



KARIM ABUALROOS

Karim Abualroos is a Palestinian writer and researcher from Gaza.

He has specialized in the Middle East and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

He obtained a Master's degree in Political Science from the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut, Lebanon, and has published several novels and articles in international academic journals.

He also wrote several articles for Mo*.

He lived in Ghent for a while but now lives in Brussels, where he is opening SABBAR.

Sabbar is a bookstore, café, and cultural meeting place in Saint-Gilles.
@sabbar.be

We are very happy and grateful that he wants to share his poems with us.

First you can read the full poem 'Exile When it Grows Weary of Itself' and then the poem 'Trilogy Against Extinction Bread, Water, Air'.

The poems were also displayed as posters in the streets of Ghent.



About the Stories from Gaza project

‘Stories from Gaza’ stems from a simple yet urgent need: to make space for human stories from Palestine that often remain underexposed in mainstream media.

With this project, we aim to bring the Ghent public closer to the daily life, culture, and resilience of Palestinian communities. We invite visitors to pause, listen, and connect—with stories that touch, confront, and connect.

The current situation in Gaza and the continuous stream of images and information evoke strong emotions. Many people feel a need for clarification and context, but equally for human encounters and solace.

This project aims to address both.

Through poetry, walking, gathering, food, and shared experiences, we create moments of reflection and connection.

Here, these everyday actions also become visible as forms of care, resistance, and hope.

For Palestinian residents of Ghent, sharing personal stories offers a space for recognition and processing. For others, it is an invitation to listen, learn, and show solidarity. In this way, we are building together a city where there is room for diversity of voices, empathy, and engagement.

Exile When It Grows Weary of Itself*

By Karim Abu Alroos

I
I stand here,
amid the fractured mirrors of the self,
and nothing in me points to the way.
My face is a map that melts whenever light draws near,
as if afraid of clarity, afraid of being read.
My voice is a shadow searching for its body

in languages that do not open doors—
it knocks, stumbles, and retreats, defeated,
back into the throat.

I say: exile.

And the space between my chest and my memories contracts
until it suffocates.

The word itself trembles at utterance,
knowing I have nowhere to place it—
no shelf, no settled memory, no confident tongue.

Everything around me is temporary:
the wall waits to be torn down,
the chair remembers strangers before me,
the café recalls other faces,
even the air I breathe
waits to be replaced by another's lungs.

** This poem unfolds in seven parts. You're reading one of them. Find the others on windows nearby,
or read the full poem at www.verhalenuitgaza.be
In English and translation in Dutch.*



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Exile When It Grows Weary of Itself*

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II

I walk as the wind walks through an unfamiliar street:
without direction, without weight, without trace.
I name things with names that aren't theirs,
betraying them with my tongue
lest they betray me with their memory.
I fear calling them by their true names—
lest the homeland wake from its long sleep
and ask me, "Where have you been?"
And I will not know how to answer.
I no longer resemble myself;
I see him in old photographs and think he's a stranger,
and yet I've become no one else.
This creature suspended between two times,
fleeing a past and fearing a future,
dwelling in an endless pause.

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III

I have learned to breathe as one who apologizes to the air,
to take my share in silence,
without burdening anyone.

I have learned to laugh
so absence will not hear me and recognize me,
to write so I won't rot in silence,
to prove I still exist somewhere,
even if the place isn't mine.

Everything is heavy when it doesn't belong to you:
memory heavier than the stones that built the houses,
a word heavier than a wound when spoken out of place,
and the suitcase—ah, the suitcase—
is my only body when I try to convince the world
that I have a weight that allows passage,
that I have the right to occupy a space,
even a fleeting one, even on the margin.

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IV

Don't ask me where I came from.
The place no longer remembers me,
and I no longer dare to remember it whole.
Time behaves as if it never passed through me,
skips over me, leaves me forgotten
at some middle station.

I am a fracture walking on two legs,
a sentence spoken out of context—nonsense now,
a shadow searching for its owner in a closed airport,
in endless corridors, under the cold hum of neon.

At night, when everything quiets
and existence empties of witnesses,
I hear things remembering their old sounds:
a glass of water sighing as if longing for a river,
a window trembling as if bracing to cry or flee.

I tell myself:
perhaps I never left after all,
perhaps I am still standing in the same place,
and this is only a long dream
of an exile dreaming he is exiled.
Or perhaps I left the body and remained in language,
dwelling in words as the dead dwell in graves:
motionless, lightless, yet fully aware.

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V

Exile is not the opposite of homeland.
Exile is what happens when waiting grows long enough
to become nature itself,
when memory turns into a second skin
that cannot be peeled without bleeding—
without taking flesh, veins, and history along.
Exile is to be a stranger everywhere:
in the place you left—because you left it,
and in the place you reached—because you arrived too late.
To be the comma between two sentences,
the point that belongs to no line.

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VI

I write to remember that I still breathe.
I write because silence has grown heavier than iron—
pressing on the chest, blocking every passage.
I write to weigh myself with words,
to make sure I haven't yet evaporated,
that I still have mass, even if made of letters.
In every text I write, I try to retrieve my features,
to gather what scattered of me across borders and stations.
But the letters always outrun me,
fall into darkness before I arrive,
betray me as places did.
Perhaps language knows better than I
that I no longer reach anything whole—nor do I wish to.
Wholeness is frightening; it means the end.
I only wish to be a clear trace in the dust,
a voice walking without a body, passing through walls,
a memory refusing to be buried within luggage weight limits,
refusing to be reduced to a passport number.

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VII

I am not exiled.

I am exile itself, when it grows weary of itself—
when it sits by the roadside to rest a while,
takes off its shoes, looks at its swollen feet,
and wonders:

Where was I going all this time?

Then it rises—reluctant, tired, stubborn—
and resumes the journey.

Because exile never stops;
exile is perpetual motion, a continuous fall,
a flight that ends only when flight itself becomes home.

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Trilogy Against Extinction - Bread, Water, Air *

By Karim Abu Alroos

I . Bread

In the morning, when light rises from the dust,
the loaves emerge from their own ashes
small, singed creatures
carrying the scent of life inside their crusts.
I stretch out my hand, not to eat,
but to make sure it still remembers how to touch.
Bread here is a test of memory:
do you still remember the taste of earth?
do you know what dignity feels like when it is baked?
Every loaf is a short prayer,
spoken without sound,
driven by fear to its edge.
The dough gathers the breath of the hands that knead it,
keeps it folded inside,
as if it means to remember us after we burn.
Here, bread is not food.
It is a form of resistance,
a way of thinking with the body.
Each crumb says to the world:
I am still here,
even if the fire reaches me before I can swallow.
And when a day passes over an empty table,
we look at one another
as if each of us were the missing piece of the same loaf.
We sit in silence,
breathing carefully so the light does not cool.

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Trilogy Against Extinction - Bread, Water, Air *

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II. Water

At night, when everything cools,
water becomes the memory of fire.

It glimmers on broken walls
as if giving the ruins back their shadows.

I fill a cup half with emptiness,
and drink from what cannot be seen.

Water here does not quench;
it reminds.

It reminds the body of its fragility,
and thirst of its own awareness.

Under siege, no one merely drinks.
Every sip is an old reckoning with existence,
and with those who left carrying dry veins.

Water redistributes memory,
deciding what will stay in the flesh
and what will float on the surface of the soul.

When it stops flowing,
the tap becomes a mirror for waiting.
We watch it as a drowning man watches the sky,
searching for the cloud that lost its way,
for the moisture that forgot our faces.

Water resembles meaning
it can only be held when it is missing,
only seen through what it reflects.

Perhaps that is why
it leaves its trace on everything,
but never leaves itself anywhere.

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III. Air

Beneath a sky that cannot be closed,
a human being stands alone,
lifting his head as if to remind God
he is still underneath.

Everything on earth is sealed—
the borders, the sea, the roads, the words.
Only the sky remains open,
the window no one has learned to lock,
the last comfort not yet turned into a statistic

I breathe slowly,
as if every breath were a negotiation with
absence.

Air is not free
it is the last possession we share with the
world.

When the shelling begins,
I feel the air contract,
as though it breathes with us, afraid.

Still, it stays.
It slips through the cracked walls,
through the roofs split open,
through the emptiness left by those who are
gone.

It stays, a witness without memory,
filling the chest just enough for tears,
never more.

With each breath taken,
we recover the idea of survival.

With each exhale,
we sign a temporary truce with hope.
Air is a treaty between absence and
endurance,
signed every moment without ink,
without witnesses.

In the open sky,
everything can be seen from above:
the houses that fell,
the names unburied,
the hands still waving to the clouds.
We stand there
in the center of this small strip of earth,
raising our faces to the void,
trying to believe that something of God
still passes through.

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Epilogue

Bread taught us that survival is an act of dignity.

Water taught us that life begins in scarcity.

Air taught us that freedom cannot be sealed.

These scars on the body of the land
are not signs of weakness,
but a new map of consciousness
a way for the lost to find direction again.

Every scar a window,
every ash a language,
every breath a small declaration against extinction.

As long as there is one piece of sky left open,
a human being—even alone—
can still say:

I am here. I am breathing. I still see.

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