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Atlas in Transit

Becky Thompson MFA

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Atlas in Transit

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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STONECOAST MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING

BY

Becky Thompson

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We hereby recommend that the thesis of Becky Thompson entitled *Atlas In Transit* be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts.



Advisor
Debra Marquart



Reader
Chen Chen



Director
Justin Tussing

Accepted



Dean for the College of Arts, Humanities and Social
Sciences
Adam-Max Tuchinsky

Abstract

Atlas in Transit is a collection of poems circling around the precarity and resilience of people in transit from Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia and other countries to Greece beginning in 2015 in what became the biggest forced migration in the world since WWII. The collection offers witness poems about people fleeing their homelands within a larger historical context, with nods to Sappho, Minoan pots, Byzantine and Ottoman history, the Genocide of 1922, and silhouettes crossing the burning sun. Many poems rely upon formal forms—villanelle, terza rima, ghazal, haiku— as well as broken-step couplets, found conversations, and redacted documents. The poems attempt to dislodge quickly fixed imagery of “the refugee,” seeking language that carries contradiction and balance, atrocity with humanity, the forces of love with the forces of loss. The poems curate details of living and loving to offer a symbolic map as they circle around suffering, empathy, and the work of art to bare/bear witness.

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All respect to people-in-transit, these poems, for you.

In his poem “Trace,” Rumi writes, “You that give new life to this planet, / you that transcend logic, come. I am / only an arrow. Fill your bow with me / and let fly.” Katherine Larson you have been my bow, your learned presence, a lifetime. Also, Debra Marquart, your playfulness and confidence in me; Chen Chen, your intuitive guidance. The writing of Anna Akhmatova, Sonia Sanchez, Ilya Kaminsky, Joy Harjo, Natalie Diaz, Daniel Borzutzky, Ocean Vuong, June Jordan, Tarfia Faizullah, Audre Lorde, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Sholeh Wolpé.

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Dedication

~ Arezu Kabuli

~ Katherine Larson

~ Diane Genevieve Harriford

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Preface: Artist Statement

In her beautiful book, *Afterland*, the Hmong poet Mai Der Vang writes, “Spirit, we are in this with each other the way the night geese/ in migration need the stars” (20). This is how I feel about the worries of the world, that we are in this together to solve them, whether it be the climate catastrophe or forced migration or the pandemic. The language for a new century requires that we see how these worries are connected and for each of us to know that “love calls us to the things of this world” (233-234).

When, by happenstance, I found myself meeting rafts of people fleeing war from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia and other countries to Greece in 2015, my first yearning was to welcome people arriving on the shores and then offer supplies they might need as they walked across the island and toward northern European countries. In the first few months of this crisis, the media had not arrived, a reality that led me to write for *The Huffington Post* and other international media sources. By the time I returned to Lesbos for the third time in 2015, the media had brought their fancy cameras, a reality that meant the world was learning of the biggest forced migration since World War II, even as the reports were *about* people in transit, not *by* them.

When I returned to Boston in early 2016, I felt bereft, mute even, desperately wanting people to know about the enormity of the exodus and the courage of those in transit, but weary of the quickly fixed and contained imagery of “the refugee.” During this time, a friend sent me Jehan Bseiso’s online poem, “No Search, No Rescue,” dedicated “to the families and lovers at the bottom of the sea, trying to reach Europe.” I had watched dinghies on the horizon disappear; held mothers, grandmothers and children

who could not stop shaking; walked with Syrian and Iranian poets up the mountain pass, their poems a talisman for people as they climbed. Jehan, a seventh generation Palestinian poet working in Lebanon agreed to edit a volume of poetry by and for refugees. From a café in Beirut we put out a call for submissions and within 48 hours received stunning poems from people across the globe, none however, for obvious reasons, from people currently in transit. Their missing voices in our edited volume led me to offer poetry workshops in various centers on the mainland of Greece and in Mytilini (Lesvos) which enabled us to publish *Making Mirrors: Righting/Writing by and for Refugees* with poems by people still on the move alongside poems by refugees and their allies in more secure places.

I start this chronicling of *Atlas in Transit* with the story of the creation of *Making Mirrors* because the two projects are interconnected. As a woman living in the US, my first priority was not to write about refugees but to use whatever resources I had to get poems by people living the experience of dislocation and exile into the world.¹ While I published a few poems that centered on forced migration it wasn't until *Making Mirrors* was published that the poems I had been working on began to talk with me in a louder register.

My hope to attend Stonecoast reflected my knowing that when it came to writing a collection of poems based on refugee organizing, families in transit, the European backlash, and detention—I was over my head in terms of my poetic expertise. While I had edited a collection of poetry, taught poetry at the university level for more than a

¹ This is a lesson I learned from the early years of multiracial feminism, conveyed in the title of Lorraine Bethel's essay, "What Chou Mean *We*, White Girl" an adage reminding white women that solidarity is not a given, it is earned.

minute, had my first volume of poems published, I didn't feel I had the craft tools I needed. My awareness of my own literary limits paralleled seeing that even with my years of training in sociology, feminist theory and global studies, I was having great difficulty conceptualizing the enormity of forced migration in this century. In 1903 W.E.B. Du Bois had written that the "problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line" (13). I was coming to see that the problem of the 21st century is the problem of the border line and that those two problems are interlinked.

So why, when I could have written an ethnography about forced migration drawing on the stories of people who I had walked and worked with did I find myself writing poetry instead? Such an anonymous, quiet choice. I realized that there are certain topics that require a deeper register. Long sentences, paragraph indentations, and footnotes flattened what I had witnessed—mothers feeding infants out of paper cups since their baby bottles had sunk, the depth of perception among many people willing to get on a raft to cross a perilous sea, the ingenious organizing among people across religion and language to keep each other alive.

In *The Art of Time in Memoir* Sven Birkerts explains that writing is "the restoration through words of what has otherwise vanished from the world" (20). When I look at *Atlas in Transit* retrospectively I am struck by how many times I circled back to the coming and arrival of rafts—a location of great presence and absence. That is the metaphorical centerpiece of the collection. The precarity and resilience of people on the move. My experience is that the slip of sea between Turkey and Greece holds a multitude of consciousness—of those who made it and those who didn't. It is like Moby Dick's mouth. The rafts float by the whale's teeth, the sky, the witness, the sea, the power in

charge of whether people lived or died that day. I keep returning to Moby Dick's mouth (it's like I haven't left), hence my many questions to people I have met since 2015 who survived the sea crossing. Crisis can do that, bond people to each other in inexplicable ways. A few people I have spoken with can remember specifics, but many have few or no words. Trauma is like an eraser. This past summer when my friend Maryam, a community organizer in Afghanistan who is now living in Moria, and I traveled to Eftalou together where her raft landed, just getting close to the water was almost more than she could do. My friend Abbas Sheikhi has written about his family's precarious journey in "The Belly of the Sea" (20). I am guessing this is one reason his poem, more than any other in *Making Mirrors* is the one highlighted in reviews. He has put words to what is still unspeakable for many.

In Carlos Motta's video included in the art exhibit, "When Home Won't Let You Stay," a transgender woman, Raneen, said that the two hours of terror on the raft lasted longer than a whole lifetime. She alludes to how time warps, shape shifts, during a living nightmare. Time takes on another dimension; it both slows down (interminable, this will never end) and speeds up (can't find it, missing time, too intense to remember). As artists we are in search of this time. There are some world events whose horror, whose immensity, puts it in the category of lost time—the Battle of Dunkirk, widespread famine, the time between the cop aiming at Philando Castile's chest and the pulling of the trigger, the time from rafts leaving Turkey's shore to making it to the beach in Lesvos. I feel like a two-tailed swallow, continuing to return to that place, over and over.

I am not the "me" I was before the 2015 arrival of people on rafts. The me I was seems uni-dimensional now. I am interested in shifts in perception, belonging, and

vulnerability that have occurred. For me, returning to Lesbos (physically each summer and in my poetry year around) is trying to find meaning not just of my own, but of a larger collective. There are certain life struggles that seem to demand we find words. The time of the Middle Passage, the massacre at Sand Creek, the beating of a child. Not all time is equal. Some time carries more weight, a yearning, an insistence, a huge pull back, and moving forward at the same time.

This willingness, maybe obsession, to grapple with lost time, may be energy woven into quilts and paintings of Faith Ringgold, the cutout images in Kara Walker's art, Ai Weiwei's decision to make the epic film *Human Flow*, the resonant words in Yusef Komunyakaa's poem "Facing It" (159). These elegant works of art don't bring back the dead. Do they honor their lives? Is honor too big a word for artists to earn? My guess is the accomplishment may be more humble—as we are caught inside certain extraordinary moments, trying to pull those scenes into the present, shrink them to something fathomable, or at least become more familiar with living with them. So much is lost when people need to leave their homelands, to lose the words of this leaving as well feels like more than I can live with, the homing pigeon of my mind insists.

Remembering is not enough. I need to tack these moments down, create a witness.

**

Where to include my consciousness in my work is one of the reoccurring themes in my writing life. In one of my early books, *A Hunger So Wide and So Deep*, my own experience was present in the way I framed the project, in the interviews I did, in how I

wrapped theory around women's brave words. But I didn't put my story in directly. As an academic I did not want to further undress by inserting my own story or re-center whiteness in a multiracial book. I did include some of my own lived experience in a later book, *Survivors on the Yoga Mat*, but only after an editor insisted, and then there were months of my worry that I would be castigated for doing so. As a woman whose work has focused on race and antiracism (teaching in African American Studies programs at Wesleyan, Duke, and in residency at Princeton), the politics of my own narrative have been complicated. White people have tried to orchestrate and run the academic, aesthetic, political, economic show for forever. We need to step back, not be in charge so often, understand that the white experience is the minority one in the world.

Since going back and forth to Greece I have continued to ask a question about subject position and creativity, particularly of people who are both insiders and outsiders to what they write about. I think for example of Carolyn Forché's astounding book, *The Country Between Us*, she who had been recruited by a Salvadoran resistance fighter to chronicle the US war in his country. There was an almost forty year stretch between when "What you have heard is true" appears as the first line in her most famous poem, "The Colonel" written in 1978 that became the title of her memoir in 2019. *What You Have Heard Is True* can be read as a stunning history of political terrorism in El Salvador in the late 1970s. It can be read as a coming-to-consciousness memoir of a young woman under the careful and audacious tutelage of a Leonel Gómez Vides. It can be read as companion prose to Forché's book of poetry, *The Country Between Us*. It could also be read as a lesson for poets, an *Ars Poetica* in prose form about what makes poetry possible, what is required for poets who are both insiders and outsiders to their work, her

US citizenship requiring that she hold her government accountable as she saw atrocities beyond comprehension. Her answer to Vides's necessary guidance was to write copious notes while she was there, the most difficult in pencil.² And then, to come back, to New York City, to a flat with steel bars and many chains, and to finish *The Country Between Us*.

The complexity of insider/outsider vision led me also to study the work of Tarfia Faizullah, a Bangladesh-American poet who, while on a Fulbright to her country of origin, wrote about women's resilience in the face of rape in Bangladesh. Reading *Seam* as an example of feminist trauma-informed poetry highlights how careful Faizullah was to render visible in poetic form, the genocidal rape of 200,000 women during the West Pakistan military operation in East Pakistan in 1971. This care begins with Faizullah's insistence in placing herself within the narrative, not positioning herself as an observer "studying" rape victims. The reader travels with the poet as she includes several poems titled "Interviewer's Note" where she bravely asks questions: "But wasn't it the neat narrative/you wanted? The outline of the rape/ victim standing against a many-winged/darkening sky..." (46). In a beautiful example of cultural humility she tells on herself that she had some preconceived notion about how women would talk about rape, a notion that requires her to "Rewind. Play. Rewind." (46). Faizullah's care for women survivors continues as she sidelines the where, when, and how of rape, a tedious linear retelling that can feed voyeurism, in favor of light touch, respectful references. Instead of

² Taking notes isn't so easy psychically, since as Duncan Wu explains "the initial response of the imagination is silence, and language is inadequate to the task of articulating fully our reaction to the extremes of experience" (Wu, 3). This is one reason why "the imagination has always been on trial" (15).

gruesome details, the poet highlights repetition of senses, of color, shape, and sound, a quintessential linguistic pattern for many trauma survivors.

The celebrated poet Sholeh Wolpé also dances between cultural contexts in her work as someone who grew up in Iran but now lives in the US. While many of the poems in her 2008 book *Rooftops in Tehran* are sweeping and global, *Keeping Time with Blue Hyacinths* are more interior. The metronome of *Keeping Time with Blue Hyacinths* is the back and forth between pain and beauty, with pauses in the middle for martinis, tango, and taking to the bed for escape. Still, the voice of a world conscience is present, as she continues to write of the invisible, twisted, multiple, lives of exile: “but like the sea, we keep coming/ fiercely and never arrive” (64). While there is already confidence and authority in the voice of the poet in *Rooftops of Tehran*, in *Keeping Time* Wolpé lets her focus be psychologically reflective while she leans into the forbidden. Both are acts of courage for women from the Middle East, women who are treated as women of color in the US. Wolpé models a poetic consciousness at the border of being an insider and outsider, and how to deal with that through art.

Another model, Paul Celan straddles the border between the living and the dead—he whose family died in the Holocaust while he lived. His poetry and death are haunted by this inexplicable sparing. Celan’s poetry reckons with many questions: How to write about a traumatic subject that does not cause further damage, does not repeat a tired trope? How to write about subjects that touched you without personalizing them (reducing them to your tragedy)? Might a poet need to refute existing grammar, syntax and structure to not repeat the damage? What happens when the language you write in is also the tongue of those who killed your parents, children, friends, map makers, china

washers, artists? Each of these questions pivot on insider/outsider consciousness.

Psychoanalyst Shoshana Felman writes that Celan's poems "dislocate the language so as to remold it—creatively and critically—a new poetic language entirely Celan's own" (33). Many of Celan's first lines could stand as their own poems. If you cannot trust language, or you must subvert it to avoid complicity, then a first line might be all you have, that one moment, before all is lost. Forever undone. Celan's use of repetition encircles the reader. There are so many eyes in his poems, watching in the silence.³ His words are often out of order, repeating themselves, needing each other, witness to their own sounds. And then Celan advises, "Go / to the eye, / the moist one—" (123).

**

While these and other poets modeled for me ways to reckon with subject position, discovering how to do that myself was often messy, confusing, fraught. The poems that grapple most directly with contradictions I felt in my social location are "Calculus" and "Solidarity, For(ever)" two of the most difficult and most revised poems in the collection. In "A Sketch of the Past" Virginia Woolf writes that memoirists tend to say, "This is what happened': but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened. And the events mean very little unless we know to whom they happened" (Birkerts, 26).

Woolf's point speaks to the import of exposing one's emotions, contradictions, changing

³ Repetition becomes a safety net, connective tissue in narratives that are, by definition, missing pieces. Traumatic memory is not like "regular" memory. It is like a long piece of film that has been spliced, with many pieces lying on the floor. It is up to the survivor, the poet, the lover to pick up some of the pieces, unworried about putting it all back together, accepting brokenness as its own beautiful frame.

perspective, complicity, even though that isn't easy. How to do that without taking over the narrative, without re-centering an external gaze?

One solution I fell upon as an insider/outsider was through persona poems from the point of view of a raft, a prison wall, the sky. Somehow getting inside these so-called non-sentient beings gave me a way to share my emotions, my heart. I also wrote a number of poems in the voice of youth—Sona from Guinea Bissau, a teenager in a camp, Ahmed speaking to his thirteen-year-old, a ten-year-old considering whether the acapella group, Sweet Honey in the Rock meant that honey can live in a rock. Some of these poems were based on conversations I had been part of, others were extrapolated from connections I made with young people while I was teaching. About a child's consciousness Joy Harjo explains to Layli Long Soldier, "I believe children can be extremely contemplative because as a child you feel things so deeply, so strongly; there's a presence, an alertness of the senses."

My biggest shift in consciousness as a writer came through understanding how poetry can work for social justice. I knew that was true for world class poets...Neruda, Du Fu, Akhmatova, Jordan, and Lorde, since their poems have flown around the globe, have been woven into President's speeches, city walls, political banners. But what about poets who don't have such a big reach? US poets have learned that if you sell 2000 copies of a book that is considered a success. I had my doubts about the power of the words to undo cruelty. And this doubt on my part made it even harder for me to take my own poetry seriously. Since I turned to the writing of poetry in my late 30s I have felt that I chose an even more anonymous path than that of a public sociologist, my writing destined to reach even fewer people, the effort to write much more difficult than prose. I

still carry this awareness, but I have also seen glimmers outside of it, including this past summer when I was asked to give a talk on refugee activism and I decided to do a poetry reading instead. At this talk one woman cried through the whole session. Afterwards, she and her husband asked what they could do. Many people ask this question but few really follow through. This couple did, including sending money each month to three of the families I have become close to which pays for emergencies, including lawyer fees that made it possible for one family to move from a godforsaken abandoned hotel in a rural area of Greece to Cologne, Germany. I have felt the power of poetry. We are living it. As the poet Katherine Larson has written, “poems can slip into places that people and politics cannot.” Yes, the couple’s financial support only reaches a few families but one includes a ten-year-old Arezu who I carry on my eyelid...wanting her safety, no matter what. It seems like poetry and prayer may be intimately connected. They work energetically, in a space that can’t be quantified or measured exactly. Perhaps faith is an energetic link between poetry and prayer.

Another change in consciousness has involved my growing respect for formal forms—villanelle, terza rima, ghazal, haiku. When I first started writing poetry, Sonia Sanchez advised that I only write haiku for the first year (and I could graduate to tanka after that). I think she was wanting to give me an antidote for sociological writing, a quick fix to get me to the essentials. I did that, but I was also drawn to the ampersand in Black Arts poems that let narratives run down the page, drawn to poems that dance on white space. But there is something almost mathematical about formal forms that offers structure for difficult subjects. As I read the poems now that have been tamed by forms, I

can see that the condensation that occurs give the words internal combustion. The words become nuggets of energy inside the line.

So then, the work is to be sure that the poems gain momentum, and then land in a way that doesn't send everything crashing since the topics themselves—people drowning, rape, people in limbo in frozen tents—are their own horrible crashing. In *The Source of Self Regard* Toni Morrison writes, “The work must bear witness and identify danger as well as possible havens from danger” (267). I hope the reader finds havens in the cosmopolitan dreams of a young woman in “Dido’s Lament,” the ingenious teaching in “Each Day Lessons in Greek”; and, in “Ceasefire,” the sensuality between a couple before and after deciding to leave their home.

The consummate songwriter and singer Cris Williamson said in a recent workshop that you need to give the listener something to hold onto, something to buoy them. This is true for poetry of conscience as well, hope has somehow got to be woven into a poem and we can't afford to let the endings be tragic. Formal forms offer some gauze. And the restraint of carefully counted syllables, even in long line poems helps me cut away the nonessentials that gum up the flow and deep meaning of the words that remain.

My lessons at the level of craft have also included seeing how central juxtaposition is in poetry (and other art forms too). Poetry requires holding together two seemingly opposite truths in a single frame. I guess that is because a human's mind flings in so many directions. So poems need to be wise enough to hold opposites so that the mind doesn't get bored, restless, unconvinced. Also, the mind seeks patterns, all kind of patterns—color, texture, number, cadence. Patterns we create make a difference in how

the mind can hold the ideas. I needed to play with many kind of patterns, to write the poem as a prose piece and then re-create it as four haiku (and visa versa).

Writing “Atlas in Transit” has asked me to make peace (at least some of the time) with the huge swaths of alone time that writing requires. I have needed to become a hermit in order to write these poems. It helps when I think about the inordinate amount of time that Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama “spend” in meditation. When I start to feel like, “what’s wrong with me, will I have friends when I am finished writing” and “what possible good are you doing the world sitting holed up in your study, or sitting up in bed or in a small room in Eftalou, not on the beach?” I try to remember that writing is a form of meditation. And, if I am honest, deep books and quiet reflection at the desk can be more meaningful than many conversations and interactions in the world. I have felt lonely and isolated, but also compelled and met by the poets whose words I have been studying. I do wish for pages at the end of poetry books (like an afterword) that lets us in about what the process of writing has involved. To me, the two, the poems and the shifts in consciousness, are connected energetically but they are usually separated, with the process relegated to interviews published separately from the collections, or lost somehow. What was the moment of awareness for Ilya Kaminsky when he decided to set *Deaf Republic* in an unspecified place? Did he first write it as a particular location and then mute the details? How was it for Akhmatova, those decades when *Requiem* was only held in the memories of ten friends, not on the page? When did Celan feel most alive, like he would really make it, which book of poems, which country? The recent rise in hybrid writing (poetry and lyric essays in the same collection) may help mend some of the Aristilion splits that still police literary borders.

For my own writing, I am interested in a style that “collapses the distance between writer and reader,” an intimacy that relates to making space for vulnerability and beauty (Addonizio and Laux, 118). I have been thinking about fact and fiction...and what held me to feeling I needed to represent the facts as closely as possible when writing about people in transit. Where did that belief come from? Some of it is from the work of Rafael Campo and Martín Espada. I trusted their poetry because I felt that they were telling truths—both through the scenes they describe and historical accuracy. I have learned much over the years about political movements through poetry, Espada and June Jordan going to Nicaragua, Campo working with people with AIDS, Naomi Shihab Nye’s writing on Palestine. In my writing, I wanted the poems to be historically accurate, knowing, especially in the first several months of the crisis, there wasn’t much written about the 500,000 people coming from Turkey to Lesbos. And, who would I be, as a American, English-speaking person to embellish, to shape shift facts for the sake of how the words sounded on the page?

But over time, I have seen that if I don’t use my imagination, I run the risk of flattening my descriptions of people and places. My meetings with many people in 2015-2016 were so intense, quick, urgent. There wasn’t time for me to even ask, where are you from, what languages do you speak, how many children did you leave behind, where is your grandmother? But later, as I wrote, I wanted to write with specificity...to convey on the page what I felt, the connection. While I didn’t have the “facts” the emotional imagery stayed with me—the curve of a young woman’s back as she held her newlywed’s hand, explaining that he had leukemia, asking would they make it to Germany in time? The cerulean blue of a ring an elder slipped on my finger as I left a

camp. Without imagination, people and places will be one dimensional. Still, what right do I have to imagine other people's lives? This dilemma is what led me to put my energy into getting other people's voices out into the world, including people still in transit before my own writing. But when *Making Mirrors* was finished, I was still in the same dilemma... sitting on my own poems, my own memories...still the voice, whose story is this? Who gets to tell what, ethically?

There is no right or wrong here, really. So much in this life is random and then, boom, something we do matters. I am thinking about a young woman telling me how healing it was when she got to see a video that Eric Kempson made (one of the people in Lesvos who stood waiting for rafts for years) that included footage of her and her family when they got off the raft in Eftalou. Her son had remembered Eric's long blond hair which is how they found each other, years later in a community center outside of Moria. She spoke of it as a moment of integration. Like the big details of the journey could be fastened down a bit, identified. Might some of my poems be like that for people, a way to fasten down moments, not have them be blank spaces any more, floating or crashing moments with no name?

**

In one of the many times when Leonel Gómez Vides was schooling Carolyn Forché on how to listen/write poetry he said, "This is what your poet Rilke wrote, wasn't it? In order to write a single poem, one must see many cities, and people, and things: one must get to know animals and the flight of birds" (16). In the years I have been writing the

poems for *Atlas in Transit*, I didn't have a teacher in a single body. Rather, I felt as if I had teachers coming to me from multiple directions. One night after I finished teaching a poetry class in a small, rundown hotel outside of Thessaloniki that had been temporarily converted into a place for "unaccompanied minors" one of the young guys who was supposed to come to the class came up the dirt driveway, having taken a bus from the city to the hotel. He had clearly broken curfew. He looked disoriented, high. The older man running the hotel turned to him, few words between them, maybe getting ready to lecture him, instead, his arm around him, walking quietly together into the hotel, such intimacy in the silence. This scene, my feelings of sadness, awe, humility, found its way into "Accompanied Minor" "We Say, Salt," and "In Moria We Have Cats."

Another moment: I'm walking with a family from Molyvos to Petra up a highway, pushing my bike. No matter the circumstances, whether the people walking were Syrian, Afghan or Somali, if an elder needed to stop and rest, someone would get up from the backpack they were sitting on and give their seat to the elder. No matter what. The respect for elders, almost entirely lost in the US, is still honored among the cultures represented among those in transit. It's palpable. That honoring found its way into "Zouhourat, An Invitation" and "Gathering, Incantation," among others. The vivacious tenacity of "out" transgender and gay men...the transwoman who said yes, even on the raft I had my silk scarf on. A famous queer musician, still wet from a rough landing gave selfies to young fans who kept saying, we love your music. Months later, at an underground dinner and celebration in Athens, transgender women tried to hide their laughter as my hips, clearly, could not find the Syrian nightclub rhythms. I carry their love of living. And an embroidered sadness.

One of the quotes that I included in the poetry packets I used as the basis of my teaching is by Alice Walker: “A writer’s heart, a poet’s heart, an artist’s heart, a musician’s heart, is always breaking. It is through that broken window that we see the world: more mysterious, beloved, insane and precious for the sparkling and jagged edges of the smaller enclosure we have escaped.” This quote was translated into Farsi, Dari, Arabic and French by a range of translators I had the privilege to work with over these years.⁴ Working in translation—an honor, riveting, intimate, like a dance, exhausting, part hilarious, part pitiful as I miss, completely, so many cultural cues. Walker’s words travel. Another quote I included in the packet is from John Edgar Wideman: “The sign of silence presides over my work. Characters who can’t speak, won’t speak, choose never to speak until this world changes. My impulse to give voice to the dead the unborn, to outlaws and outcasts whose voices have been stolen or muted by violence... Silence is proof that the decision to listen is not ours. Proof that we are called to pay attention” (116-117). This call to pay attention made its way into “We Have Taken the One in the Sky as Our Witness” in honor of Fadwa Suleiman, whose poetry was translated by Marilyn Hacker and included in *Making Mirrors*. Suleiman, a beloved actor and activist in Syria who died way too young of cancer in France.

Suleiman’s untimely death speaks to enormous losses people are facing from multiple directions—loss of community, years of schooling, disconnection from first

⁴ Teaching in Greece, at the International Women’s Partnership for Peace and Justice in Thailand, and at China Women’s University has given me a chance to work with extraordinary translators who have generously translated packets of poems, including the poetry of: Zeina Azzam, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Bei Dao, Noozar Elias, Zeina Hashem Beck, Martín Espada, Joy Harjo, Nazim Hikmet, Nikky Finney, Audre Lorde, Mary Oliver, Pat Parker, Sonia Sanchez, Warsan Shire, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, John Edgar Wideman, and anonymous Afghan poets.

languages, family members strewn about. The crazy map of where people are staying looks like the dangling threads of slave trade routes, families split at the spine. Since 2015 I have felt obsessed to read all that I can—political science, economics, history, linguistics, literary theory, sociology—to begin to wrap my mind around the causes and consequences of 68.7 million people currently dealing with, as Warsan Shire wrote, “When home won’t let you stay” (29). My own experience and the reading led me to conceptualize the forced migration in the Mediterranean in phases, the first, when people were walking to Europe (2015-March 2016), the second, after the borders closed (March 2016-2017), the third, long term limbo (2017-2019), and the current imprisonment of recent arrivals (2020-present). Meanwhile, the rafts keep coming, as the international community suffers from crisis fatigue. The camps in Lesbos are looking more like camps in Lebanon, home away from no home.

I have written while trying to reckon with myriad political contradictions—Greece, one of the most welcoming countries on earth, the only country in the EU that still had not closed its borders, is also split at the seams. The people of Greece face Golden Dawn, dwindling pensions, plummeted tourism, young people having to leave small villages for work, alongside tremendous ingenuity on the part of the newcomers, while, as I hope comes through in “How Shall We Divide This Bounty,” Greece is the little guy in comparison to the other EU countries making the economic decisions. Meanwhile, he who will not be named president might extend the banned countries beyond the current seven. In a couple thousand years/ the humans will arrive. If the planet is still willing to host them.

And then there is the planet, the land itself. Lesvos is a crossroads for birds from all over the world. As small as the island is, there are four different terrains on Lesvos—high desert, seashore, petrified forests, the plains. You can see a long line of Turkey’s coast from Lesvos. Most people in Lesvos have relatives in Turkey. In the long view of time, Turkey and Lesvos are actually one piece of earth. When rescue boats began stopping rafts from coming to shore, they eliminated a way for people to land in beauty, to stand on the beach, to see where came from, to adjust their hats and scarves before taking the next steps. The beauty of Lesvos holds people, it can’t help it. That holding is a counter balance to human cruelty. Maybe not enough. But still. And continuing.

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My hope is that *Atlas in Transit* offers witness poems about people fleeing homelands within a larger historical context, with nods to Sappho, Minoan pots, Byzantine and Ottoman history, the Genocide of 1922, and silhouettes crossing the burning sun. To do justice to the complexity of crossings and time in limbo I draw upon broken-step couplets alongside personification, embedded dialogue alongside the use of found documents. Some poems play with white space, others have lines that allow for skipping consciousness. I hope these forms make room for trembling vulnerability. I tried to curate the details to offer a symbolic map. The poems circle around questions of suffering, empathy, loss, abandonment, the work of art/literature to bare/bear witness. I found myself asking, how does one write about tragedy without reducing it? How can language create a space that moves beyond annihilation? To be successful, it seems, the poems

must carry contradiction and balance—atrocious with humanity, the forces of love with the forces of loss. Intoxicating darkness and intoxicating beauty, in 80 some-odd pages, somehow. With forced migration, children are often the most hurt and the most imaginative; love lives in crevices, in glances, with an older brother who says to a younger one, don't drink bleach. Resistance is never ending, even in death. Even the dead speak, as Toni Morrison says, the past is infinite (300).

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And who will join this standing up
and the ones who stood without sweet company
will sing and sing...
even under the sea

June Jordan
Directed by Desire

Part One

Words made of island sand
Words that have known the pottery of the sea
Words rolling in

Josué Guébo
Think of Lampedusa

We Say, Salt

Salt in fine lines around your eyes keep walking

Salt in the shaker where tourists stare

Salt for flavor salt caged in yellow plastic salt to make tabouleh

In Arabic salt is *milh* we say salt is earth's silk

For the desert's pleasure we say salt in the blood

We say salt will dust your eyes with sorrow come here I will kiss you here

Sprinkle salt for tomatoes salt for when your lover leaves you in salt

When the bomb leaves a salt trail in the street we scatter with our children

Salt tracks on the desert travel at night with salt in our shoes

The sea loans salt to rocks we are salt rafts their own salt nation.

The Sea Shares Salt with the Breeze

i.

The poppies stand at attention, like stop signs
among twisted life jackets, cut up water bottles,

men's pants strewn across surprised hills.
It's true, the road is drenched in light.

Cassandra rolls up a tattered raft, stacks
baby life jackets (the size of juice cartons),

the orange still inflated. A family inches
toward Molyvos, tells us they silenced

the motor to muffle their landing. Rain
threatens the blue expanse. The sea chants.

ii.

They tell me, we chanted, our raft
took in water like an upside down

umbrella. We stayed still, zipped up
our breath until we reached sand, our

lips, dried roses. *Sano* in Greek means
foreigner and guest. Police caution

walk west, no shelter here.
Our eyes paint forward.

iii.

Their shoes walk, I sleep
awake. My mind

confuses helicopter blades
for fishing boats, a buzzing

refrigerator for a motorcycle.
When a light zigzags across

black glass, I wave a lantern
in big sweeps above my head

to guide the silhouettes to shore.
We share chai and plum toast.

Families walk, babies
in arms at the back.

This island a canopy
each raft a nation.

iv.

Nations: canopy each raft
 a human chain
to carry dazed relatives
 from the boat to shore
gather under an
 eastern strawberry tree
its thin skin shed in
 long strips. We drink water
and load my bike again
 one child on the front
another behind, handlebars
 carry diapers and apricots.
In Kalloni they spread
 a blanket over a bare floor
lay their infants down like tired
 dandelions drown by sun.

v.

Tired sun: cancel rough-sea days. Our eyes count white caps.
A man in a torn wetsuit drags a dinghy to shore, bills all wet.
Scavengers eat bananas. Rusty pickups haul engines to sell in Izmir.
A father lifts his newborn to Allah. Everybody cheers.
Girls in Kmart shirts with smart phones ask about Sylvester Stallone.
At night I pass food through open-shutter windows, toss water bottles.

vi.

We snuck families into her tinted-window van, the Greek chef and I,
dodged police barricades, sped
families to safety across the island.

After that, we shopped for sweet kale and marzipan
at the gourmet grocery.
She had stopped smoking by then

except after the dinner rush or before the dinner rush. Sometimes
in the middle. She was beautiful
to the end, her brilliant bald head.

She taught me the five drivers of this migration:
sex slavery + organs + water + arms + drugs.
SOWAD,

an acronym we made up. Rhymes with firing squad, Assad,
façade, retinal rod, roughshod, cephalopod,
war god, not outlawed.

Cephalopod, from the mollusk class, characterized by the ability
to squirt ink. Known to fisherman as inkfish.
Another name for poets?

SOWAD: the people in vans kidnapped in Bulgaria missing now.
One December I watched a Serbian vet jerry-rig
a car radio

to intercept patrol boat messages. We liberated sneakers
from a storehouse
when wind chill forced cruelty.

The lesson. Find the key. Use the key. Replace the key. Repeat.

vii.

What about the mother who tucked her infant
under the prow
of a docked boat, the only shade where

the baby could sleep? It's true babies can sleep
with their eyes open,
when you rock them in a van,

heading to Mantamados. If you're walking from
Afghanistan to Turkey,
water proof band-aids are gold—

like rosaries made of green olive pits by inmates
at the Damascus Central Prison.

Pure ingenuity.

Like the Lesvos "dirty girls," in pickup trucks who hoist
piles of wet clothes to the laundromat,
bring them back clean

for the next boats. Smelling like jasmine. The girls wear
suspenders and purple rain boots.
I've always liked a girl

in uniform. In Mantamados the legend of St. Taxiarchis
honors the embossed image of the saint
made from mud

and blood of murdered monks. They say the saint changes
shape depending on how he
feels about the believer.

People bring him iron shoes so he can walk at night.
They are found worn out
the next morning.

viii.

On days when I want to reach a raft shuttered by cliffs, to find people who might be too injured or too stunned to talk or out of water or seasick or unsure which direction to walk, I take a shortcut through the hot springs gate Philippe left unlocked without saying a word, when hot springs were closed, when Greeks were forbidden to help, a gate that opens to a cove beyond the naked beach, a rocky route to the sea quicker than any motorcycle as I jump between stones, an art learned in a rushing river in northern Arizona with my barefoot sister, tomboys leaping tall rock buildings in a single bound, legs stretched like the scent of hyacinth in spring far from Mithiminas road.

ix.

On Mithiminas road
an elderly farmer pulls his pickup
to the side, lets eight
of us pile into the bed
of his truck between
nectarine boxes and hay.
Jude's velvet hat hugs
her eight-year-old head
as her mother stretches
her own leg out, cut to the bone by
a smuggler's machete.
They stick a baseball cap
on my head to hide me
from vigilantes skulking around.
Laurel trees blur by
and the sea gifts blue
to the farmer who
saved us from a blazing
walk up a hairpin
mountain. Jude's father
casts safety with
his wide open arms.

x.

Past hairpin mountain, two sisters and their kid brother run to the playground by the Kalimera Resort Hotel, giggle on the slide and candy-striped swings until a sad-sack manager appears, shoos them away, their parents saying *Salam Alaikum*, sorry, *aietidhar*. My little sister and I played pirates one Christmas and took apart our swing set with shiny wrenches and screwdrivers. I wish for our toolbox so we can double back.

xi.

When talking is our only toolbox on a double moon night
a musician explains to me:

*rubble pinned spirits to the ground when the drones
came running toward our house each day
a meteor shower the pink white walls collapsed
around us we packed my flute and phones
scooped water with hands like bowls as waves
competed for the sky's attention we traced
the route ancestors traversed when
Turkey was still Asia Minor.*

xii.

Minors: channel ancestors. The bowl of the earth
is turning upside down, *ti kaneis* and *khodahafez*

barely a start; the teens teach me Persian
phrases, *khosh amadid* and *dooset daram*

my mouth marbles, they laugh. A tourist
bus snorts up a starless hill, numbers walk.

xiii.

Numbers dizzy the stars. One million walk
across the border, two million hover to cross, three

million in transit, four million stuck, five
million pray, six million killed in the Holocaust.

Germany, the refugees' goal, this paradox.
Elie Wiesel wondered if god died

in Auschwitz? I want to ask: the boy who
fills a baseball cap with cool water; the man

in Kara Tape as he observes Salat, sewage a street
beside him; the mother deaf from a barrel bomb,

who collapsed on the beach, then hoisted herself
up, dressing her daughter in a pink Madeline hat;

the family who outsmarted the smugglers,
found their own raft, snuck under the radar;

the professor who ran alongside my car, placed
his only blue stone ring on my finger—

Dido's Lament

Back home we'd play with words, evanescence
and effervescence, our conversations electric,
mornings at TcheTche café for half a baguette
and fig marmalade, cardamom coffee, extra
cream, the neighbor's drab shawl, her eyes on us, our eyes.

And before we met, I'd take a fast train from Aleppo
to Istanbul, laugh all night with a Danish journalist
who couldn't taste lemon drops nor stay
silent. We watched a marine, his wide
holster and yesterday smeared across his skin.

Summers before, I temped as a translator
in an auditorium designed for sound
my words exact. On Fridays
I'd take the city bus to the Souq, wander
through the Bedouin fabrics, taste the curried soup.

These trips, evanescence. You, in my life
effervescence, the guts to go when we did, with
my clarinet and your doctor's bag, my music trapped
in vinyl. I convinced you, after the café scattered
stained glass across the floor.

When you jumped from the raft to lighten the load
to swim, or so you thought, who knows, the driver
refused to go back. I begged for you in three
tongues. Later, they searched the Gulf of Adramyti.

I crouched into a trance as reporters circled for a story.
The Greek coast guard shouted like I didn't speak English.
Or French. Or read Russian. My hands didn't tremble. Yet.

Minutes after they found you clutching air the reporter
pressed, aren't you relieved? My mouth a silent wail.
No. I am furious. He didn't ask me before he jumped.
The raft still married water. A seahorse in my belly.

A Litany Travels

The translator says: *Let's turn to "A Litany for Survival."*
We'll say it first in Dari. Then English. Altogether. Ready?

Did I mention that I'm over my head?

Or perhaps, my head continues to fly about but my spine has folded in.

When did this accordion behavior begin?

Was it when we had chairs for fifteen and twenty-five came, not counting the children?

Or was it when I passed around an attendance sheet that came back with six signatures? Fear buried their pens.

Was it after we read a haiku and a father said, *how can we write pretty poems, our lives are not pretty*, as his three-year-old daughter drew on her arm with a purple marker?

Or was it when I couldn't outline the basic shape of Afghanistan on the board? Someone came up, drew his country and all the ones that touch it.

Was it when shutters we opened so the small room could breathe kept banging, each time pulling people from their chairs?

An older man rose and gently closed the shutters.

Or was it when a teenager clutched her friend, sandwiched between men like fish, said she liked the poem about memories and backpacks, wished it was in Somali. I said, me too.

Or was it when a father explained his family receives 300 euro each month. If they're granted asylum, that will end after six months.

Or was it when I was sure two teens who stared into their phones were there for the free bus tickets until they recited brilliant landays in Dari and English?

They wrote them with google translator.

What about the seven-year-old who answered all my questions in English before the adults, their eyes stuck on the table.

The table floating with cherry pits left by the four-year-olds.

There is no childcare at this refugee center.

Parents hold their children close, won't let them go farther than their side vision.

Their eyes reach in all directions.

The Afghan filmmaker declares, *I'd rather not hear the word refugee. Ever again.*

He asks, *What would happen if every time you hear the word refugee you ~~whisper~~ / shout the word people?*

What about the woman who, after I blah blah about writing to tell the truth says, *with all due respect, no one can speak honestly as long as we are here.*

Layla Asks, Why Are We Here If We Didn't Do Anything Wrong?

When it's cold I can see my breath, tiny crystals inside little clouds. We carry branches from the forest to our tent. Papa says the wood is dead. So it's okay to burn. Except for olive trunks. They're still alive. Like sleeping cats. More like resting than dead. Mama says that without olive trees I wouldn't be here. Great grandmother to daughter. Great grandfather to son. That's the line. Olive farmers. Soap makers. Cooks in fancy restaurants. Olive oil for fried zucchini flowers and crispy potatoes. We don't burn olive trees. It would be like burning ourselves.

Yesterday the family next door— we say next door even though it's a tent— packed up to move to Kara Tepe, a funny word I had to practice. It costs a lot to move. Again. Kara Tepe is closer to town. People live in containers, not tents. Mama says a container is a box where no mosquitoes are allowed. It has a door we can close. And a flat floor. Still no room for my sister's tricycle. Papa says the sky will be blue wherever we go. At night mama whispers when they think I'm asleep. Says she's a bad daughter for leaving my grandma behind. That we might get sent back. Even though our house is gone. The school's blown up. Says, we're hungry here. White rice is not enough.

There's a woman here who carries me on her shoulders. Even though I'm big. She teaches poetry, sings us songs. *We who believe in freedom cannot rest.*

It's from these singers she calls Sweet
Honey in the Rock. I didn't know rocks
have honey. That teacher is from America
where the bombs that fell on our house
come from. Now I wonder,
who is who?

Mama says sometimes I ask too many
questions. Papa says we're strong
enough for anything. We have
olive trees in our blood. Mama says,
use your imagination. Like the drawings
we make in class at the Hope Project.
As if painting smoke can carry a message.
The art teacher wishes the bombs we draw
could turn to hearts. I tell her I can say
good morning in six languages. French,
from the girl two tents away. Dari and Arabic
from Sami who stays in Kara Tepe. Farsi
I knew. English, of course. And Greek
for the streets, at Lidl's grocery store. I draw
bombs that look like bombs. I save hearts
for real bodies. Sometimes the whole body
can be a heart. Lots of red on the page.
Papa says we're lucky. Mama says
don't lie to the children.

Zouhourat, An Invitation

In the months when you could walk from
the highway right into Kara Tepe people
would escort you, arms circling,

yes, happy to see you, and I remember your purple
leather backpack, and yes, my arm is better, the one
we wrapped in plastic from the dry cleaners to stop
the bleeding and this is my daughter who was shaking
after the crossing, and here is my grandmother who
you walked with into town and yes, I can take you
to the family who arrived last week, the elder
is a teacher, about fifteen all together, yes, they are
Syrian from Idlib and be careful not to step in
the dirty water, and we can't eat the food here
since it made my family sick, all twelve of us,
and yes, we arrived after the second day of walking
so long, too hot. But we're all here. We're dry after
everything got soaked that day the men cut out the raft,
took the engine before we even got out. Not sure how
long we will wait. We gave our names several
times. Careful where you're walking and down
this lane, to the right, is their tent...

The elder reaches his arms out, Salaam-Alaikum, his eyes
a welcome party. Says,

duck your head. So glad you found us.
Remember my wife and mother from the beach?
Here's my brother and his children. It's tight but
we're together. Sit on this cushion. Thank you
for bringing the heart medicine. And sim cards
to call our family. God be with you. Will you
join us for tea? Zouhourat made from hibiscus.
How does it taste? Yes, perfect sweetness.

Aftermath: Counting in Greek

The war came to shore shaped like a watermelon slice
They wrapped their cell phones in plastic, tore up their passports
The helicopter picked up people except when wind stirred the sky
We couldn't count the rafts that sank
On a day when a second raft vanished, the sea refused more rain, clouds stained black
The point is to add shape that doesn't end in zero
What does a museum look like for splintered boats and lockets caught in fishing line?
Workers painted walls orange in Kara Tepe, teens stared at make-believe calendars
Sticks became guns, bombs in the sky flowered children's drawings
A white pillared house stands idle in Eftalou and lights dizzy the coast of Izmir
On the beach where they sliced raft bellies with fishing knives yellow beach chairs
wait for tourists.

Part Two

Very little grows on jagged
rock. Be ground. Be crumbled so wildflowers will come up
where you are.

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi
The Soul of Rumi

Ahmed Talks to his 13-Year-Old Brother

Remember you are Superman, with a hurt-proof cape. Don't forget your aunt nick-named you balloon—he who will float above danger. Learn to draw a map of Syria in ink on paper cups. Don't look at the sea if it makes you sad. Look at the sea and remember you made it. Be the song you sang on the raft. Don't run from ghosts. Use your backpack as a pillow, a seat, a table. Carry your prayer rug inside. It's okay to let the rug double as a bed. Eat meals with the young Palestinians. They've been through this longer than you have. Keep ironing your shirts even though you gotta stand in line. Know your people are proud. Remember why they sent you first. Don't trade your toothpaste for cigarettes. Well maybe sometimes. Don't sell your kidney to anyone. Ever. Remember your uncle before the sniper. Be tall. Know you come from a people of maps and stars. Learn how to be a barber. Wherever you go men will need their hair cut.
Don't drink bleach
Don't drink bleach.

Jamil Says, We Wait in Line

~ Afghan School, Mytilini

close to swerving into down and low. We
watch the coast guard swear in Greek as they dare to strike.
It's painful to lose months, moldy cots stacked straight.
Hard if you've played percussion in Jalalabad and taught physics. We
outran the drones and kissed our mothers' hands. Many can sing
so now we trade hip hop beats—Awesome Qasim meets Soul Travelers. Sin
was dreamed up by the military and electrified borders. We
know it's easy to gain days with Allah if you're dead. Thin
chance. We know Taliban trucks were made in the USA, gin
and heroin fast tracks for military who rape by day. We
are clouds looking for a way out, gotta play no matter the sway of forces. We jazz
a new plan, pool our money, buy tents for a school, open in June,
two years later children still come. And elders—Kurds and Somali. We
teach music and mathematics, world politics wrapped in rap. We will not die
soon.

Ghazal: Asylum for the Youngest Brother

Their bodies thrown from Afghanistan, they escape by sea,
for three years Greece offers shaky shelter, who will see?

In Moria they barter for cigarettes, stand in queues, with
grandmothers who said they were forced to trust the sea.

They build a radio station with egg cartons and sweat, send
Dari and Arabic through airwaves to enlighten the sea.

They spread prayer rugs under a tamarisk tree,
its parasol safer than tents stacked by a wild sea.

Their videos expose Moria's hunger and neglect
officials punish their brother. What they don't want to see.

They wait for months, time like a basket empty of bread;
deportation separates them like teacups fallen in the sea.

How to sleep without night sweats after bombing in Kabul?
Their parents now in exile by the Indian sea.

At a mushaira they gather lilies for the dead. Can you hear
their mother sings their names by the sea?

His girlfriend whispers in German, honeysuckle
on her skin, her auburn hair awakens him. He sees.

Whose names will you remember? Shaped like the arc of the sea.
Joinda, their sovereign family, robust across the sea.

Immigration

I can't offer you
evidence since my backpack
sank to the bottom.

Coping

This is not funny.
I am laughing. You are laugh-
ing. Pass the pita.

Solidarity, (For)ever

i.

In Eftalou, surreal life jackets strewn like a painting, Syrian students show me a video of a poetry slam

in Damascus. One man from Qamishli asks about Tupac Shakur. That night I call my mother, her voice

a low viola, who tells me about ancient Arabic etched into pottery she studied in Qamishli, whispers, *they're*

gassing children, bombing the mosques. I'm too embarrassed to ask, where's Syria on a map?

It's two countries west of Afghanistan, on rafts with young guys from Pakistan. Find a map.

We scribble map routes from Eftalou to Mytilini, on paper napkins. They're walking across the island.

Young yogis raise money on Facebook so we can buy baby bottles, tuna, maxi pads, sim cards. But don't buy

dates. If people have anything it's that delectable fruit mothers pull from their bags after the last disaster.

Each family a chosen date.

ii.

It's an honor to be offered a date, to witness the birth of new life when jubilation circles the beach

but a father reaches for a diaper from his bag and pulls out a key for a house that is obliterated.

The door gone, the key remains, a diaper for his child but—
he shows me photos.

I retrace my mother's steps, her only true love, a Lebanese man
who taught Dostoyevsky.

He called her *habibti*, a word that breathes now on this island.
When someone asks you to choose

one spelling for *habibti* —*habeebi*, *babibi*, *habibni*—
what can you do? Keep them all.

iii.

How come I keep coming back something about safety
something about home in second grade I paste a slave ship
on blood red paper I'm on that ship a little girl tied down
the one who flees her body knows it's not home for years
in dreams the Gestapo smash my front door strap me
down in a forsaken place I feel myself in Anne Frank
Alan Kurdi so what to do with this intimacy this over-identifying
funnel money from friends to buy baby bottles live for dates.

iv.

My friend Gabriel tells me, there's been 12,000 volunteers
in Lesbos since 2015,
only 50 in Yemen.

Why? Idyllic views, the finest olive oil, romantic coves,
quick flights from Athens.

Racism that refuses to sink.

There's still raw sewage in Moria. Gabriel said head honchos make
\$5000 each month, Greek workers \$300.

He says, ship bosses

back to Brussels. Give the money to the locals and newcomers.
Meanwhile the Greek system moves

like a tortoise in the sun,

years in limbo. In 2015 everyone fleeing to Greece
walked north.

Now Greece is their only hope.

Today Arabic and French bounce down cobblestone streets.

An old woman stands on tiptoes

squinting into the ATM

as she searches for her pension. A Pakistani teen tilts
with his tall body

to shade the screen from the sun.

v.

There are (at least) three ways to connect with people across borders.

Feminist as tourist. Terrible.

Feminist as explorer. Not good.

Feminist in solidarity.

vi.

An English tourist tells a shopkeeper she wants to welcome people
to Lesbos. He asks,

why not greet them in your home country?

An American volunteer picks up a family whose baby is sick
then cranks the Christian music

so loud the mother can't hear

the doctor's voice on the phone. In Athens I pass out a packet
of poems just before class,

discover the Farsi script runs

left to right. Before I apologize a woman points to the poem
with Aleppo in the title, says,

Let's start here. I'm from Aleppo.

The class admires the poem even though the poet
a seventh generation Palestinian

has never lived in Aleppo.

vii.

On days turned upside down with injuries, a certain elder yogini
her hair like Medusa

and a spine she can roll up

and down a Lesvos volcano—she who feeds forty cats, swims
in the Aegean winter—

shows up with her jeep

for a shivering man in a wheelchair, three children and their mother
who can't stop shaking.

One morning two sea-soggy girls

run up hills searching for a fishing boat to rescue a raft. They tell me
they're seventeen years old.

When I see them later, they say nineteen.

Haiku Questions

Is a poem really
a poem if it's written on
someone else's back?

Can there be any
refugee poetry that's
not by refugees?

Who owns words if they
are in the sea? Can dolls talk
once they wash to shore?

Call Him Cosmopolitan

~ poetry workshop for youth, Thessaloniki

He wears black boots with silver buckles, schools himself on the Internet.
Before the raft he got a tattoo. His mom's name so she will know.
They call rubber dinghies floating coffins. They don't charge less in a storm.
He has one kidney. His brother is here with him. He is worth the price.
After Dadaab, he. After Libya, he. After the sea, we.
He speaks Somali. Andam speaks Pashto. Adh speaks Farsi. So we all laugh.
He likes this poem about wild geese and flying. His father writes at night.
He practices English, performs for volunteers. Learns to swear on the Web.
His girlfriend sends him a selfie on Fridays. They break fast on WhatsApp.
They play shoot'em up videos on their cots, wait for dinner: cold cuts.
Sometimes he's so hungry he eats baby food from the storage room.
He calls home with sim cards bought from turning tricks. Steals the mint mouthwash.
How come they hate us in the US? I have a Beyoncé tee shirt.
The first seventeen years of my life don't count. I am starting over.

“We Have Taken the One in the Sky as Our Witness”

In your right hand hold the colour of the tribes
In the left a pencil that erases state borders.

With the colour of dawn, you can cross over
A merciful god turns a mirror on borders.

For if you have crossed so have we all
Skin is an organ that refuses all borders.

We plant petunias in fallen white helmets
The scent travels past bullets, slips around borders.

Alawites in Aleppo, my family strewn about
I know now the moon cancels night borders.

If you are worried, *grasp a skein of sunlight*,
so torture won't seep into your body's borders.

They call me Fadwa Suleiman, my poems: no borders.
My body from Paris to the sky, an elegant boarder.

Hold onto Time

Beyond the off-white metal door
down the hall past the electric chair
and the dank room where men use
the flying carpet to splay women

their spines like split rivers, stands
a wall ten feet high, in the cell where
women trace Arabic calligraphy
with their fingertips. A makeshift

blackboard or date book for those
without pencils. Yara Badr called
it an improvised calendar
counting the days inside, scribbles

that run like EKG lines. Perhaps
Yara's father engraved her name
in delicate script on a prison wall
when she was a child. She etched

her husband's name now. When women
get thrown inside, the wall keeps watch
as inmates make toys from matches, sew
coin bags from torn trousers. Before

Yara's husband was taken, his body,
not his spirit, he wrote the line, *I feel
sorry for us all*, meaning those who man
the flying carpet and those strapped

below, each caught in a terrible storm.
Call the wall Robben or Attica
or Abu-Ghraib. Related by mortar
and blood. Made of steel feathers.

Carola Rackete Takes the Microphone

My life a change from Silversea cruises
to arrest on a gang plank, my spree against death.

Who knew that I would sink their command?
Powered past an Italian patrol boat, a marquis for the dead.

Since when did rescue become a swear word?
On the fourteenth day I said, so help me, no dead.

When an Italian minister claimed my rescue meant war
I said, his words are a quay for the dead.

The photos now shutter my non-normative hair.
Where are stories of migrants whose lovers are dead?

If they impound one ship, we'll raise money for more
Luventa and Alan Kurdi from a fleet that's not dead.

May maritime law stand up against death.
They call me Carola Rackete, I refuse to play dead.

Winnipeg

Conceived in stink, plastic melting like burning flesh,
waterproof seams stitched with needles, doubled back
to reinforce—my birth, my death—ignoble. My body

a vessel for leaving. Between the factory and dump,
I waited. When a smuggler ordered five families
to rush the storm, they refused, afraid the waves

would devour. The smuggler pointed at Samin,
pigtails hiding behind her uncle's legs. *Go now,*
or there will be no later. He snatched at a woman's

dress. At the shore parents catapult children over
my slippery edges. Hungry rocks taunt. A man knots
his wheelchair to my handles. My sides expand,

puffed air and plastic, thin as skin. If I were human
I would ask my ancestors to help. What's the lineage
of a raft—recycled umbrella, lining of a tent,

a billowing sail? *Keep your body as quiet as sleeping*
fish, I whisper to the children. The parents strain
their eyes, scan the distant shore for waving arms.

Silver pellets flood my belly, from below,
fish eyes watch. Between weighted sea and sky,
I gather the threads that circle my body

and I Winnipeg us, hoist to safety. To shore.
Families tumble out, a scavenger takes his knife
to my guts. I am limp on the sand, tossed

on a pile of empty water bottles, consigned to life
jacket graveyard. You might not have heard me
say goodbye. But I did. Look up. I may be a balloon,

someday brimming with helium, high for a celebration.

Squatters' Rights

~ *LGBT Gala*

Squatting in an abandoned building in Exarchia Square
Qamar and Samir up the ante of who can shimmy faster
Unlock their hips to the jerry-rigged sound system
As the gay chef from Syria orchestrates a four course dinner
That will stretch to feed fifty. An Afghan couple wanders in
Their toddler dancing with a transgender woman with
Eyes that tell us, "my sisters and I risked the raft,
Ravages of bombs now behind us, a hole in the boat the
Size of my fist, we filled with singing until we were
Rescued." *Paris is Burning* travels to Athens on a dinghy,
Inclusion the mantra folded into tabouleh, parsley translates from Arabic to Urdu,
Gracious a verb everyone is granted, as the base from the sound system
Hijacks old fear. Temporary become an excuse for let's party, community
Travels with tattoos and silk scarves. The toddler sleeps in a crook of an arm as
Silence equals death transforms into eyes from this storm.

Part Three

You run outside, our spirits go with you.

Naomi Shihab Nye
The Tiny Journalist

Loving in Doorways

We read the lines in the poem about *bread*
in our children's mouths so their dreams
will not reflect the death of ours.

I ask, what dreams will you keep alive?
A teenager offers, I couldn't go to school
my mother's dream already dead.
The room sputters sadness.

I suggest let's practice words for feel:
Good fine, okay, the standard refrain until
I interrupt, say, no copycat. We do "copy,"
act out "cat" an expression like *burst at*
the seams, like *loving in doorways*. I stand
in the narrow doorway, lean in and out, ask,
how is it to love here *coming and going*
in the hours between dawns?

A teen gestures to his heart, then
to the east, then to his stomach, we
figure it out, heart sick, almost—Oh!
Homesick. We practice the word out loud:
Homesick. Homesick. Homesick.

Then more words spill: *devastated,*
depressed, worried, oppressed. Indigestion,
a word from the last class. We laugh.

Another youth, red henna hair, gold chain,
diamond post in his left ear says, my name
is Abdul Aziz Ahmadi and I feel normal.
On this day, this moment of grace, this gay
teenager with his friends feels normal in
this cacophonous place, my undercover
queer self officially retraced.

My name is Mohammed Zakir and I

feel mountain. The baby on his shoulders
laughs as English expands, we say
mountain-us, mountain-us reigns
above good and fine and okay.

The Accompanied Minor Wonders

At first it was a whim, a whisper
before curfew on a bus.
Let the old man see it, then touch
ten euro and a phone card for a month.

Before curfew on a bus
in Victoria Square behind a dumpster
thirty euro, and a phone card for a month
his hand a chisel, my face a manhole cover.

In Victoria Square behind a dumpster
my parents message me on WhatsApp
his hand a chisel, my face a manhole cover.
I wear a jacket of lies, my voice sunken flowers.

My parents message me on WhatsApp.
A young man beckons, his gaze draws me to him.
Why my jacket of lies, my voice sunken flowers?
His fingers surprise, I'm alive to his touch.

The young man beckons, his gaze draws me to him
asks, what's worth a dead space inside?
His fingers surprise, I'm alive to his touch.
The Qur'an is my family's unpaid voucher.

What's worth a dead space inside, I wonder.
Let him see me and touch.
Let me not be a coward—
At first only a whim, then a whisper.

Report from Sona

I count to eighty / in Greek, the boys say Guinea / is a hen, not home.
Mommy says my bike / parks by my *ngoni* in / our house by the sea.
Dad tucks the Qur'an / inside plastic at night so / our tent will stay safe.
They shoo the people / we shoo the cats, but who do / the cats shoo? The rats.
I whisper, Dulce / you were brave in the water / Dulce doesn't talk.
When I go outside / I hide Dulce inside my / pillow, she hates dirt.
Do you know who makes / insulin, is that Allah's / job mommy needs it.
When Daddy swings me / round and round, the kids line up / they call him swing set.
The boys tease me that / lullabies are for babies / I sing in Susu.
My panties are tight / mommy cuts the elastic / so my legs are loose.
How do clouds hang in / the sky? Do they want to come / down or stay up there?
They call me Sona / aka Kankele T. / the lady who sings.

Jeopardy

My mother and father live in _____ now. Where is?

They stabbed my cousin _____ times. What is?

We buried our passports in the sand in _____. Where is?

Sophia is the capital of _____. What is?

We flew to _____, we paid the smuggler in _____ and _____. How much is?

The beach where we landed is _____. What is the name of?

The girl on Facebook they killed is _____. Who is?

My oldest brother is alive and famous. Not a question.

My parents are in _____, my son is in _____, I will live in _____.

Where is?

Cartography in Lesvos

Near the Oleander bush a family
hid before their climb up Petra Mountain
after their raft sucked salt water, turned their bellies
upside down. Over the crest children
dizzy the merry-go-round, dance
in resort sprinklers until the owner
mumbles generations, hands us aurora
apricots and vanilla ice cream.
At the praying mantis rock, a science teacher
with elegant muscles gives me his salmon
shirt, his friends order selfies. Phones telegraph
safety, lovers sit close, their feet in Europe.

They say memories fade, mine multiply

Now police intercept rafts, mechanic rescues
whisk people away, arrest taxi drivers
who offer free rides. No time
to stand together in a breeze

What does it mean to miss the intimacy of disaster?

At the life jacket graveyard next
to the dump a German couple
scooters up the hill, takes photos
while eating nine grain toast. French
academics talk post-modern flight.
A Barcelona film crew picks through

jackets to curate their best shot.

Crows memorize the wind

as two garbage trucks trudge up with
old fish and more jackets.

I wave to the sheep

herder as I skid down the hill.

Save the people, bury the dead, photograph the remnants.

At a computer store the Greek
man won't copy my poems since

he sees Arabic on the page.
I sit in his smoke,

ask about his family, eye his automatic
weapon perched next to the door,

a recent fixture along with
for sale signs on lonely hotels.

Down the highway is a new bar next to Moria. Of course.

Greek workers guard people in tents,
barbed wire doubles as a fence

a clothesline for diapers, a baby carriage
seconds as a grocery cart, shade

for an infant, a step up from when parents
carried babies and toddlers walked.

At the refugee center men grow rings
around their arms at a makeshift gym,

drink Turkish coffee, dance holding
hands. Women stretch out like

elaborate stories, by windows
that mirror the sea.

The sidewalk sparkles an atlas in transit.

The streets of Mytilini look like Beirut
Greeks here who ran from Turkey

Turks who kicked out Afghans
Afghans who wish they were Syrian

Syrians joined by Congolese—
teachers, holy seers, and men selling hats.

Sappho's Legacy

A family walks until they reach a monastery. Kids play
in a fountain, adults sleep until sky turns to
afternoon. By the same marble statue the Golden Dawn visits
two weeks later, leaving graffiti in mixed-up Arabic. The spray-
paint men follow newcomers across the island. My friend
shows up for the Moria work crew to catch wind
of who's in the Golden Dawn. A few beers later Greek workers
name the five men from Athens with spray paint.
My friend and his buddies find them by their pick-ups and
say, it's time to pack your things.
Here's the ferry schedule. We would be happy to escort you
without the cops, here at the crossroads
built on Sappho's lyrics, carried in a sheepskin satchel,
her words for soft and mighty days.

In Moria We Have Cats

Crazy cats, high cats, new cats, old cats
Come to play and learn to fight cats
Rich cats that show up in shiny white vans rented especially for cats.

Don't feed the cats, whatever you do
No photos, no trinkets
No hospitality, no stories for cats

There are stealing kinds of cats
Take the tent right out from under your pillow cats
Cats who sell crack
Cats in a tunnel of dead light
Cats with strobe engines
Cats that counsel on rage control

Careful you might become a cat
Make money as a cat, get cat food, sleep with a cat.

When it comes time to spay a cat
Think about who's up, who's down
If you once were a cat,
Sharp claws in this town.

Celan Travels

After two friends lift Ra'Ed up a cliff
reporters stage photos of agony
then leave him stranded without a lift

by unshorn sheep and a blue farm house, we
sit as he details how his brace split, points
to his spine where a bullet sang tragedy.

The night stuns needlepoint stars, cold anoints
silence until a van arrives, takes us
to police. I scour the town for joints

to fix plastic, duct tape superfluous.
A Greek jeweler holds the brace in his hands
melts silver in gaps, wraps a wire truss.

At daybreak I sneak past the camp's command
find Ra'Ed under a juniper tree.
He marvels at the jeweler's winged bands,

straps on the brace so he can stand, we
take a selfie before a final goodbye
as I teach I teach my heart to sleep.

Teaching Poetry at Khora

Praise this stand-alone building in Athens for its ingenuity

Praise the class when their collective poem majors and minors in despair

Praise another class when their poem conjures sunny carousels

Praise the man from Côte d'Ivoire who says

I have no time to write about my past

Praise him again when he says

I have no time to write about the future

Praise the Eritrean woman who glances at the door when I ask if she speaks Farsi

Praise the mural on the classroom wall that got carried away with color

Praise the teenager who wrote

they shot us as if we were deer

Praise the soldier from Syria who asked

can we write about anything, even if it's scary?

Praise the teenager who wrote haiku about his eight cousins

my mother became / their mother, not enough / to go around

Praise the artist who wrote in Arabic

the sea did not save my memories or my paintings

Praise the Syrian woman who wrote

the white postbox stood / alone / the bomb took everything else

Praise the man from Sierra Leone who leans in

this one in the story who lost his whole family, was me

Praise the twelve-year-old who whispers

I carry my soul in my hands

Praise the mother who wrote

I sleep with the sea, I do not sleep.

A Tailor Explains

the way to begin is to thread the needle. Find
thick ones to poke through heavy canvas, yes
we become ghosts bullets can't find.

Our children catch lightning bugs at night
their feet quick stitches that don't reverse
the way to begin is to thread the needle. Find

a pattern to embroider Hafiz's poems, we hide
under wild oak trees, other families join us
we become ghosts bullets can't find.

Our bodies layers of lace, I stitch a design
for the divine inside my baby's vest,
the way to begin is to thread the needle. Find

the day when the sea was a soft hemline
sew a map to safety in our minds
we become ghosts bullets can't find.

This night, we sleep outside the tent, side
with wind that unravels the heat, pray
to thread another needle, find
other ghosts bullets could not find.

Ceasefire

Beyond the paned window
 the city glimmered bombs
our girl a thin wind when
 she walked to school
the next apartment reduced
 to tilted door frames.

when we were young

nights when tabby cats stopped screaming
 we unbuttoned, remember
summer by Latakia Harbor, your eyes
 an etude, how even now
your neck stretches, lips
 part, I part you with
permission, your dazzled moon;

nightmare, in love

months now, we talk until we can't
 about the queues, crushed weight.
This cubicle, could it be?
Our daughter asks for nothing
her scared kitten eyes, she
picks at the plastic food
says it tastes like martians

to feel safe again, love

and yet, under the borrowed blanket
I cup your ankles, trace
circles around your belly, wait
 for your slight rise
darkness arouses us still.

How Shall We Divide this Bounty

In a storeroom stacked with black and blue suitcases,
caved-in boxes, futons that float in dust, eight women
and their children arrive. The storyteller whispers
Bood Nabood, once upon a time, the children's faces turn
to her like dinnerplate dahlias. In a land with many animals,

they meet, as animals do. The lion says to the tiger, the fox
and the wolf, go out and get us dinner. The animals,
obey the lion, file out, then return: the tiger with a hefty cow,
the fox with a puffy chicken, the wolf with a delectable sheep.

The lion roars to the wolf—wolf, how shall we divide
this bounty? The wolf replies, since the tiger brought
the cow he shall eat the cow. The fox, the chicken. And I,
the wolf decides, shall eat ...

his words stop midsentence
the lion has cut off his head.

The lion roars to the fox—fox, how shall we divide this bounty?
The fox says, you shall eat the cow for dinner, the sheep
for breakfast and the chicken for a snack. The lion smacks
his lips, says, and how did you know the answer, dear fox?

When you killed the wolf.

One child claps. Another reaches for her mother's breast,
slips inside her scarf. The storyteller asks,
now what if the animals are countries?

Who's the lion? The tiger? The wolf?

The room animates, all agree, America is the lion.
Turkey, the fox. Greece would be the sheep.
A young woman interrupts—No, Greece

would be the chicken, eaten by Germany
who is the tiger. So is Russia. A woman with
eyes painted black says, Afghanistan is not

a fox, she is not a chicken. We are deer,
meat so sweet that everybody wants to eat. The Russians
and Americans are carnivores. Another woman
pipes in, what if we are the lions?

You walked from Iran with your children. You survived
your father stolen by a sniper. We're all lions.
Midsentence, three women announce they'll be back
as they motion toward the nervous food line, dinner

scarce, the children sprint in front. The storyteller waits
to resume her tale, her arms embroidered by a bomb, she
who dressed as a boy under the Taliban, traveled

by night to buy jam and bread. Soon, mothers will return,
potatoes rolling off paper plates. New children will arrive.
The storyteller, touched by a southern star, begins again.

~for Nadia Ghulam

In Molyvos an Innkeeper Explains

In Greek we have a parable about a neighbor's goat. Two neighbors live in a rocky village. One has a goat, the other is goatless, claims the goat will cavort with his sheep, make his neighbor rich. The mayor offers to buy the goatless man a goat, but the man screams, I don't want a goat, only that my neighbor has no goat.

You see, Germany decides how many goats, which goats, maybe no goats. In Greek there's a word, *vetrina*, the curtain that hides the real show. NGOs are hungry for goats and travel to shear them. The Chinese want a railroad to transport goats. Europe and the US want angry goats to stay outside their

Fences. Syria offers rocky terrain for extended goat killing. Iran pays young Pakistanis to fight in Syria, kills defectors and defenseless goats. The US sells weapons to the bidder with the most goats. ISIS laughs as we watch, which mosque, which clock explodes next.

When rescuers wiggle babies and elders from rubble their relatives carry them to Greece. If they take a night raft it's cheaper, called the student special. Once engines reach Lesvos they are re-sold to Turkey, twenty-first century recycling to pay for goats.

Women who fled from Izmir to Mytilini in the 1920s took goat milk baths each day. Greeks called the Turkish women prostitutes. Now, in Moria, there's no place for women to wash their hair. On Mondays they sign up for a bathtub at Bashira House so they can wash in bubbles and roses, sometimes goat milk.

Calculus

In a makeshift camp, two signs blow in the wind,
Syrians and *All Other Nationalities*. Parents hold babies
and follow signs. My mother dragged my sister and me
from her father's Mormon house after he voted for Wallace,

drew her own line in Arizona sand. This is a story about
who belongs and doesn't. In Athens, Tracie grabs my hand,
marigold scarf flung around her slender neck, says it's safer
for trans women on the streets than in camps.

My friend Luiz and his family dimmed their headlights three times
to cross from Mexico. Each time they were boxed. The fourth
time they walked across under a generous moon. A Syrian family
climbed into a raft five times to reach Greece. Thirteen people,

1000 euro per head, including children. Multiply by five. Life
jackets extra. This spring they bulldozed Lesvos beaches to bring
new sand for tourists. Two million people wait in Turkey. Erdogan
shuffles the money deck. Europe takes a post-WWII bow after they

accept seven percent who fled their homelands. 93 percent fled
to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. In a video, a researcher flips
a monkey on her back, muscles limp, her eyes a closed chapel.
I climb a hill where we watched for rafts with our naked gaze.

Ten kilometers lie between Turkey and Lesvos. 1,700 between
Libya and Italy. The Mediterranean plays a rigged referee. An
expression in Dari, don't search for angles on the ground, look
up. This calculus makes my eyes burn.

Now four Mormon students on a mission eye the sea with
a telescope. Their Bishop told them to spread Smith's gospel
to everyone but Muslims. The Latter Day meets the College
of the Americas meets the US border patrol meets Assad's gas.

A Coast Guard Officer Asks

Months after walking with families
to the harbor where Janni Papadakis

handwrites the names of each newcomer
sometimes patient with Arabic and Farsi,

sometimes wound up, no words
between us, my actions, perfectly illegal

his work perfectly legal, three hundred
thousand registered, his belt empty

of a weapon, no billy club or gun—
Janni turns to me, says in Greek-English,

I have just one question, why do police
in America shoot their own citizens,

on the street, in the middle of the day,

at night? Fred Hampton's spirit explains,
Michael Brown testifies, I stutter.

Migrant Declaration

Regarding the EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016

Today the Members of the European Council met with their Turkish counterpart. This was the third meeting since November 2015 dedicated to deepening Turkey-EU relations as well as addressing the migration crisis.

The Members of the European Council expressed their deepest condolences to the people of Turkey following the bomb attack in Ankara on Sunday. They strongly condemned this heinous act and reiterated their continued support to fight terrorism in all its forms. Turkey and the European Union reconfirmed their commitment to the implementation of their joint action plan activated on 29 November 2015. Much progress has been achieved already, including Turkey's opening of its labour market to Syrians under temporary protection, the introduction of new visa requirements for Syrians and other nationalities, stepped up security efforts by the Turkish coast guard and police and enhanced information sharing. Moreover, the European Union has begun disbursing the 3 billion euro of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for concrete projects and work has advanced on visa liberalisation and in the accession talks, including the opening of Chapter 17 last December. On 7 March 2016, Turkey furthermore agreed to accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece and to take back all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters. Turkey and the EU also agreed to continue stepping up measures against migrant smugglers and welcomed the establishment of the NATO activity on the Aegean Sea. At the same time Turkey and the EU recognise that further, swift and determined efforts are needed.

In order to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk, the EU and Turkey today decided to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. In order to achieve this goal, they agreed on the following additional action points:

- 1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. This will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. It will be a temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering, and restore public order. Migrants Arriving in the Greek islands will be duly registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with UNHCR. migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive will be returned to Turkey. Turkey and Greece, assisted by EU institutions and agencies, will take the necessary steps and agree any necessary bilateral arrangements, including the presence of Turkish officials on Greek islands and Greek officials in Turkey as from 20 March 2016, to ensure liaison and thereby facilitate the smooth functioning of these arrangements. The costs of the return operations of irregular migrants will be covered by the EU.

2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU take into account the UN vulnerability Criteria. A mechanism will be established, with the assistance of the Commission, EU agencies and other Member States, as well as the UNHCR, to ensure that this principle will be implemented as from the same day the returns start. Priority will be given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly. On the EU side, resettlement under this mechanism will take place, in the first instance, by honour commitments taken by Member States in the conclusions of Representatives of the Governments of Member States meeting within the Council on 20 July 2015, of which 18.000 places for resettlement remain. Any further need for resettlement will be carried out through a similar voluntary arrangement up to a limit of an additional 54.000 persons. The Members of the European Council welcome the Commission's intention to propose an amendment to the relocation decision of 22 September 2015 to allow for any resettlement commitment undertaken in the framework of this arrangement to be offset from non-allocated places under the decision. Should these arrangements not meet the objective of ending the irregular migration and the number of returns come close to the numbers provided for above, this mechanism will be reviewed. Should the number of returns exceed the numbers provided for above, this mechanism will be discontinued.

3) Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Turkey to the EU, and will cooperate with neighbouring states as well as the EU to this effect.

4) Once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ending or at least have been substantially and sustainably reduced, a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission schemes will be activated. EU Member States will contribute on a voluntary basis to this scheme.

5) The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated vis-à-vis all participating Member States with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens at the latest by the end of June 2016, provided that all benchmarks have been met. To this end Turkey will take the necessary steps to fulfil the remaining requirements to allow the Commission to make, following the required assessment of compliance with the benchmarks, an appropriate proposal by the end of April on the basis of which the European Parliament and the Council can make a final decision.

6) The EU, in close cooperation with Turkey, will further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and ensure funding of further projects for persons under temporary protection identified with swift input from Turkey before the end of March. A first list of concrete projects for refugees, notably in the field of health, education, infrastructure, food and other living costs, that can be swiftly financed from the Facility, will be jointly identified within a week. Once these resources are about to be used to the full, and provided the above commitments are met, the EU will mobilise additional funding for the Facility of an additional 3 billion euro up to the end of 2018.

7) The EU and Turkey welcomed the ongoing work on the upgrading of the Customs Union.

8) The EU and Turkey reconfirmed their commitment to re-energise the accession process as set out in their joint statement of 29 November 2015. They welcomed the opening of Chapter 17 on 14 December 2015 and decided, as a next step, to open Chapter 33 during the Netherlands presidency. They welcome that the Commission will put

forward a proposal to this effect in April. Preparatory work for the opening of other Chapters will continue at an accelerated pace without prejudice to Member States' positions in accordance with the existing rules.

9) The EU and its Member States will work with Turkey in any joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria, in particular in certain areas near the Turkish border which would allow for the local population and refugees to live in areas which will be more safely.

All these elements will be taken forward in parallel and monitored jointly on a monthly basis.

The EU and Turkey decided to meet again, as necessary in accordance with the joint statement of 29 November 2015.

Part Four

Even the dead speak, “the past is infinite.”

Toni Morrison
The Source of Self-Regard

We Leave Magnolias in a Fountain

i. I write to Huda

who I met on the shore four years ago on a crowded
July day, and ask her advice for people now waiting
in Kara Tepe, since I live in a US houseboat, floating in

some reality far from a container stuck on a hillside in Mytilini,
too hot for summer, too cold for winter, designed to entice
madness, at the least, a yearning, sometimes hatred for what people
can / not do for each other.

The two haiku she sends:

Advice for people
in the camps is a question
I carry now.

How could I hate Greece
so much now, after loving
her in Syria?

A UNHCR report: the average person needs 2000 calories
per day to survive. So officials distribute 1,900.

Just enough less to keep you on edge?

Who do you borrow calories from? The baby? The elder?
The full-breasted woman?

ii. I write Bashir

ask him what he remembers from the sea. He writes back, no matter
who you are, what country you came from, if smugglers kept you
in a truck for weeks, if you dodged fire in Kabul, if you carried your
elder aunt...no matter what, the sea was the worst, our arrival, the gift:

disaster the sea / glorious, the shore

the chop...the pitch...the storm / the hands...the rope...the sand

my daughter curls inside my vest/ she runs with pipits by the rocks

gasoline soaks our tired clothes / wildflowers preach to a quiet beach

sarin gas on frightened skin /we leave magnolias in a fountain.

iii. I write a supervisor

about translator rates so we can teach Darwish and Jordan in the poetry class. It is customary, he says, to pay five euro per hour. The teachers only get ten. If you pay more, you send a confusing message.

The translator arrives, a professor in Afghanistan, his perfectly clipped beard, his British English, he who speaks and writes in Pashto, Urdu, Persian, and Hindi.

When my eyes say help, after people start to fidget, after the white board marker gives up, after we run out of pencils, he begins to recite Nye in Dari so those who can't read might float a poem above their chairs.

iv. after class, my energy evaporated, I ask, where will you rest?

Back at my container, safer than the forest
where we cowered when they fired on us
and better than forty-five days in an Iranian jail.

He shows a photo of his wife, her gardenia petal nails
scrubbing his oxford-button shirt.

Their container is white tin on the outside, white tin
on the inside, no insulation. No electricity. No internet.
No rugs. No windows. No sky.

We're lucky. We are here.

v. the view from Mytilini

a holiday for the wealthy.
I take the bus back to Eftalou.
Gaze out a window
scratched by granite and salt.

Ekphrastic

The photo would be of you and me
standing under wisteria, sea

like a drape in the background, cats sacked
out in the shade, our arms looped

after you whispered your testimonial
and I typed into an overheated laptop.

Only there could be no snapshot,
your red soccer shirt and my linen

shorts made for Greece in June,
the two of us shy and afraid.

No hug for the child, your adult
face closed by orders to spy

on families, their intimate rhythms,
where they washed and prayed, when

their children tumbled home from
school, the St. Finbarr church on

a suicide bomber's list, barbed
wire wrapped around Boko

Haram's prey, the child vanished

in explosions you escaped.

~ for Emmanuel

Each Day Lessons in Greek

Ignatio says, first we name the cats—mother, and three kittens, Leeza, Chrissa, Beba and Lola. I practice *The soil on the mountain is not good for farming. The earth in the garden is rich.* Today, we focus on *ah-crow-care-eh-mos*, monuments on rooftop corners. Mary says they're for beauty. Sculptures of women with buxom breasts.

Ignatio says even churches have gargoyles. In the old days women didn't wear blouses. *Panselinos*, the hotel down the road means full moon, which is tonight. Each day lessons in Greek, a blue book full now. We start with *the garden is beautiful.* And *today is hot.* Then, *the cats play.* And, *this is honeysuckle.* Then, *Monday is your first yoga class and you'll ride your bike.* And *Mary picks strawberries for her mother.* And *Ignatio was born in Koochocuyo.* And, *today the waves are wild.* And *Becky writes poems about people moving across this island.*

Ignatio laughs when I can't say the letter "w," insists on proper pronunciation, waits as I sound out sentences. Slaps the air when I play with words. "Service" in English can mean a car or a gathering at a church. *Theng zero pooh eena* (we don't know) is my favorite expression. Ignatio claims, *if Becky speaks Greek now, she will write Greek next year.* On the morning seven people drown in dinghies off the Mytilini coast he teaches me, *I am very sorry for this.* We practice *YiaYia keeps company with the sea and remembers everything.* The word for happy—*harumene.* And *this is the word for artichoke.*

Perhaps someday I'll be able to ask Ignatio in Greek about his family. Who died in the Turkish genocide. The survivors fled across the Aegean to Kalloni where he drives every Sunday to sing tenor at his church.

One day I'll ask him about the shoes. How he discovered me serving scrambled eggs and croissants to thirteen people from Syria and Iraq in my Sun House room. We planned to eat quickly then walk to Molyvos before dawn, except I forgot about thirteen pairs of shoes outside my door. And that Ignatio wakes before the cats. My eyes traced the floor when he came in, afraid I'd offended my host.

Ten minutes later, Ignatio returned with milk for the children. As we left he motioned with his hands (no words in English) avoid the police, send the family to the right, you go left so no one sees you together. He counts with his fingers, my *family, fourteen died*.

That winter Ignatio waded into the Eftalou sea in front of the Sun House, cradling a three-year-old boy. Later, Ignatio discovered a journalist had snapped his photo, put it on the cover of an international magazine. Mary had the photo framed. It's propped between the fireplace and the ironing board.

How Ganesha Works

May I ask for a love letter to the painter who tied
her six children to her belly with a jump rope

before stepping inside the raft, saying they
would all reach shore or go down together?

So many poems veer toward sadness, doves
seeking a water fountain gone dry.

But then, four sons and their Syrian mother,
who dodged smugglers, swam their dinghy to

shore, announces, yes, I escaped without
my husband, after he took me in snatches.

The elephant god traces a path.

At the Sea, Shazia whispers

From across this island I traipse
to Eftalou like a homing pigeon drawn
to a grave. The sea wakes

my fear but look at my Alia, she's a swan
in the waves, will float until she learns
to butterfly, her spirit tries on

anything new, while I yearn
for before when we pleated rice and peas
we loved in a valley with sweet ferns,

eucalyptus and mango fields, we
lived with electric gates and body guards
until bullets traveled thru my beloved. Carefree.

Alia and I escaped through a night's scar
traveled far, now I think in allegory
of the Trojan and a fanciful horse, filled with stars.

As for this beach, what then of tiny boxes, tiny
graves? What then of bones that anchors abut?
These questions like jiggers that leave faint lines.

The Aegean venetian blinds I cannot draw shut.

She Asks Jizo Bosatsu

what to do with her body now the dinghies
have stopped their furious pace? For three
seasons she'd biked the seacoast road,
chased rafts to shore, walked families up
Petra highway. Now rafts that slip past
the military's neon eye are banished like
uninvited relatives at a wedding. She
stares at Turkey's coast, wonders about
mothers who sell shoes in Istanbul,
lament Syria, count unschooled seasons.

She buries stones in sand to zig-zag a path,
stacks rocks into faces and stout bodies,
balanced to weather wind, like Jizo statues
in Japan, Moai heads on Easter Island.

These cairns, opal and obsidian, named
after people she misses, shaped like the arch
at Hisham's Palace and Parthenon columns.
During storms stones topple like unpracticed
gymnasts, their falls redesign the coastline.

Might those still standing chat with fishermen,
howl at the sea, send love letters to the Bent
Pyramid, grieve for the Mosque of Aleppo?

On her last evening, anise adorns the road,
this island's sunflower. The new moon traces
its solstice sky. She glances into a rowboat
marooned on a beach #safepassagenow
scrawled on its side, a pair of infant sandals
cradled inside. Her mind tumbles like rocks
that refuse to stack. Do shoes stay on a girl's
feet as she goes down, or wiggle free?

What cairn for such a thing?

Once Her Children are Asleep, Fatma Picks Up Her Paintbrush

*A people without
a homeland are like dates
on a forgotten tree
sweetness left to wither
falling on white phosphorus ground.*

Gathering, Incantation

Years later we will gravitate to Seaweed Beach
Where generations landed or slipped under.
A four-year-old who wanted lit up shoes
Now a father and a muezzin for a minaret.

When generations landed or slipped under
A man with a frozen knee and split heart
Now a father, a muezzin for a minaret
His squint a permanent feature.

A man with a frozen knee and split heart,
A woman whose belly carries quartz sees
His squint as a permanent feature
Reaches through an October breeze.

A woman whose belly carries quartz sees
The wind chant to rip tides,
Reaches through an October breeze.
The dead arrive in white gloves

Watch the wind chant to rip tides
Bow to the living, midnight song rising.
The dead arrive in white gloves
Stars patch color on wildflower hill

Bow to the living, midnight song rising.
Spirits trail with slant harmonies
Stars patch color on wildflower hill
Years later we will gravitate to Seaweed Beach.

What the Sky Watches

Sunrise on my face, a Minoan pot shape shifts into a mosque.
Poseidon winds chase white caps coming up for air, the sea bottom laughs.
Up cobblestone steps rosaries become a man's talisman, each quiet flick.
Women without wings paste eagle feathers to their arms, scoop up children.
Cats meditate in summer, hide in winter rain, love and fight like humans.
Swallows embroider nests they return to each year, babies know they're home.
Heavy summer air let strife be lonely, sidewalks sing to the streets.
I cry for the world fragile as a starfish left alone by the tide.
Without my ozone I'd be as helpless as a baby left alone.
If water covers the islands sea urchins will host bigger conventions.
The moon makes stars shy with their beauty, the sun misses the etude.
Zeus says, Atlas, hold heaven on your shoulders, a new weathered map.
Tonight a steady stream of people walk across the setting sun.
We are all connected to the center of the earth, each precious one.

Return

~ *after Du Fu*

Wake to / blank wall / sea floods
night vision / raft dizzy / dot sinks

insistent calls / lighthouse sounds / birds seek
fish eat / light candle / starless land

travel / take me / faint song
ancient channel / to god reach / choppy water

mind quiets / Aegean return / tide rests
teal light / weathered / before dawn

morning / black tea / turns to you

In the Arc of Lost Time Blue Holes Gather

the consciousness of those who made it
the strait between Turkey and Lesvos
the rafts, whale's teeth, the water
I return like I never left
Their hours of terror last longer
Inside the whale, time absorbs a new
the clock slows down and speeds up
from the world, like the Battle
the beating of a child, that
Rumi's couplets, Weiwei's human flow.
honor too big a word for poets to earn
moments we are caught inside
new, so much lost when
words too, more than we can live with—
to the sea, over and over, not done.

all the sea cannot bear
and did not
the whale's mouth
and its power to decide.
asking, were you there?
than a lifetime.
dimension, birth and death collide
demands we find words vanished
of Dunkirk, the Sand Creek massacre
we weave memory into quilts
Art cannot bring back the dead
more like humble
try to shrink horror into something
people leave their homelands, to lose
like a two-tailed swallow, returning

Wrapped in Clouds

Since leaving
is the hardest
as if they were
I remember ones
quiet as a breeze
body is a statue
not knowing
or waiting
Do I pray
another despot
they stay, this
without tourists?
come, after years
or do I pray they
and no food?
that water will
stay, waves
Do I pray?

seeing babies in strollers
they cry and laugh
wrapped in clouds.
whose limbs twitched
on a pond. My
filled with tears. I wake
if I'm on a raft
for one.
people come, escaping
or do I pray
island trembling
Do I pray they
in detention—
stay, leaky tents
Do I pray they come
carry or do I pray they
will menace?

Lesvos

~ after Jennifer Zeynab Joukhadar

When I was born
a glacier carved my
shape like a winter tulip, so
I could still see Anatolia, my eight sisters each
a tortoise step for the gods. I am my mother's daughter, here
before volcanoes let loose. Lava domes are now castles to the sky.
Sea of my dreams, with your fierce moods and sequined days, I am the
poet's land, the home of Arion's meter and Terpander's musical scale. There
was a time when the people rotated crops like verses in holiday hymns. There
was a time when men were pretty and women were strong. There was a time
before the Byzantines and Ottomans. When gargoyles cavorted with cats who
mated and then slept. Sea of my dreams, I long for boats that bring tilapia and
cod. For beaches that sing rain, recycle wind with long breath. When the moon-
flower shines, it's a moment in time that will awaken your spine. As long
as you come you are welcome. Flamingos will be waiting.
And early mist, night shades so black they shimmer. Sea
of my dreams welcome all who come to my shores. As olive
trees reach from China to Australia, so do my arms.
This island is too big. This island is too small.
There is always room.

Notes

“The Sea Shares Salt with the Breeze:” In 2015-2016 one million people fled their homelands across the Mediterranean to Greece. Because of its proximity to Turkey (less than 10 kilometers), the island of Lesbos was the epicenter of this fleeing.

“A Litany Travels” references Audre Lorde’s “Litany for Survival,” one of the poems translated into Pashto and Dari for the poetry classes (from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, Norton, 1997). The Somali teen’s reference to a “poem about memories and backpacks” references Zeina Azzam’s “Leaving My Childhood Home” in Jehan Bseiso and Becky Thompson, editors. *Making Mirrors: Righting/Writing by and for Refugees*. (Interlink, 2019).

“Layla Asks, Why Are We Here If We Didn’t Do Anything Wrong” references the lines “We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest” from “Ella’s Song.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Sweet Honey in the Rock – Topic, 28 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tG1dNJh2rw>.

“Jamil Says, We Wait in Line” is in honor of “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks and Joy Harjo’s “An American Sunrise.” *Clouds looking for a way out, gotta play no matter the sway of the forces* from “The Soul Travelers - A Way Out / Gale Sayers (Live Acoustic).” *YouTube*, uploaded by GoalMusicGroup, 21 June 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAeXYp3kC0k>

“Ghazal: Asylum for the Youngest Brother” celebrates the occasion of Jalal Joinda’s brother gaining asylum in Greece after a prolonged threat of deportation. The Joinda family includes filmmakers, actors, singers, and teachers. See Joinda, Jalal. “Jalal Joinda a refugees song.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Fridoon Joinda, 7 April 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YANREeSa5rw>

“We Have Taken the One in the Sky as Our Witness”: Fadwa Suleiman was a beloved Syrian actor, poet and activist who was forced into exile in 2012. She lived in Paris until her death from cancer in 2017. Italicized lines from “Syrian Poet and Actor Fadwa Souleiman, 45.” *Arablit Quarterly*, 17 Aug. 2017, <https://arablit.org/2017/08/17/fadwa-souleiman>. The title is from “From Genesis” in *Making Mirrors: Righting/Writing by and for Refugees*.

“Hold onto Time” references the work of Yara Badr, Masen Darwish, and their colleagues at the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. See Yara Badr and

Mazen Darwish, “Lifetimes Stolen” and “Letters for the Future.” *Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline*, edited by Malu Halasa, Zaher Omareen and Nawara Mahfound (Saqi, 2014), pp. 192-201, 202-204.

“Winnipeg”: The Winnipeg was a steamer commissioned by Pablo Neruda to carry 2200 people from danger in Europe to Chile in 1939. About the ship Neruda wrote, “From the beginning I liked the word Winnipeg. Words either have wings or they don’t. The word Winnipeg is winged.” See Desimone, Arturo. “Valparaíso-bound: Neruda’s ark.” *OpenDemocracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arturo-desimone/valpara-so-bound-neruda-s-ark>.

“Loving in Doorways”: The title, “in our children’s mouths/ so their dreams will not reflect/ the death of ours,” and “coming and going/ ...between dawns” are from Audre Lorde. “A Litany for Survival.” *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (Norton, 1997).

“Report from Sona” is dedicated to an eight-year-old I met from Guinea Bissau.

“In Moria We Have Cats” is dedicated to the fourteen-year-old who wrote the landay in a poetry workshop, *Work for yourself not others/Tomorrow no one will be friends with you*. When Moria opened in 2015 it was designed for 3,000 people. It currently “houses” over 20,000 people.

“Celan Travels”: The last line references *you teach you teach your hand to sleep*, from Tarfia Faizullah. “Reading Celan at the Liberation War Museum.” *Seam* (Crab Orchard Review, 2014).

“Lesvos” is after the sacred maps in Zeynab Joukhadar, Jennifer. *The Map of Salt and Stars* (Touchstone, 2018).

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