Chaudhuri (@durgaMataoflondon) is a silk-paint artist living in England. DurgaMata creates Peace-With-Justice-And-Oneness-Love Freedom Cards to sell to raise funds for families in Gaza facing starvation and genocide.

Enock Noé Etando, 16 years old, is a member of the World BEYOND War South Kivu Chapter in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Stephen Fournier is a grandfather, U.S. Air Force veteran, retired lawyer, and a lifelong Hartford resident in the U.S.

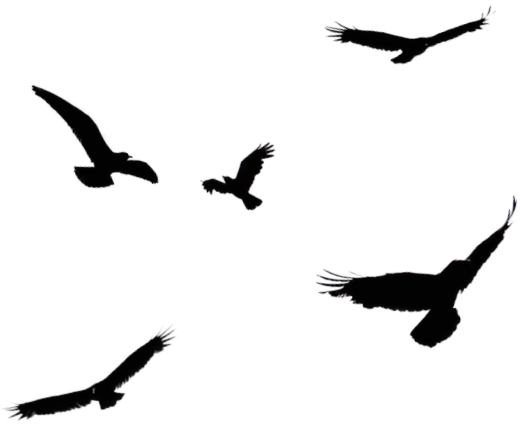
Gillian was fortunate enough to be born in the mid twentieth century in peaceful Canada and yet, as her piece indicates, the experiences of her parents —both veterans of WWII — affected every moment of every day. Only well into her forties did she begin to understand that so many of the bizarre aspects of her childhood were due to her parents' flashbacks. The title Navigating Home, for her, suggests the need to navigate around the figurative landmines that could trigger veterans. She has dreamed of gathering oral stories from other children-of-veterans for a book called War Wounds but never got around to it.

Juley Harvey is an award-winning poet and former journalist in both Colorado and California. She lives together with her rescued pet companions Angielope, maltipoo beauty (10+), and Mr. Pye, Abyssinian healer kitty (14), on the property of her brother and his companion in Susanville, CA, where they are creating a solar greenhouse. juleyharvey.substack.com

Karen Haydock (@haydock.karen) is a visual artist, scientist, and educator, based in India since 1985 (originally from New York City, NY and Santa Fe, NM). Karen has been illustrating and writing books in addition to making artworks on paper and canvas, as well as digitally, and also making constructions in wood and mixed-media. She has conducted research on how people learn. They hold a PhD in computational structural biophysics. Much of Karen's current focus is on the process of questioning and finding interdependencies, using a historical dialectical material approach to investigate and communicate through art/science.

Caroline Hurley is a former health administrator who now lives in a sustainable Irish community. Her writing has appeared in Village Magazine, Books Ireland, Counterpunch, L.A. Progressive, Arena (Au) and elsewhere. She is a member of the Irish Chapter of World BEYOND War.

Emma Kavuma is a world-renown Lead Artist, lives in Kampala, 6 hours away from the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. He follows in his artist father's footsteps, even though he lost him and his mother as a young child. 4 year-old Emma picked up charcoal from the fireplace when his parents died and started drawing. Sharing the principle that creativity is a birthright, Emma brought art-making to Syrian refugees in the Netherlands as well as his work facilitating the Singing Tree Mural.



Tehmina Khan (@TehminaThePoet) is an Indian Muslim poet raised by scientists. She has spent her adult life writing, teaching, resisting, mothering, and daughtering. Tehmina has taught science to preschoolers, citizenship to octogenarians, and poetry translation to elementary school students; she currently teaches College Writing at UC Berkeley and Poetry for the People at City College of San Francisco, where she defends everyone's right to a quality education. Tehmina lives, writes, rides her bicycle, and loves between unceded Ramaytush and Muwekma Ohlone lands, commonly known as San Francisco and Milpitas, in a multigenerational family web.

Tesfay Equar Kidanu was born in the Tigray regional state in Ethiopia. Tesfay obtained a BA in Theatre Arts from Mekelle University and an MA in Theatre in Multimedia from Addis Ababa University. Currently, Tesfay serves as a senior lecturer and researcher at Jimma University. Tesfay is passionate about the multimedia theatre arts. Tesfay has worked as a playwright, actor, director, and critic as well as a trainer in psychodrama therapy and jury at the festival Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau.

Victoria Koch is a widow with one grown daughter. Victoria is a retired teacher, writer, gardener, and lover of the positive spirit. victoriasvisiblevoice.blogspot.com

Sallie Latch is a long-time activist, retired teacher, world traveler, and part-time visual artist.

Upul Lekamge is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology serving at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. He is interested in Sociology, Anthropology, International Relations and Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education.

Catherine Ann Lombard, M.A. is a psychosynthesis psychologist, practitioner and researcher. She is a published writer of numerous essays, poems, and scientific articles. She and her husband live in Italy where they grow most of their own food. To learn more about Catherine and psychosynthesis, visit her website at LoveAndWill.com.

Dr. Jive Lubbungu is a researcher, author, and lecturer at Kwame Nkrumah University in the department of literature and languages, Zambia. He is also current Assistant Dean, Postgraduate studies at Nkrumah University. Dr Lubbungu has published books, book chapters as well as articles in international referred journals. He has a strong passion for writing and research. Before joining the university, Jive worked as an Adjunct lecturer at Rusangu University, resident lecturer for the University of Zambia, and as a part-time lecturer at Mulungushi University since 2017. His work focuses on comparative literature, gender, education, and contemporary issues. He has published widely and organized major academic events, including the 2018 Golden Jubilee International Conference and the 2021 Tilembe National Literary Festival. He is active in professional networks such as PAI, ZATANTAFAA, and ERAZ and serves as a research mentor for G2LM-LIC. He is currently the country Director for Professional Authors International. Dr. Lubbungu is also involved in editorial boards and the National Health Research Authority. His civic and academic contributions reflect his dedication to scholarship and sustainable development.

Mahnaz (@whispers_in_c0lors), a 16-year-old Afghan artist who works with pencil and colors, began painting at the age of 13. She has a keen eye for beauty in simplicity and is also an amateur photographer and video editor. Nature, portraits, and objects form the core of her artwork, and her favorite art styles are realism and impressionism. To Mahnaz, art is a mirror, one through which she sees herself and captures the unspoken words of the soul. She hopes her voice, and her paintings, will become symbols of peace and freedom to the world, echoing the unheard stories of Afghan girls.

Mona Mehas (she/her) (@monaiv.bsky.social) is a retired disabled teacher in Indiana USA with 6 chapbooks. Twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize (*Paddler Press* 2023, *TV-63 Project,* 2025) and Best New Poet (*Lucky Jefferson* 2024). Mona's work has appeared in multiple publications and online museums. She helps edit a small press, works with an online Star Trek fan magazine, is a former President of the Poetry Society of Indiana, and is Indiana Co-Leader for Authors Against Book Bans. Mona is editing her second novel while perpetually distracted by her next chapbook.
https://monamehas.net

Alia Mohammed (@Miss.alia.mo) is an educator, partner, daughter, and friend, who is passionate about the fight for a Free Palestine. She believes children bring peace, and promotes cross-cultural understanding while committing to reading extensively for the purpose of learning and understanding. She strives to bring empathy and truth to all that she encounters.

Lawrence Montgomery: In the early 1970's Lawrence began a commitment to war resistance and filed for conscientious objection status with the U.S. Selective System, a system that fueled the Vietnam War. Today his paintings continue to represent his heartfelt feelings for peace and social justice. As an artist living in a country with a permanent war economy in the Anthropocene Era (during what has been labeled the Sixth Extinction) he is a firm believer that artists must respond with meaningful social content in their art to defend human dignity and human rights. lawrencemontgomery.com

Rachel Rash (@rachelrashbooks) is a contemporary American poet, and writer. Rachel is enraptured by the elegance of where science and mysticism meet, which creates exquisite depth to her prose. She spends her precious free time with her family in the beautiful state of Arkansas. She leads a busy life, fueled by coffee (because there isn't much sleep).

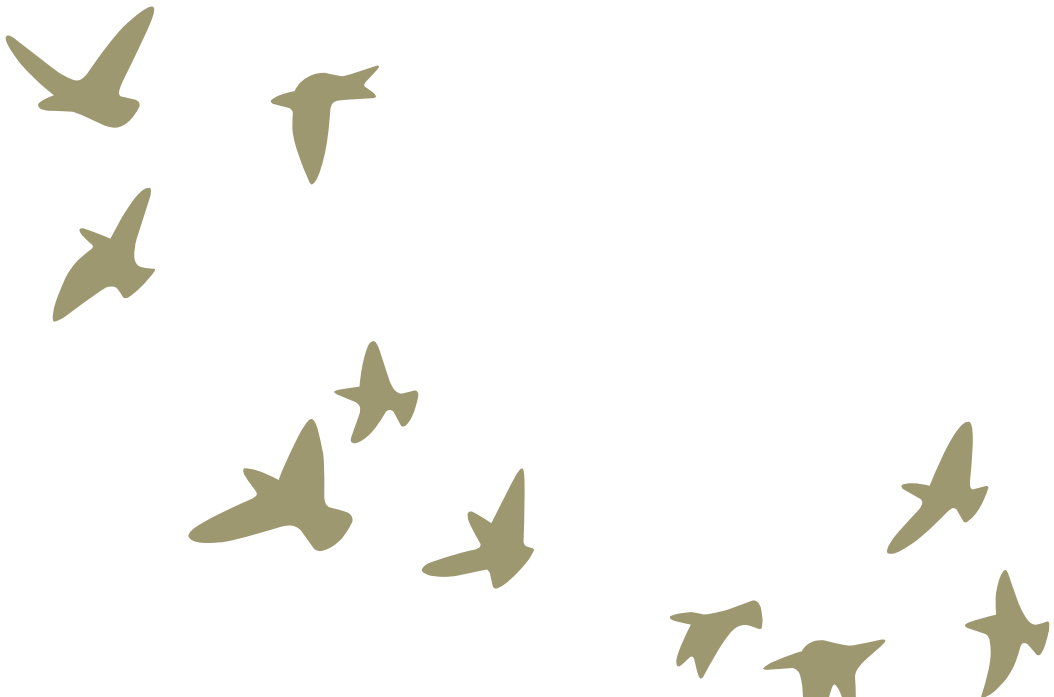
Beatrice de Salles is a multilingual diplomat, interpreter, and international affairs strategist with over a decade of experience advancing cross-cultural cooperation, global leadership, and sustainable development. She serves as Chief of Global Affairs and California State Chair for G100 USA, leading high-level delegations and global partnerships. Founder of the Certified Global Diplomacy & Leadership Specialist (CGDLS) Program, she equips professionals and students with essential diplomatic and leadership skills. A UN speaker and experienced delegation leader, Beatrice has championed education, sustainable innovation, and women's leadership worldwide, blending institutional diplomacy with grassroots empowerment to advance peace, equity, and shared global responsibility.

Amena Sediqi-Aini is an Afghan American peacebuilder, writer, and peace advocate who immigrated to the U.S. as a teenager after her family fled war. She's a proud mother of two and professionally trained as a CPA with over 25 years of experience in finance leadership. Amena serves on the National Committee for the Department of Peacebuilding Campaign at The Peace Alliance, where she helps guide strategy and advocacy. Passionate about amplifying diverse voices, she blends her professional expertise with her commitment to advancing peace and social justice.

Suhaa Sheikh is a writer, artist, and amateur entomology enthusiast from Toronto, Canada. They primarily write short stories in New Weird and absurdist genres, with the occasional venture into poetry.

Yurii Sheliazhenko is a peace activist, human rights defender, scholar and Quaker living in Kyiv, Ukraine. He is a board member of World BEYOND War and the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection.

Jihaad Suhail (@the_other_luigi) is an essayist and conceptual artist who draws on his life experience, and a philosophy of inner struggle in a world so focused on outer conflict.



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