

# Roots

AND

# VERSES



amal  
SAÏD FOUNDATION



ANTI-TRIBALISM MOVEMENT

# FOREWORD

**The Verse Club is a project that wishes to empower young voices to create and showcase their poetry through workshops and poetry nights. The project ran for just over a year and involved 4 cohorts of young poets who attended 6 intensive workshop sessions of poetry instruction, culminating in a final showcase performance where they displayed their work in front of attendees.**

Our young poets have had the opportunity to be published in this anthology distributed by the Anti-Tribalism Movement (ATM). The Verse Club initially aimed to amplify the voices of young (and in many cases third culture) Muslims however, the programme was open to anybody interested in joining with a passion for poetry. The Verse Club intended to further the ATM's principles to foster honest dialogue, produce young leaders and more cohesive society. These values continue to drive creative programmes at the ATM and we hope to provide more as we celebrate our 10th year anniversary.

Throughout the project, we've had the pleasure of welcoming poets from all walks of life and various levels of poetry proficiency. The Verse Club would like to thank all of our participants for taking the leap to attend our workshops.

For many of our participants, it was their first in-depth encounter with poetry, and we want to commend them for their dedication to the project and their art. We hope you all took something meaningful from our time together forward. Thank you.

The Verse Club would also like to thank our facilitators, guest poets, and showcase headliners for the time they spent with us, and for sharing your craft with our participants. A special thank you to our facilitators who have been involved with The Verse Club at various points – Neimo Askar and Fahima Hersi and Ayaan Abdullahi. Thank you for creating an intimate and welcoming atmosphere at The Verse Club.

Lastly, we would like to thank Amal (a Saïd Foundation programme). Thank you for your contribution which has allowed us and our participants to accomplish and get better at what we love to do.

**Bishara Mohamud**  
Operations Manager  
Anti-Tribalism Movement

I'm on the central line at night 11 PM  
When I spread my feet  
In my Nike  
And they look at me  
Looking at them looking at me  
Low key  
MashaAllah  
In my abaya from Whitechapel  
Looking Peng  
You've seen me tighten my hijab  
It always uplifts me  
And lowers my gaze  
And they wanna ride this wave  
Which is okay  
But let's contemplate  
I remove the khajoor from my box in the  
bag  
I think - will I smell a certain kind of way?  
Needless to say  
For someone to feel a certain kind of way  
They are not to be blamed  
I am not ashamed  
From where I come  
I can feel my ancestors pain  
The reparations you owe and negate  
Have repercussions  
Britain don't cover what you create  
Whether its enclosure  
or  
the last climate change conference you  
blame  
family planning in Africa  
for climate change  
Acknowledge this  
before it catastrophates

It is a capitalist problem  
Next time you say  
We take up too much space  
See you at Iftar by RTP  
Will you look us in the face  
Will you call us by our name  
Or will you leave flowers in your  
euphemism  
Okay  
At Canada Water I wait for my next train  
To New Cross Gate  
You don't follow me anymore  
So I love this place  
It's so beautiful  
Stopped at After Hours for an aero  
milkshake  
It tastes great  
I can't feed into this system  
But maybe just for the day  
I'll stuff food in my face  
And somewhere down the line  
I'll stop feeding my privilege  
pg. iv  
Now how does this all relate to what I  
was saying  
The journey has ended  
But tomorrow  
Let's get back to the train

**- Aaliyah Patel**

# [UNTITLED]

[You.]

Love is uninspiring. Love is empty.

Love is comfort. Love is comfortable.

Love is lying on the sofa, a lukewarm cup of shaah bigeys in my hand,

a plate of almost stale xalwo on the

coffee table. My feet perched on your thighs, us lazily flicking through Sunday afternoon television.

Love is the soft sound of music drifting in from the kitchen.

The gentle tap of your fingers on the armrest of the worn-out leather couch.

Love is uunsi wafting through every

room, touching every surface with it's

warm embrace, staining it

with the essence of home.

Love is the slide of drawers opening and closing,

hushed footsteps on tiled floor.

Love is the feeling of your fingers gently

dragging down my arms,

A trail of goose bumps in their wake.

Love is the feeling of your hands

intertwined with mine.

Love is lazy and I'm lazy's lover.

**- Ayaan Abdullahi**

# [UNTITLED]

In between the breaths of laughter with  
the person who began before me.  
Hoping the end of each other joke is the  
prompt for the beginning of the next  
sentence.

Both of us scrambling to create a home  
that would fit the two of us.

I learnt you can't own other people  
I don't even own myself  
the imposing burden of silence  
the imposing burden that I am

**- Idil Abdullahi**

## WHERE DOES YOUR JOY RESIDE?

and you enter your rented room.  
all your shoes are cheating on their  
partners  
on the laminate floor.  
your mother's voice  
clear as ocean.  
in your palm, the phone call  
with your mother  
is where your joy resides,  
that inch-squares of home.  
tell her that your day has gone dark  
around four. here. you joke  
about how you both can time travel.  
air eavesdrops and smiles;

jots down your favourite recipe into a  
poem:  
ginger, garlic, spring onion  
soy sauce, sugar, a stick of cinnamon  
star anise, chilli pepper and chicken.  
notices the missing of measurement  
of love. your mother  
says it is just a handful of this and a  
pinch of that.  
you: but I don't have your fingers and  
hands.  
mum: yes, you do. yes, you do.

**- Jinhao Xie**

# DESTINY

I looked for you through a thousand prophecies,  
I read between lines and wrote a thousand theses,  
to decipher our destiny and all its hypothesis.  
I turned pages until my wrist got sore,  
I wondered about the future and what happened before.  
SO I linked the lines of my palms to retrace the origins,  
to understand the end of every beginning.  
My Maktub, destiny or purpose, the reason why I walk on earth,

I won't be sitting patiently for you to come to me ...  
I will listen carefully, to every preachers or oracle,  
to acknowledge every miracle  
patience  
follows  
actions  
until you allow me to reach my destination.

**- Lynda Nechat**



# THE FIRST TIME I FELT DIFFERENT WAS WHEN I REALISED WE ARE THE SAME

Disguised in skin  
It's easy to blame  
Decorated in names  
We're easy to tame  
But everyone has a name  
Just like me and  
Apparently I don't say mine properly  
So now I refuse to introduce myself  
And you know  
If you don't talk  
People will forget you can speak  
And if you don't run  
The finish line will creep  
Up on you in your sleep

The first time I felt different  
Was when I realised I was the ghost  
in my dreams  
That I was the wolf  
Who was eating my feet  
Toes in my throat  
My pillow swallowed my screams  
And somehow between chokes  
we both learnt to breathe  
I learnt to walk on my hands and  
now the wolves sing me to sleep

**- Manisha Mohan**

# THE BATTLE OF GENERATIONS

“this will look good”  
mum said, dress in a long black skirt  
I left  
“why do you look like my nan”  
he joked, tears in my eyes  
i choked  
Is this who you want  
me to be?  
a black shawl covering  
Zara & Other Stories  
how will they know i like Dr Who  
or that i’m cool  
or that i’m Me  
or that i can also afford  
skinny jeans with a basic tee

**- Muna Jama**

# MUSLIM FOR THE SISTAHOOD SISTXR

Thank you.  
Standing at the cliff edge of Misery,  
Yours are the hands that hold me  
lovingly back to remind me with the  
warmth in your touch that my  
purpose has always been Kindness.  
You chide me and say,  
“Never, apologise for your feelings,  
You’re apologising for the Truth.”  
Closer to drowning in the sea of Pain,  
Yours are the hands that will find me  
and drag me back up.  
Just so I can Breathe.  
Breathe, knowing that our goal has

always been to be at peace in the land  
where the skies are lightly pink  
and the clouds painted softly in Lilac.  
I am anchored in our Love  
My Reflections.  
My Echoes.  
You believe in me.  
You believe me.  
Thank you.

**- urloveisdead**

?

Who am I ?  
Is a question that is powerful  
What defines ?  
And what constructs are ineffable  
What relies ?  
On what to make me lovable  
Wearing a disguise  
It destroys all that is magical  
Who am I ?  
To be speaking in this voice to this  
Thinking that I'm better but I'm all of it  
Lying to survive  
And destroying truth along with it

Is your prize is plastic or in diamond  
rings  
Who am I ?  
To say these words in confidence  
Pick a side and defend it with your  
arrogance  
That's the why  
The part you never question  
Do you chose the lie  
or what your heart is saying

**- R. Seif**

# ODE TO MOTHERS BRAIDING THEIR DAUGHTER'S HAIR

It is Sunday morning and I slowly rub away  
the sleep from my eyes.

The voice of the news anchor from the TV  
downstairs reaches my room and the smell  
of my mother's cooking invites me to start  
the day.

After the pounded yam is made for later,  
and while the egusi cools on the stove,  
and I have washed the last of the pots,  
AND hoovered the stairs,  
my mother beckons me to sit in front of her.



First, she leans my head to the side, resting it on her right lap. Next, she makes a line and parts my hair like the red sea. Then, she takes three strands and braids them together, each strand going under, over, under, over, under, her fingers working fast like magic as she takes my wild mass of hair and creates her art. We are partaking in an act of self-care that is over 5000 years old, you see, where we are from, braids were used to tell the other

sisters what tribe you belong to and the brothers if you were single. They were a symbol of status and beauty and 5000 years later not much has changed. What a strange paradox it is to take the kinky and the coily, the tangled and the damaged, the freshly washed and coconut bathed locs and create a crown from our roots. Reaching upwards, sideways, and everywhere in between



With each strand of hair neatly braided,  
my mother unravels a piece of the past,  
unfolding secrets from a time that I do not remember.  
Sometimes she will take phone calls from Nigeria in a language she thinks I do not understand  
'These children will kill me, oh' she exclaims as she carefully detangles my hair before laughing at her sisters reply.  
On some occasions we argue, me, cranking my neck to see what's on the TV,  
her, pulling my head back in position to remind me who is really in charge of this situation  
and on some days we say nothing at all, but that's ok, because this is our bonding.

When it's been a couple of hours and my bum is numb and my limbs need to stretch,  
I reach my hand up into the rest of my afro to guess how many more braids there are to do,  
I estimate four,  
she parts my hair into ten.  
I ask how long left,  
She kisses her teeth and rolls her eyes at the same time.  
She is teaching me about patience and poise and I am too young to realise.  
I am 3, 13, 21, 33, 45 years old and my mother holds my head, carefully admiring her artwork.  
She laughs to herself, 'I still got it'

**- Saadiya Yusuf**

# ODE TO UUNSI

we burn uunsi into the air  
for if we close our eyes  
and smell home  
maybe,  
somehow,  
we'll end up there.  
each time you waltz round  
the kitchen,  
the staircase,  
the closet,  
you conversate with me.  
you remind me of everything I am  
yet everything I'm missing  
you carry the calm of meetings held  
under trees,  
the beauty of cilaan stained feet,  
the giggles and squeals of kids I may  
never meet.

you have a way of turning heads.  
of letting loose oceans from the port of  
our eyes,  
of making soldiers hiccup into a smile,  
and so  
I want to write an ode to you and your  
grace,  
of how although I may be miles away  
you turn our bitter Octobers here  
into gardens  
of May's.

**- Sagal Farah**



# THE ONLY PLACE I CAN WRITE THESE DAYS IS THE BUS

## I. Lambeth North Station.

The doors open  
and there's someone in my seat.  
Back of the bus, to the right, just in front  
of the stairs.  
I sit down on an empty row, put down  
my bag  
and exhale for the first time that day  
like  
a whole body and mind exhale.  
The kind that nestles into the gaps  
between your muscles and holds you in  
place like a slot-by-slot  
puzzle  
moving in between bunched fists and

tired wrists  
and the soft vibrations of my tongue  
full of words that are not my own  
but have become my own.  
This must be that grime of London that  
everyone's always talking about.  
Static, apathetic  
nonviolent.  
Clinging to the parts of me I barely even  
recognise anymore.  
A sticky film of quiet washes over me. I  
breathe into it.  
Like dandelion seeds I unfold  
and gather quietly in the cracks  
between the windows.

## II. Kennington Road.

Lately everywhere I look it's like I can see time.

I cup my hands around it carefully like smoke and I know there's nothing inside but I hold it there for a second.

The dents in my hands swelling with secrets of faded moments I have no grasp of, moments that to me feel fleeting but ebb and grow and etch into every pore.

Every now and then lurching out into everything

like quickfire howling through the air. A kettle-drum beats quietly in the distance.

Sometimes time will stop and feel the pulse for a moment before it slinks back in to its host, sometimes it's just gone.

Leaving in its wake a tangled and messy and trembling wind that is all around you and nowhere and sometimes you may never see it again. The shifting of churning plates is something you'll grow to find solitude in.

### III. Fitzalan Street.

A woman sits next to me, man in tow,  
with three bags in her hands.  
I offer her my seat for her husband and  
she smiles.  
"I've sat next to him for sixty-five years  
thirty minutes apart might just do us  
good."

I imagine what it would be like to spend  
a lifetime saving a seat for another  
person.  
I imagine what it would be like to spend  
a lifetime moving through a pair of eyes  
that feel like your  
own.  
I pick up the phone and call my mother.

#### IV. Windmill Row.

Yesterday I woke up to my head loud  
and spinning as if all my thoughts and  
senses had come  
together  
and staged a rebellion against my  
physical body.  
I called in sick to work.  
Scooped up the parts of me that felt

foreign and held them to the beating in  
my chest until they  
came back to life.  
We stayed there together  
all the disjointed chunks wrapped up in  
one  
until the first milk-blue signs of morning  
swallowed us whole and spat us back  
out again  
in the shape of something that felt real.

## V. Brixton Station.

I remember the last time we were in  
A&E like it was yesterday.  
Your hand cold in mine, your arms in my  
arms  
your laboured breath catching in my  
throat.  
We waited five hours and you counted  
all the hairs on my arms.  
Twice.  
You asked me why they felt like tiny  
spikes  
and I thought about explaining to you  
histories of a shame I couldn't bare  
when it came to my restless body hair  
but instead I said  
"they just grew like that."  
The hours passed with the rise and fall  
of your chest  
and I counted as they moved from one  
side of the room to another.  
Finally, you looked at me as if to say  
time with you is a bandage that will  
unfurl another day  
but for now it is enough.  
We got home and I wrapped you up  
five times in old hoodies and washed  
up blankets, and turned  
on the TV.

Our routine of care etched into us both  
familiar and entirely untouchable.  
But how many times will we put out  
their fires with our love when fire needs  
water, not words?  
I think about all those moments we  
spent together dissecting your dreams  
slicing and tearing and sewing until you  
could recognise them as your own.  
And you never did.  
I wish I could go into your head and  
pluck out your words one by one  
like feathers from a bird  
tie them together and present them to  
you like  
"Here."  
"Here is all I have ever known of you  
since the moment you were born and it  
is all beautiful and  
important to me. "  
You are important to me.  
You  
are the back of the bus at the end of a  
long day. Right at the top, to the right,  
just in front of the  
stairs.

## VI. Jebb Avenue/Brixton Prison.

I almost miss my stop.  
Again.  
Winding through words and restless  
nights  
to feel and understand the moments of  
chaos I've learnt to take shelter in.  
I feel the biting wind on my skin  
and for a moment, there is nothing else.  
The truth is this is not a poem but a love  
letter to times I don't have to think.  
To moments of stillness on a  
southbound bus  
And pockets of pain with people I trust  
to fogged up windows and blurry lights  
to holding each other on hospital beds  
to holding each other when there are no  
hospital beds  
to caring when we have no care left to  
give.  
I reach my estate,  
put my key in the door

and wonder what it means to be rooted  
when you're never fucking rooted  
but always fucking rooted.  
How far will you stretch  
until you've absorbed it all  
until you can feel the snapping strings  
sing the wing-beaten song of a time  
when there were  
no roots or vines.  
When there were only lines and lines  
of idle moments with a tapered end  
and holes that mend  
empty  
blissful  
an airtight yellow that made sense.  
Like dandelion seeds I unfold  
and gather quietly  
in the cracks between the windows.

**- Sana Ali**

# LOOK IN THE MIRROR

I look into the mirror and I see this  
This?  
This face that was given to me  
The face that I am burdened to  
I wonder how can you see true beauty  
It is oh but a wonder for me  
Such a long & restless search  
A futile one?  
I look into the mirror and I think oh....  
Is this all I am to them?  
Just a pretty little face  
I am more than my "beauty"  
Oh why, can you not see that  
Oh why  
Do I have to scream it from my " beautiful" lips  
That you so shamelessly sneered to me  
I look into the mirror and think...  
Is this all that I'm worth  
Is this all my currency in the world?  
No, it's not  
NO, it's not I say

**- Tarrine Khanom**

## **A SLEEPY WISH THAT I CONCOCTED AT 17:16 WHILE ON THE DESK, DOUBLE DISCHARGING:**

To have my name written alongside the most prolific names in Filipino history but not have my bio be glossed over so much that white writers can justify shortening my existence in just one sentence for the sake of page number when proofreading the latest travel guide on the Philippines, where they refer to the Badjao as sea gypsies, speak of Sharon Cuneta like they

watched her grow up and advertise Calauit Safari Park without mentioning the tribes phased out in 1977 during the Marcos regime or how the giraffes are getting too used to people they can longer which ones are for them and which ones are after them

**- Troy Cabida**



# I WRITE

i write for the 12 year old me i spend  
everyday trying to reconnect to  
because although i know universes  
more now  
she could tell each cloud apart  
she could give one look at a plant and  
give a five-thousand word summary  
the clarity of youth slips away when the  
busy adulthood takes over  
i speak really fast  
its a habit from being the youngest  
a habit of having a home with my  
mother  
and a home with my siblings  
and a home on my own when everyone  
was busy  
its a habit of spitting it all out so im no  
longer in the way  
and writing,  
is taking time to have the words  
and then keep them  
the thoughts stop when no ones there  
to listen  
sometimes i stopped listening  
and i write to reach back inside and find  
clarity  
to stay forever living and not just alive  
tribute to the white land we are in right  
now 'the unexamined life is not worth  
living' - socrates  
i write to remind myself the quran is not  
a book about people who lived all those  
years ago

its a lesson for every image my eyes  
take in  
chosen purposefully for these eyes and  
this soul  
to understand something  
am i watching the images or am i numb  
as they flicker in my sight?  
am i wasting my time?  
sometimes,  
sometimes we do  
days of naps and netflix and nonchalant  
conversations where we are careless  
with our existence  
watching days turn to weeks turn to  
months of numb distracting ourselves  
from the fact we  
purposefully distract ourselves to get  
away from the fact we forgot  
we forgot what it was like to look at one  
thing or person and have clear ideas  
about just that  
to be in this exact moment  
instead of constantly connected to 10  
other moments  
when did we become a static image  
glitching in real time?  
lets not forget our souls are not from  
here  
they've been ripped from there home  
put soundly in these bodies that age  
each year  
purposefully  
intentionally

and that unfolding beauty is a film only  
we can watch happen  
you pulled yourself thru hard days  
and woke up in the morning to wash  
your face  
no one else did that for you  
no one in life will ever see you as you  
see you  
and thats okay  
and thats all the personal space you will  
need  
so be a lotus flower sitting on a lake  
within the world but untouched by the  
world

so be energy that you filter 5 times a  
day  
so you can share the compassion your  
heart overproduces  
so you can be something beautiful for  
this world  
so you can be something beautiful for  
your souls future  
so you can let that beauty guide you  
home

**- Yasmin Osman**

## EGO

Chinese people call white folks  
Pale ghosts “bai gui”  
Ghosts make ghosts of you  
shoved of gnawing wind  
Burping down the roads, minted at  
ready  
Who do not seek to take their feet off  
the unappealing  
Even when it is only uncertainty

Crying in its interpretation  
Jone caught in his neck  
tethered to his house, Quickly not  
My grandmother is tethered to me too  
Jumping from never built to understand  
not knowing she could have met  
herself somewhere else

**- Yi Chen**

