

مقاعد الأمل دائماً محجوزة  
The seats of hope are  
always reserved

NAJWAN DARWISH

वाक  
रविर

The Raza  
Biennale of  
Asian Poetry  
2019

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always reserved

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## CREDITS

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## Organised by:



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قدساً

ا

وقفنا على الجبل  
لنرفع لله الأضحية  
وحين رأينا أيدينا ترتفع فارغةً  
عرفنا أننا أضحياتك

\*

اتركي الغاني يقطّ بين يدي قرينه الغاني  
أيتها الباقية  
ما شأنك بهذا الصبح المرتبك من الزائلين؟

\*

أيدينا ترتفع فارغةً  
نحن أضحياتك

## Jerusalem

I

We stood on the Mount  
to raise a sacrifice for you  
and when we saw our hands rise  
empty  
we knew  
that we were your sacrifice

Let the mortals fall  
in the hands of their fellow mortals  
You alone always remain  
This confused pilgrimage  
of those who are impermanent—  
what concern is it of yours?

Our hands rise, empty  
We are your sacrifice

## II

When I leave you I turn to stone  
and when I come back I turn to stone

I name you Medusa  
I name you the older sister of Sodom and  
Gomorrah  
you the baptismal basin that burned Rome

The murdered hum their poems on the hills  
and the rebels reproach the tellers of their  
stories  
while I leave the sea behind and come back  
to you, come back  
by this small river that flows in your despair

I hear the reciters of the Quran and the  
shrouders of corpses  
I hear the dust of the condolers  
I am not yet thirty, but you buried me, time  
and again  
and each time, for your sake  
I emerge from the earth  
So let those who sing your praises go to hell  
those who sell souvenirs of your pain  
all those who are standing with me, now, in  
the picture

I name you Medusa  
I name you the older sister of Sodom  
and Gomorrah  
you the baptismal basin that still  
burns

When I leave you I turn to stone  
When I come back I turn to stone

اشكر الهند

اشكر الهند

انها جعلت من اشجارها  
وسمومها ورجالها  
شذا الدفتر الصغير

حيث بالكلمات تجتمع أهلاك من قبور ومناف  
من عن يمين الرب وعن شماله  
ومن سعيره أيضاً

حيث يقولون للجسيم: هل من مزيد؟

اشكر الهند

وارفع شذا الدفتر.

## Thank India

Thank India:

From her trees

and the labor of her women and

men she made this small notebook

whose words call your people back

from their graves and places of exile,

from the right hand of the Lord and

the left—

and from His hellfire too,

where they've been asking the flames:

Is there more to come?

Thank India

and lift up this notebook.

## Nothing More to Loose

Lay your head on my chest and listen  
to the layers of ruins  
behind the madrasah of Saladin  
hear the houses sliced open  
in the village of Lifta  
hear the wrecked mill, the lessons and reading  
on the mosque's ground floor  
hear the balcony lights  
go out for the very last time  
on the heights of WadiSalib  
hear the crowds drag their feet  
and hear them returning  
hear the bodies as they're thrown, listen  
to their breathing on the bed  
of the Sea of Galilee  
listen like a fish  
in a lake guarded by an angel  
hear the tales of the villagers, embroidered  
likekaffiyehs in the poems  
hear the singers growing old  
hear their ageless voices  
hear the women of Nazareth  
as they cross the meadow  
hear the camel driver  
who never stops tormenting me  
Hear it  
and let us, together, remember  
then let us, together, forget  
all that we have heard

Lay your head on my chest:  
I'm listening to the dirt  
I'm listening to the grass  
as it splits through my skin...

We lost our heads in love  
and have nothing more to lose

## We Never Stop

I have no country to return to  
and no country to be banished from:  
a tree whose roots  
are a running river:  
it dies if it stops,  
it dies if it doesn't.

On the cheeks and arms of death  
I spent the best of my days,  
and the land I lost each day  
I gained each day anew.  
The people had a single country,  
but mine multiplied in loss,  
renewed itself in absence.  
Its roots, like mine, are water:  
if it stops it withers,  
if it stops it dies.  
Both of us are running  
with a river of sunbeams,  
a river of gold dust  
that rises from ancient wounds,  
and we never stop.  
We keep on,  
never thinking to pause  
so our two paths can meet.

I have no country to be banished from,  
no country to return to:  
I'll die if I stop,  
I'll die if I keep going.

## Identity Card

Despite—as my friends joke—the Kurds being famous for their severity, I was gentler than a summer breeze as I embraced my brothers in the four corners of the world.

And I was the Armenian who did not believe the tears beneath the eyelids of history's snow

that covers both the murdered and the murderers.

Is it so much, after all that has happened, to drop my poetry in the mud?

In every case I was a Syrian from Bethlehem raising the words of my Armenian brother, and a Turk from Konya entering the gate of Damascus.

And a little while ago I arrived in Bayadir Wadi al-Sir and was welcomed by the breeze, the breeze that alone knew the meaning of a man coming from the Caucasus Mountains, his only companions his dignity and the bones of his ancestors.

And when my heart first tread on Algerian soil, I did not doubt for a moment that I was an Amazigh.

Everywhere I went they thought I was an Iraqi, and they were not wrong in this.

And often I considered myself an Egyptian living and dying time and again by the Nile with my African forebears.

But above anything I was an Aramaean. It is no wonder that my uncles were Byzantines, and that I was a Hijazi child cuddled by Umar and Sophronius when Jerusalem was opened.

There is no place that resisted its invaders except that I was one of its people; there is no free man to whom I am not bound in kinship, and there is no single tree or cloud to which

I am not indebted. And my scorn for Zionists will not prevent me from saying that I was a Jew expelled from Andalusia, and that I still weave meaning from the light of that setting sun.

In my house there is a window that opens onto Greece, an icon that points to Russia, a sweet scent forever drifting from Hijaz, and a mirror: No sooner do I stand before it than I see myself immersed in springtime in the gardens of Shiraz, and Isfahan, and Bukhara.

And by anything less than this, one is not an Arab.

## How Many?

How many bedrooms do I need  
to get a bit of sleep?  
How many chairs  
to sit myself down?  
How many roads  
to walk back to you,  
my distant country?  
This time I've gone  
and I'm not coming back.  
Your job, now, is to slip out,  
lovesick and afraid,  
and come in search of me.

## I Don't Claim

I

I don't claim to have any enemies  
other than myself,  
my demanding  
melancholic  
self  
that sleeps on the bed of its misery,  
always ready to shed its blood  
over the smallest of trifles—  
leaving nothing  
for my enemies to do.

I don't claim to have any enemies  
other than myself.

II

I don't claim to have any friends  
other than myself,  
and I'm not denying anything  
since the people I'm offering my spot to  
are also myself,  
which I'm splitting into many selves  
and losing one by one,  
just as man loses himself:  
I don't claim to have any friends.

III

I don't claim to have a companion  
other than this roaming imagination:  
When it walks on the earth, you call it a dream,  
and when it walks on its head, you call it delusion.

I don't claim to have any companions  
but him—my dream, my delusion,  
my sweet death every night.

#### IV

I don't claim to have a family  
beyond those I lost in wars,  
the ones I lost to exile  
in the gardens of paradise  
and in hell.

I don't claim to have any family  
but them,  
the ones with mislaid graves  
and well-known places of exile,  
the ones murdered on the coasts  
and waiting at the borders.

I don't claim to have any family  
but my own.

#### V

I don't claim to have a country.  
My country is an Andalus of poems and water  
that I lost  
and am still losing—  
in loss  
it becomes my country.

I don't claim to have any country  
other than loss.

## "Reserved"

I once tried to sit  
on one of the vacant seats of hope  
but the word "reserved"  
was squatting there like a hyena

(I did not sit down, no one sat down)

The seats of hope are always reserved

## Phobia

I'll be banished from the city  
before night falls: they'll claim  
I neglected to pay for the air  
I'll be banished from the city  
before the advent of evening: they'll claim  
I paid no rent for the sun  
nor any fees for the clouds  
I'll be banished from the city  
before the sun rises: they'll say  
I gave night grief  
and failed to lift my praises to the stars  
I'll be banished from the city  
before I've even left the womb  
because all I did for seven months  
was write poems and wait to be  
I'll be banished from being  
because I'm partial to the void  
I'll be banished from the void  
for my suspect ties to being  
I'll be banished from both being and the void  
because I was born of becoming

I'll be banished

## A Country Called Song

I lived in a country called Song:  
Countless singing women made me  
a citizen,  
and musicians from the four corners  
composed cities for me with mornings and nights,  
and I roamed through my country  
like a man roams through the world.

My country is a song,  
and as soon as it ends, I go back  
to being a refugee.





**Najwan Darwish** is a renowned Palestinian poet who was born in Jerusalem in 1978 and he is considered one of the foremost Arabic-language poets of his generation. His work has been translated into over 20 languages and his 2014 book *Nothing More to Lose* was listed by US National Public Radio as one of the best books of the year.

Among other prominent positions, Darwish has been the Chief Editor of the Cultural Section of *Al Araby Al Jadeed* pan-arab newspaper since its establishment in 2014 in London, and he serves as the literary advisor to the Palestine Festival of Literature.

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रज़ा फ़ाउण्डेशन | THE RAZA FOUNDATION

The Raza Foundation is an arts and culture organization established in 2001 by the master of Indian modern art Late Shri Sayed Haider Raza, who sets an example where fame and glory are not lonesome attainments but things to be liberally shared with the broader creative community.

The Foundation has been instrumental in creating spaces for various art and culture programs, publications and fellowships to the younger talent and also carrying a deeper research into the work of the masters. The Foundation has also been providing a financial assistance for a large number of institutions, individuals and projects relating to culture, visual arts, music, dance, theatre, ideas, architecture, photography and for the publication of many important books including *The Art Critic: writings of Richard Bartholomew*, Kumar Shahani's *'the shock of desire and other essays*, *Smriti Vismriti: Shankho Chaudhury, Kaljayee Kumar Gandharva*, *The Spirit of Indian Paintings*, *Finding My Way: Venkat Singh Shyam*, *Sonata of Solitude: Vasudev Santu Gaitonde* etc.

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