

OTHER WORDS

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE WRITING
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SHERIFF OF MECCA: TRAITOR TO THE HOUSE OF ISLAM

ILS

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Other Words
An International Journal of Creative Writing
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Introduction

When truth speaks through poetry, it pierces even the hermetic veils of time. Such was the profound and haunting insight of the Syrian poet Omar Abu Risha (1910-1990), whose couplet strikes at the heart of leadership and betrayal:

لا يُلَامُ الذَّنْبُ فِي عُدْوَانِهِ
إِنَّ بَيْتَ الرَّاعِي عَدُوَّ العَنَمِ

"The wolf is not to be blamed for its aggression
If the shepherd is the enemy of the sheep."

This sentiment finds a stark embodiment in the figure of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali (1853–1931) of Mecca, also known as the Sheriff of Mecca. His betrayal of the Muslim Ummah was deliberate, calculated, and painfully pervasive, leaving an indelible mark on modern Islamic history. Despite his noble lineage, Sharif Hussein's actions rendered him infamous. His legacy persists through his descendants, who, even today, appear indifferent to the suffering of Muslims worldwide. It is deeply troubling that such figures, whom I refer to as shepherds who lead their flock to wolves, make themselves more contemptible than the predators they serve, for at least the wolf's nature is true to itself.

Poetry, far from being merely an outlet for personal emotion or sentiment, must embrace the full spectrum of life's realities, including politics. I firmly believe that poetry and creative writing should reflect not only feelings but also the interconnectedness of everyday life with history, politics, and Islamic sciences. This fusion can reawaken the Muslim soul and foster an informed and spirited generation, capable of understanding history in its true form. In this light, the relationship between poetry and politics is rather pivotal. For it is through this very dynamic relationship that young Muslims can appreciate their history, gain insight into their identity, and resist the forces that seek to divide them. Creative writing must not shy away from political themes but rather integrate them with historical and spiritual wisdom to inspire and educate.

Sharif Hussein, whose actions epitomise betrayal, serves as a significant historical figure whose story must be remembered. He is infamous for his revolt against the Ottoman Empire in June 1916 and his alliance with the brutal colonial powers, which enabled them to oppress his fellow Muslims. While

Islam strives for unity within the Muslim community, Hussein's ravenous greed and unfettered ambition for rulership led to its fragmentation. Misled by empty promises from the West and colonial powers, he sought dominion over Muslim lands, ultimately leaving a legacy of division and dishonour. And thus by understanding figures like Sharif Hussein, we can better grasp the importance of intertwining creative expression with political consciousness to preserve and strengthen the unity and resilience of the Muslim Ummah.

While these shepherds who hunt with wolves still cast their long shadows over Muslim lands, nothing poses a greater threat to the Islamic identity of future Muslim generations than raising individuals who are disengaged from politics and interact with Islam solely through superficial expressions of love and an unrealistic emphasis on peace—what some have termed a “hippie form” of Islam. Islam, according to all schools of thought and sects, is a comprehensive way of life. It is therefore imperative to incorporate politics into the education and upbringing of Muslims. They must be encouraged to understand, empathise with, and amplify Islamic perspectives and opinions through political engagement, ensuring that their faith remains relevant and influential in addressing the challenges of the modern world.

The Other Words Journal of Creative Writing serves not only as a platform to showcase the poetic and prose talents of Muslims but also as a medium for education and reflection. In each issue, the journal highlights a historical figure who either contributed to Islam or opposed it, allowing readers to explore significant personalities and their political roles—whether supportive of or antagonistic toward Islam. This initiative aims to provide the journal's audience, and the Muslim community at large, with valuable insights into history while simultaneously enjoying the creative expressions of its contributors.

It is with great pleasure that I invite readers to explore this third publication, Volume Two, Issue One, of the Other Words Journal of Creative Writing. Within its pages, Muslim poets and writers share their feelings and emotions, offering a collective form of expression that fosters understanding and connection within the community. This shared creativity has the potential to serve as a source of healing, particularly in the face of the crises we encounter in the contemporary world.

Lastly, I firmly believe that Muslims are fully capable of engaging with the modern world. However, there is an unfortunate tendency among some to withdraw from it. I hope that the Other Words Journal can help break this pattern by nurturing and amplifying the creative talents of the Muslim community.

Abdul Hai

Operations Manager

January 2025

Abdul Hai¹

Betrayal

Betrayal of the Moment,
And no voice of Bilal;
The minaret wept in silence.

Silence in the morning prayer,
And the sound of nothingness—
Empty of a thousand men.

A man trading the sanctity of Allah
With the skin of Al-Bayt;
He gambled—

Gambled the Arabian coffee
To Europe's market and forgot
Its taste. The old man dreams—

Dreams of an Arabian horse, once a source of pride,
Losing the race. With the midnight wind,
Badr's victory buried.

Buried and kissed the moment of disunity—
Betraying the Covenant of Allah,
With the wine of traitors.

Traitors are remembered
With blood and ink
And buried in the history of Hijaz
For Betraying.

¹ Abdul Hai; ILS Operations Manager.

Hanna Warsame²

The Ansar

Witness the onslaught of a rising sea,
a desert of men on horseback, they meet
the enemy that they once found family.
You should judge them not, in your modern age,
Before the revered infantry, who was *he*?
Simply man: simply warrior, or sedentary,
And grown indeed out of necessity.
Cloaked were they with a canopy of fortitude,
Survival and strength or they'd be pursued.
Now these are the men you see before you,
They mark our history, personify our views,
Within the seerah or by the teachings o' the Qur'an;
Adorned with golden turbans, note their skin is withdrawn,
Their eyes are uncovered, and nothing else,
Make haste! It is the Ansar who are our guests,
So provide them well wishes, and much respect
Pious and courageous, they eventually became,
The Ansar, over centuries, more known to fame,
And heavily armoured, their garments tell stories,
Ones of glory and glory and glory.

² Hanna Warsame is a Muslim-Canadian writer based in Ottawa, Ontario. She holds an MA in English Literature from the University of Ottawa, where she was the recipient of a SSHRC Master's award for her research into 19th-century Romanticism and the Ottoman Empire. Her poems have appeared at Iceblink Literary Magazine and Clepsydra Literary and Art Magazine. This is her first publication of Islamic poetry. You can find her at <https://hwarsame.wordpress.com>.

reading maketh a full man; an ode to Umar (R.A.)

Ferocity in the morning light, thou art finally home
O caliph, once wretched, you've becom'd now grown,
Before our eyes we see you mature
In poems, in books, and in history, secure,
And after two great men, your rank is third,
O righteous leader, who once overheard
His loved ones reciting that which he knew not
The beginning of "TaHa," it is told, it is taught,
A beautiful sound, when read, made him weep,
The man who once a shepherd, now had freed
Himself rather than those for whom he herded and cared,
Verily it is said the best leaders start there,
Indeed, with hadith, you'll become more aware
What manners construct man, or leader, or spare
So ponder Umar's beginning, as much as the rest
An inkling of greatness had sparked at the crest,
The middle of two extremes, he transformed to be,
Neither tempest nor tranquil, but a median, you see,
He exceeded in all directions, courageous and bold
Wise, just, and moral, as it was foretold.
To Islam he gave what it lacked at his conversion,
A man of great strength, reflection and service,
Discipline at one point had been his right hand,
Though he learned to temper it, to become a better man,
O Umar, wolfish leader, who once took up a sword,
Intending to kill our Prophet, but instead he foreswore
To do any wrongdoing the rest of his life
Nor repeat those acts that caused others such strife
The darkness he detested, never to return

From then on learning to yearn, and yearn
For that sweet heaven which would be his abode,
And if the books are true, it is already so,
O Umar, who entered Islam of free will,
Emphatic in battle as much as in spirit,
We remember you kindly, with love, with lyric,
Now rest easily, your life taught us much,
Of virtue and sublimity, and taqwa, and trust!

The Nightingale

Emperor Mehmed's pen name was *Avni*,
In seasons of rose-coloured light, he wrote,
Of that glistening ruby, beloved was she,
More so to him than the tragedies of old
The stories oft told, a good Ottoman would know,
Lessons that ought inform,
Those inhabitants of the throne,
So as not to fail
As their forefathers
Had done so.

Pious was she,
Who in the dewy light of winter's frost,
Acted as an emblem, a candlelight stalk,
A figurine, or sweet dream, for her lover
As he made his way along the moor,
That long trod-padded sewer,
His rifle a kind of tether,
To the notion of a good shepherd.

With the form of a soldier,
The mind of scholar, the cry of a vulture,
And with that fortune-favoured chance,
His astute viziers entranced,
He must approach the gates of death,
And be put to the test,
And recall though it is fading,
That bravery

Is an Ottoman excess.

For all of earth is but a half-road along the way,
(In fleeting memory, mind you, this is as an *elegy*)
To the dagger of success,
And the shade shall gain precipitously,
As our actions we must collect.

Like a nightingale's crown on high,
May the Ottoman's record be,
The mementos of their shortcomings,
As buried as they are free,
And the couplet but a trusted advisor,
In that history of winners and misers,
As the rose-coloured garden once was,
An object of the Ottoman's love.

Claudia Azizah Seise³

For Maryam

O Maryam,
what was your secret
that God tells your story
in His book?
Millions of Muslims look
upon you with deep reverence.
Can only try to feel and sense
your profound closeness to Ar-Rahīm.

O Maryam,
what is your secret
that makes you one of the few Best.
Was it your test?
Your worship, patience or
tawakkul? Your submission,
complete and full. God chose you to
carry His Nabi.

O Maryam,
are you the secret
that God chose to be one of His?
To enjoy eternal bliss.
Your true rank leaves us wonder.
Mother of the Messiahs—we ponder God's destiny and plan for us.
To taste your secret—
remove our heart's rust.

³ Dr. Claudia Azizah Seise was born in 1983 in Germany and converted to Islam in 2008. Ever since she aims to study Islam and seek knowledge on becoming closer to God. Since age ten, she has been writing poetry. Spirituality and her search for God are important themes in her poetry. She published three poetry collections; among them one on Java and one on Mekka and Medina. Her German poetry has also been published in several collections. Claudia also writes and publishes children's books. She obtained her PhD in Southeast Asian Studies from Humboldt University Berlin, Germany in 2016. Besides her academic writings, she has contributed to the German Islamic newspaper since 2008. Claudia is the author of *Finding God*, published by Daybreak Press in 2024. Instagram: @clazahsei.

Nur Jannah Hassan⁴

Seloka Kasih

Ku belai baju putih pengantin anggun berseri dihias ditatah
Butiran mutiara murni setulus pengorbaban kasih Ummi
Ditabur manik halus bersinar memancar harapan Abah
Disisip benang-benang sulaman doa disepanjang hayat ini.

A Poetry of Love

*As I caress the white wedding dress embellished beautifully
Each pristine pearl glows with the unremitting love of Ummi
Abah's hope scintillates with every bead shiny
Our aspirations and prayers the threads of life's tapestry.*

Setiap titisan keringat yang gugur membasahi
Setiap detik bercengkang mata dikejauhan waktu
Setiap kata hikmat nasihat yang terbit dari lubuk hati
Setiap butiran air mata yang mengalir syahdu
Adalah titipan ruh dari Ummi dan Abah untuk kamu.

*Every drop of perspiration
Late night vigils ticking with every second
Each pearl of wisdom uttered from deep within
Each stream of tears that flows pristine
Becomes our spirit of nourishment for you.*

⁴ Nur Jannah Hassan is an educator, lifelong learner, and advocate for holistic education. She holds a B.Sc. (Hons) in Science from the University of Waterloo, a Diploma in Education (English-Mathematics), an M.Ed. in Guidance & Counselling, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy, Ethics & Contemporary Issues from IIUM. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor at IIUM, where she also leads the Scholars Channel at CENTRIS. She is passionate about fostering intellectual and spiritual growth through Qur'anic and Prophetic ethics and promoting awareness of the Qur'anic worldview, Islamic traditions, and diverse philosophies. Her interests include ethics, holistic health, mental well-being, and creative pursuits like poetry, calligraphy, and gardening.
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Berlayarlah bahtera mu Anaknda berdua
Di lautan hidup yang luas dan dalamnya tak terduga
Pria, sebagai suami haluan bahtera ini di pundak mu jua
Susurilah dengan mawaddah wa rahmah bertunggak iman dan taqwa.

*Raise the sails of your maiden voyage
Across the ocean of life – deep and vast—full of courage
Pria, as a husband you steer the vessel
Cruise along with love and compassion, with Iman and Taqwa on the axle.*

Prawan, pengorbanan adalah pakaian si isteri
Busana hikmah, cinta tulus suci, perlindungan dan penambah cantik
Itulah intimnya pakaian suami dan isteri, bertautan kalbu, kata hati nurani
Bersama sepadan, berbincang bermuafakat, hidup mu kan sentiasa molek.

*Prawan, sacrifice is the robe of the wife
The raiment of wisdom, pristine love, protecting and beautifying
Such intimacy is the garment of marriage, entwined soul, ticking words from
deep within
Communicating harmoniously in synchrony, in bliss your lives will remain.*

Dikala bahtera dilanda taufan kencang
Usahlah hilang pandu, lupa arah luput tujuan
Redha Allah sahaja dituju, Qur'an dan Sunnah mesti dipegang
Ketepikan kehendak 'aku', carilah jalan kesepakatan
Nescaya Nur Ilahi menyuluh kalbu malam dan siang
Walau sekencang mana taufan menggoncang bahagia dirasa manisnya iman!

*When the ocean gets rough; Do not lose sight of your destination
The Pleasure of Allah is what you are after, the Qur'an and Sunnah are to be
tightly held on
Set aside the 'I', search for points of mutual reconciliation
So, the Guiding Light of the Lord illuminates both of you in unison
Regardless of how vicious the waves are lashing,
Smile with the sweetness of faith O Pria and Prawan!*

Berlayarlah bahtera mu anaknda berdua yang disayangi
Berkalung-kalung doa, kasih dan harapan titipan Abah dan Ummi

Ya Ilahi, berkatilah satuan ini dengan Hidayah Mu yang Maha Tinggi
Sinarilah lakaran hidup mereka dengan Nur Mu yang Maha Suci
Pertautkanlah hati-hati ini dengan ikatan Cinta Agung Mu, amin..., amin... Ya
Rabbi!

*Sail O ye who are dearly beloved
With our prayers, our unremitting passion and hopes as your supplies aboard
Dear Lord, bless this union with Thy Guidance Supreme
Illuminate their lives with Your Light Pure and Pristine
Anchor our hearts with Your Love, Eternal and True... amen!*

Diakhir kalam izinkan daku menutup bicara
Telur Pindang bekalan pengembara di zaman lalu
Dalam perjalanan mencari pendita menuntut bijaksana
Itulah santun berhalus kiasan budaya Melayu
Simboliknya telur munggulung harapan ayahanda dan bonda
Buat bekal pelayaran bahtera cinta tulus nan shahdu.

*Allow me to conclude this narration,
Telur Pindang is a nourishment from tradition
For the traveller in pursuit of wisdom,
A symbol of love from the parents,
A subtle parable of the Malay custom,
To nourish the pristine love through its voyage maiden.*

Bunga Rampai suci indah mewangi
Membuka lakar jejak pengantin dirai
Titipan doa dan restu kalian hadirin permintaan kami
Agar layar kehidupan mempelai bahagia abadi
Berebalkan Iman dan Ihsan nan kental jati
Mudah-mudahan lahirlah zuriat Qurrata a'yun yang muttaki!

*Bunga Rampai a fragrant potpourri,
Celebrating the initial sketches of the bride and groom.
Everyone's prayers and blessings are what we seek,
So, their lives remain in blissful bloom,
Nourished by unwavering Iman and Ihsan,
Qurrata a'yun leading the muttaki—the birth of a new generation!*

The Death of Death

In me I find the haunting of a winter night.
Not the wild, brazen breath
Of a vulture from the West.
It's a coldness of a different kind:
The kind that sheds no tears of glass
Nor allows the world to fall apart,
As I lie amidst rubble with our fingers intertwined,
For fingers are all that is left of my child;
My friend took the rest
And left behind
The acrid taste of betrayal.
Yet I hold no grudge;
My friend shall come again,
For me, for all that breathes in the world.
Then my child shall rise once more
With me, to witness with joy
The death of death, my loving friend.

⁵ Afifa Alam Raisa is the Chief Editor of Other Words. A passionate book reviewer, a voracious reader, and an enthusiastic writer, she explores worlds beyond her own through the pages of her books. A student of literature and self-proclaimed cricket enthusiast, Afifa blends her love for stories and sports into a vibrant and curious personality.

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak⁶

A Voice from Humanity

Philosophically speaking, the whole world belongs to me and
I belong to the whole world.
All countries are my country.
For this reason, I call myself the citizen of the world.
If humanity can be analogically described like the colours of the rainbow,
Then I am just a colour in the whole spectrum. Nothing more and nothing less.
I am just a drop in the ocean of people.
All good citizens of the world are my brothers and sisters.
In my faith, I am a Muslim.
In my generosity, I am an Arab.
In my taste for food, I am an Indian.
In my spirit of togetherness with others, I am a Malaysian.
In my common courtesy, I am a Malay.
In my work ethic, I am a Japanese.
In my adoration towards nature, I am a European.
All in all, I am a universal man.
One who believes in the spirit of loving, caring and sharing.
A man who stands for world peace and aspires to create a better world.

⁶ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak is an academic with a B.A. in Islamic Education from Universitas Ar-Raniry, Indonesia, and advanced degrees from IIUM, including a PhD in Educational Psychology. His research focuses on personality theories, particularly comparing Iqbal and Freud. Abbas has taught various courses at IIUM, including Islamic Education Philosophy, Ethics, and Sociology of Education. He has published several books and articles on psychology, spirituality, and Iqbaliyat. Active in international conferences, he advocates for a better world through sharing, caring, and love. His recent works include, "A Drop of Wisdom" (2023) and "Iqbal: The Renaissance Man from the Muslim World" (2023).

Vera Maryam⁷

Patience and Mercy: A Believer's Journey

Oh Allah, this pain, this suffering You've bestowed,
A reminder that in this body, I'm but a guest.
My ache, a testimony to empathy's code,
For others' pain, be it more or less.
I tell myself: judge not, compare not,
But treat all with kindness, a gentle smile.
For in our darkest hours, we seek
Compassion that helps us through each trial.
This trial shall pass, I pray for sabr
Patience to endure, strength to persist.
Heal my body and soul,
Forgive my shortcomings that still exist.
I thank You for Your true presence,
In both joyous and difficult moments of our lives.
For giving us teachings and Quran,
And for our Prophet's guiding life.
Through Muhammad's example, peace be upon him,
You've shown us how to pray and bow down.
Your love flows like an ocean,
Your mercy and guidance for all humankind.

⁷ Veranika Skrypskaya (pen name Vera Maryam) is a Belarusian-American writer and poet whose work bridges cultures and explores religious understanding. With an AS in Paralegal Studies from LaGuardia Community College and a BA in English from Queens College in New York, she brings a passion for justice and a keen eye for the human experience to her writing. Her professional background in healthcare and volunteer work informs her creative pursuits, which often portray her journey in Islam and the search for inner peace through spirituality. Her poetry and prose reflect themes of hope and resilience, drawing from her multicultural experiences.

Abdulwahed Jalal Nori⁸

The Silent Teacher: Memories of a Father's Love and Wisdom

I share this story not just as a tribute to my father but as a lesson for all—both for fathers who are blessed with children and for children who still have their fathers by their side. Life is fleeting, and the moments we spend together are precious beyond measure. For those who still have the gift of their father's presence, cherish every moment, learn from their wisdom, and hold them close. For fathers, may this story remind you of the profound impact your love, guidance, and actions have on shaping the lives of your children. Let us not wait until it's too late to appreciate the bond that defines us, shapes us, and, in the end, remains as our lasting legacy.

My memories of my father are like treasured gems, few in number but shining with a brilliance that has shaped my entire life. He passed away when I was just five years old, yet the brief time we spent together left an indelible mark on my soul. Those moments were not merely memories; they were lessons, teachings that guided me as I grew.

My father was an imam at a local mosque in Sulaimaniya, Iraq and a teacher at an Islamic college, and he often took me to his workplace before I was old enough for school. I can still see myself, a small boy, proudly walking beside him, filled with joy whenever his friends called me a "big man" or "a copy of my father." Those words meant the world to me.

One of the most precious lessons he taught me was compassion. Whenever we came across someone in need, he would place money in my hand and encourage me to give it to them. It was more than just a gesture; it was an act meant to nurture empathy and kindness in my young heart. He showed me that these values are not just taught through words but are deeply rooted in our faith, coming alive through the Quran and Hadiths. His generosity was not just a principle but a lived experience, and he ensured I understood its importance.

⁸ Abdulwahed Jalal Nori holds a PhD in Political Science. He is with the Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies (FIDS) at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). His research interests include future studies and political reform in the Islamic world. Email: wahed@iium.edu.my.

A memory that still warms my heart is from a snowy winter day. I was gazing out the window, watching the snow gently cover our garden in a soft, white blanket. In Iraq, we once experienced all four seasons, and as a child, I loved the snow for its purity and serenity. As I watched, I noticed a small red speck moving in the snow. Alarmed, I called my father, and we rushed outside to find a tiny, trembling kitten, barely alive in the cold. I wanted to bring the kitten inside immediately, and though my father suggested we first search for its mother, he eventually agreed to let the kitten warm up inside. He even went out to buy milk for it, showing me that compassion is not just a value but an action.

The kitten became our pet, but as it grew, it started causing trouble in our home. My mothers weren't too happy with the messes it made, and I could hear their whispered conversations with my father about letting it go. Eventually, my father suggested taking the cat to the masjid, where it could live freely. He didn't force me; instead, he treated me as an equal, offering to buy me a toy in exchange for letting the cat go. I agreed, and we brought the cat to the masjid. A few days later, it disappeared, perhaps finding a new home. In return, I received a small car-shaped toy, powered by a battery, which I cherished for years. Though the toy is long lost, I often wish I had kept it, a tangible reminder of a winter's day, a kitten, and the gentle love of my father.

Another memory that lingers in my heart is from a family reunion picnic organized by my maternal grandfather. It was meant to be a peaceful gathering for the adults, with no grandchildren invited. When I overheard their plans, I begged my mother to let me join. She tried to convince my grandfather, but he refused, worried that if he allowed me to come, all the other grandchildren would want to join too. Determined, I woke up early on the day of the picnic and hid in my uncle's car, hoping to surprise them. When they discovered me, my father looked at me with a gentle smile, understanding my desire to be included. He asked me to come out, promising a special surprise instead. Trusting him completely, I agreed and waved them off like a little man.

My father then took my siblings and me to Sarchnar, a beautiful park in our city with a small river and lush greenery. We enjoyed a boat ride, soaking in the serene beauty around us. Later, he treated us to a meal of delicious kebabs, followed by baklava at a sweet shop. The day ended with a trip to a mini-supermarket, where he bought each of us a toy. It was a day filled with

pure joy, made all the more special by the love and care of a father who knew how to turn a child's disappointment into a cherished memory.

As I grew older, I learned just how many lives my father had touched. One day, an elderly man told me, "Wahed, you don't know how great your father was, how many people he helped." He spoke of how my father had saved many marriages from collapse and was always advising people to act with integrity and kindness in society. My father was known for his social nature, and our home was often filled with guests. At least four to five times a week, we had visitors, and I would watch my mother cook delicious meals for them.

Every Friday evening, my father hosted a neighbourhood gathering at our home in Majid-bag, Sulaimaniya. Neighbours—men, women, and children—would come to our house for a Quranic class. Light refreshments were served, and it was a beautiful gathering. The women would sit on one side of the house, reading the Quran and reflecting on its meaning, while the men did the same on the other side. We, the children, would sometimes play and sometimes join in the Quran reading. As a small boy, I eagerly counted the days until Friday. Sadly, this beautiful tradition has faded away, lost to the influences of westernization and materialism. The absence of such gatherings has contributed to the social issues and anxieties that many young people face today.

My father passed away in 1984 at the age of 45, taken too soon by a massive heart attack. I vividly remember that night. My father was busy making phone calls through our home telephone line, preparing for a trip to Baghdad the next morning. He was supposed to travel with his fellow teachers to receive a car, a reward for the Islamic college teachers, because that year, their students had achieved the highest marks among all branches of Islamic colleges in other cities in Iraq. After finishing his calls, I asked him if I could sleep beside him since he would be away for a few days. He said yes. I fell asleep next to him, not knowing that it would be our last night together.

I was woken up at 2 am by a neighbour's girl, who told me, "Wahed, wake up; your father passed away." I was too young to fully understand what was happening. Our house was filled with people, and I remember seeing my grandmother, my father's mother, who was blind. She was calling my father, saying, "Syed Jalal, it was too soon to leave us. I was supposed to go first." My grandmother was a remarkable woman. She had lost her sight at a young age

and had a unique story about her blindness. She once dreamt that she would become blind the next day, but in the dream, she was told not to worry, for Allah would replace her blindness with insight and reward her with Jannah after her death. This reminds me of a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), narrated by Anas (may Allah be pleased with him): "Indeed, Allah said, 'If I test My servant by taking away his two beloved things and he remains patient, I will compensate him with Paradise.' He meant his eyes." (Reported by Al-Bukhari). My grandmother's insight was indeed strong; she never needed our help to move around the house, and sometimes she could even spot dirt left on the floor by my mother. She lived beyond 100 years and passed away during our fleeing to Iran during the first Gulf War, dying on my uncle's shoulder. She was buried in the mountains between the Iraqi-Iranian border.

Returning to the night of my father's passing, our neighbour, who owned a bus, informed everyone in the house that my father's body was at the masjid, ready for the funeral. In Iraq, funerals are held quickly, with no delay. When we arrived at the masjid, I saw my father in a coffin. As a child, I didn't fully grasp the concept of death; I didn't understand that he would never return. People tried to console me, telling me that my father was traveling to a better place and that I could join him later. I remember they opened the coffin from his head, and I saw his face. My uncle asked me to kiss his forehead, and I did. He then asked me to pray for him, which I did, but I didn't cry. Perhaps I was still in shock.

I began to cry for my father a month later when the reality of his absence hit me. I missed him terribly and realized that he would never come back. I started crying at night, making sure that no one saw me. This habit continued for years until I eventually replaced it with praying for him. Since then, not a single morning or evening has passed without me praying for my father, asking Allah to grant him Jannat al-Firdaus. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "When a man dies, his good deeds come to an end, except three: ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, and a righteous child who will pray for him."

In reflecting on the life and legacy of my father, I find myself constantly drawn to the depth of his character and the profound impact he left on everyone around him. His teachings, though imparted in the short years we had together, have guided me through every challenge and triumph in my life. His lessons on compassion, empathy, and the importance of community have become the

foundation of my values, influencing the way I interact with others and navigate the complexities of the world.

As I journey through life, I realize that my father's legacy is not just a memory but a living, breathing part of who I am. His wisdom continues to guide me, and his love remains a source of strength and comfort. The values he instilled in me have shaped the way I raise my own children, and I hope to pass on his teachings to future generations.

My father's life was a testament to the power of love, kindness, and faith. Though he left this world too soon, his spirit lives on in the hearts of those he touched. I will forever be grateful for the time we had together and the lessons he imparted. In honouring his memory, I strive to live a life that reflects the virtues he cherished, ensuring that his legacy continues to inspire and uplift others, just as it has done for me.

Mohammed Akunjee⁹

Olive Groves and Ancient Stone

In lands of olive groves and ancient stone,
Where the bombs blast a people with a lineage long known,
A spirit remains steadfast and forever strong,
In defiant hearts rooted exactly where they belong.

A generation born to dust and flame,
To dreams this world could never tame,
Where courage burns under silted tears,
And hope resounds despite the embattled years.

The olive trees bear witness still,
To a patient and enduring will,
Where voices echo, fierce and free,
To claim the right of human sovereignty.

The sun may set on lands rent-torn,
Yet, in the dark, new dreams are born.
O people stalwart, with eyes ablaze,
enduring pain through endless days,
You guard the promise of a Pythagorean dawn,
Red, through the prism of the break of morn,

And as the sun tracks those jet-scarred skies, the light will cast away,

Every,

Single,

Lie,

After all, it is God who is great.

⁹ Mohammed Tasnime Akunjee holds a specialization in criminal law and human rights law, focusing on terrorism and related legal fields. He has been involved in notable cases, including the 2019 defamation case against Tommy Robinson, the Almondbury Community School bullying incident, and the citizenship deprivation case between the British government and Shamima Begum. In addition to his legal career, Akunjee is a political commentator and has contributed significantly to discussions on social justice and human rights. He is passionate about advocating for marginalized communities and addressing complex legal and social issues on national and international platforms. He also serves as an advisory member to the Islamic Literary Society.

Marabi S. Hydera¹⁰

Circle of Elders

I remember vividly well
As a young child, in the village I dwell
I can recall the tales of ancient Gambia
Narrated in this circle of elders
While they're busy preparing for the new day
Some honing their farming tools
Others repairing their fishing nests
Some reciting religious books
Others busy with their praying beads
Some brewing *attaya*, *kinkiliba* and *jambarkatang*
While others filling their tobacco pipes
Women busy pounding their newly harvest
Others preparing the night meal and morning breakfast
As a kid I often sat on the ground playing with peers
Steering at them in awe
Whenever I hear laughter,
Jokes are made between the joking relations
With all these different activities, they live together undivided
They eat, drink, laugh, and cry together
If an eye is hurt; other parts of the body go sleepless
Culture and tradition are cherished to the max
Norms and values are never compromised
There is tolerance and freedom of association
For every member belongs to an age group

¹⁰ Marabi S Hydera is a distinguished Gambian writer and public servant with a rich background in parliamentary committees and international affairs. He holds a master's degree from the prestigious Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, which has undoubtedly shaped his global perspective. Marabi's literary contributions are significant, having co-authored two notable anthologies: "A Harvest of Gambian Lines" and "A Long Road to Democracy in The Gambia," both of which showcase his deep connection to his homeland's culture and political landscape. His individual work, "A Food for The Soul," further demonstrates his prowess as a solo author, offering readers a glimpse into his personal insights and reflections. Currently serving as the Director of Committees at The National Assembly of the Gambia, Marabi continues to play a crucial role in shaping his nation's legislative processes while maintaining his passion for literature.

As a child, you're a son or daughter to all
You're loved and picked up whenever you fall
As an elder, you're a mother or father to all
You're called *ba* or *naa* and respected by all
Brothers will leave their farms to work on another's farm
Sisters would work in rain just to help a fellow finish her own
Men are taught to prefer others before self
People live in want than go stealing
Live and property are secured without guards
A mother will take care of her child and her neighbour's
People care for people not because they had wealth
But as a symbol of oneness and selflessness
Trust is honoured and men never betray trust
Humility, sympathy, and empathy is the order of the day
Neighbours don't sleep with full stomach, while their neighbours are starving
Folks are poor materially, but own the richest of hearts
I can see the smile on the face of this old man living in his small hut
I can also feel the warm welcome of this old woman
These are the good days before the advent of modern Gambia

Today we're named the elites and the civilized Gambians
We wear suit and tie and drive fancy cars
Get rich or die is our slogan
We sell out our honour just for a dalasi
The most educated are the most corrupt
We divorce our sacred values for promotion
We serve ourselves before our nation
We live a life filled with lies and deception
Brothers sacrifice brothers just to have wealth
We sing praises for criminals and vilify our saints
We worship leaders and denounce God
We speak truth to the poor and praise the rich
Our laws are meant to punish the weak
We segregate our society into rich and poor
Our level of ignorance has reached beyond measure
We kidnap, rape and torture the innocent
We even slaughter our fellow men in the name of obedience
Just because they refuse to marry evil
We are so myopic that we even put material before human
With all our so-called advancement we aren't happy
I can see this young man falling from his mansion due to depression
I can see this young lady wailing as she drive her four by four

Every other day Tanka is registering new patients
And our cemeteries are filled to neck
How I wish to be a child again
Then and only then, I can recover from this pain

Che Husna Azhari¹¹

Conversations With My Father

My father studied at the Darul Ulum of the Nadwatul Ulama of Lucknow and the Muslim University of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India. He started his studies in 1946, before the Partition of India, which took place in August 1947. He studied at both universities, the details of which are not clear. I discovered this piece of information long after his death when I pieced together our conversations. As a very young child, perhaps as young as eight, I saw his degree hung on the wall of our house in Kelantan. I would not say it was our house in the sense my father owned it; it was a house bequeathed by his in-laws, my grandparents. I later learnt that the degree earned was a first-class degree in Quran and Hadith. If I were to go deep into the recesses of my memory of those times, I would retrieve the one of him pointing to the framed degree most, jubilantly pointing, “This is my degree from Uttar Pradesh.”

My siblings and I learnt that he started his studies in 1946 and returned to Malaya with his degree in 1952. As for the degree, a political opponent mocked and derided the Uttar Pradesh degree, calling it a kacang butir degree, as it was from India, not the prestigious Al Azhar, Egypt, where people of means went for their Islamic studies. It was not even recognised as a “degree” qualification. Nevertheless, the much-maligned kacang butir degree permitted my father to become fluent in four languages: Arabic, Urdu, English, and Malay, his mother tongue. Like many of his generation, his Malay was written in two scripts, Rumi and Jawi.

The ramifications of the derogatory kacang butir degree made him shun sending his children to be madrasah-educated. Instead, we were sent to be English-educated. He was never to be outdone. To show his prowess in the English language, he would sing us his favourite songs learned in British India, albeit newly independent:

¹¹ Che Husna Azhari. CEng. PhD is a writer, company director, and Emeritus Professor from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. She graduated from Brunel University, Uxbridge, for her undergraduate and PhD degrees. Most of her time and experiences in the United Kingdom were captured in her book of short stories, *An English Sojourn*, published in 2008. She is one of the writers of the Women in Malaysian Literature in English (WMLE).

*Under the spreading chestnut tree,
There we sit both you and me
Oh, how heffy we will be
Under the spreading chestnut tree*

My father learned Anglo-English from Arabic; he pronounced **p** as *f*...there is no **p** in the Arabic alphabet, only *fa*. So, when we requested for pocket money, he would invariably answer:

My focket is emfty

Of this distant place called Uttar Pradesh, where my father read for the much-maligned kacang butir degree, I learned that the language of fine conversation was Urdu. We were taught many phrases in Urdu, many of which I have forgotten, save one, Muhabbat Zindagi Hai (Love is Life). It was the title of a film of the same name. To our father's credit, we learnt the phrase before this film was released. Perhaps it came from a poem he loved. From Uttar Pradesh, I learnt not only to love life but to love the flatbreads of North India, its salads and chutneys. Flatbreads and chutneys were my father's staple holiday treats for us, cooked by him. On Sundays with our father, he would repair to the kitchen, get my mother out, cook us the foods he probably cooked for himself and his friends where he lodged during his student days. The breakfasts were always flatbreads with salads and chutneys only, never with meat. Perhaps these were the only victuals a student on a paltry stipend could cook.

My father entered active politics in 1955, winning a state seat under UMNO. It was the year I was born. My mother called it The Year of Deputations. Many deputations came to see the assemblyman with very little money to give. Then, politicians were like my father, big on dreams and little with money to fritter. He was only a one-term member, as he lost to PAS in the 1959 General Elections. Fortunately, his party mentor salvaged him with a position. He became an officer in the Special Division (Islamic Information Division) in the Ministry of Information. By this time, I was in secondary school. Our conversations had lost much of their Uttar Pradesh tinge but never the Anglo-English. I only had conversations with him during my school holidays. These were special times because I only came home during the holidays as I was at boarding school. I went to boarding school at my father's insistence. I guess I did many things at my father's insistence.

The Islamic Information Division was tasked to explain government policies, particularly so, to rural Malaysia. Although my father was headquartered in Kuantan, the team he was a member of was responsible for *informing* the whole

state, so to speak. This explains why I consider Pahang my adopted state. My father's Islamic Information Division entourage would tour the FELDA settlements and much of rural Pahang, giving ceramahs as part of the core function of the Ministry, that is, *to inform*. I followed my father around the FELDA settlements of Bukit Goh, the Jengka Settlement Projects, and deep Pahang like Chenor. I went through the breadth and depth of Pahang, from Genting Sempah to Kuantan, from Rompin to Beserah. In all these sojourns, I never once asked my father, the Indian-educated Ustaz, why an Islamic-studies-educated graduate was an important component of this team. I surmised the reason was because Pahang was an East Coast state with proximity and close ties to Kelantan. Many of the FELDA settlers hailed from PAS-held Kelantan; hence, a state officer explaining government policies must be well-versed in Islam and able to stand tall when countered by PAS ideologues. An ignoramus in Islam will not bode well.

Our conversations then revolved around the *Revolusi Mental* of the late Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia's second Prime Minister. The said conversations were mostly monologues, with my father holding court. My father was an entertaining speaker. You could listen to him speak all day without getting bored at all. The referred tome for the *Revolusi Mental* was compiled by Tan Sri Senu Abdul Rahman, the information minister. My father was an ardent Tun Razak fan (the *Razak* was pronounced in Arabic accent), so he attributed the movement to Tun Razak, not Tan Sri Senu. The *Revolusi Mental* was the brainchild of UMNO's Youth Division, the ruling party. Quoting from memory, probably gleaned from his oft-repeated ceramahs, my father expounded on the main foundation of the *revolusi* or revolution.

“The Revolusi Mental is designed to change how members of our society think, their views, and attitudes to enable them to adapt to current demands, spearheading them to be more competitive and proactive to grab opportunities in all aspects of life.”

Then, turning to me, he declared, *“You, too, must grab these opportunities. You must be the first Muslimah to be a PhD holder. We must show the world that Muslim women are capable of being highly educated. This means having a PhD.”*

He finished with a flourish, probably thinking he was still in one of his *ceramahs*.

At that age, I did not know what a PhD was, much less what I had to do to hold it. I was also in the dark if other *Muslimahs* had been there before me, holding this coveted PhD.

Again, as if I had no choice but to do his bidding, he declared,

“You must join your brother in the United Kingdom and get a PhD. Do whatever it takes, sieve the ocean, mould Japanese slippers. Do what you must, to get a PhD.”

I let these exhortations pass. I spent my time at school, writing and being on stage. I wanted to be a thespian, like one in the West End. I could memorise Shakespeare better than the longer Quran *surahs*. I read Steinbeck and Hardy at 14, the abridged English classics at 10 or 11. I was the product of a typical Commonwealth education of the early 60s. Still, I was also the daughter of an *Ustaz*, however embracing and beholden he was to his daughter grabbing all opportunities, akin to the ideal Mental Revolution citizen, being a West End actor was not part of his plan in the scheme of things. Having a PhD was. Although my father ordered me to be the first Muslimah (sic) to hold a PhD degree, the Mental Revolution Ideology (sic) was not divisive; it did not mention race as the target group of attitudinal change or in modern parlance, a paradigm shift. Instead, it chose the embracing phrase “*anggota-anggota masyarakat*”, which translates into English as **members of society**.

I bade goodbye to my father at Subang International Airport in September 1973, putting a halt to our face-to-face conversations. We corresponded through letters. My father wrote me letters either in Jawi or Malay script in a very formal fashion, following the custom of the day. I replied in an equally formal fashion. We always start with the formal, “*Kehadapan anakanda/ayahanda yang dikasihi*” (Meeting my beloved daughter/father) and end with, “*Anakanda/ayahanda yang ikhlas*” (Your sincere daughter/father). In my second year at university, I returned home to intern at the Rubber Research Laboratory at Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. I spent six beautiful months with my father. Little did I know they were going to be the last times we were going to be together. My father died in a car accident the year after, in 1978, at the relatively young age of fifty-one.

My father would send me to work and leave his office by three pm to fetch me from the laboratory. He would tell his colleagues,

“Ana kena amik anak ana dari Ampang” (I must fetch my daughter from Ampang). He used the Arabic pronoun for *me*.

He carefully withheld the information that the daughter was a grown university student, not a primary school student. He would park his car under a giant tamarind tree near the laboratory and patiently wait for me to finish work in full view of my colleagues.

During my brief sojourn home, we would sit outside the house after Isha prayers and share our thoughts. This time, it was me holding court. I shared with him my discovery of an intellectual Islam, a political Islam, the focus of the young Muslim students from the Commonwealth who studied in the United Kingdom in the 70s.

“There is only one way to unite the Islamic millet, liberate the occupied Muslim territories, rid them of the stooges of colonial power, and establish a true Islamic state. Islamic rules and laws have a permanent validity, and the Shariah does not condone anarchy and lawlessness. Therefore, establishing an Islamic governance is obligatory’.

I too, expounded our *usrah* material from our *usrah* sessions in the UK, as if I were the Muslimah *usrah* leader, to my intently listening father.

The encounters of the Malay Muslim students from the *tanah-tumpah-darah* of the Malay heartlands with many older Muslim intellectuals in the UK, particularly the Ikhwanul Muslimin Diaspora introduced us to the fermenting thoughts leading the student Islamic movement of the 70s. Thus began our introduction to student Islamic movements, the early FOSIS, the personalities, and the giants of the pan-Islamic movement sweeping the Muslim world. One of the giants we heard speak at a FOSIS conference at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick was the physically and charismatically imposing Dr Hasan al-Turabi, the Sudan Ikhwanul Muslimin political leader and principal ideologue. I told my father of our *usrahs*, the books we read and discussed, books by Maulana Maududi, Syed Qutb, Said Ramadan, and other well-known scholars from both madhabic divides. These books became our text in our search for an intellectual Islam. The books provided the intellectual arsenal to buttress our ideological bulwark.

During one such conversation, I mentioned reading *Islam and the World* by Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Hasani Nadwi. My father listened intently but did not interrupt me. I told my father how we, the younger generation, threw our ossified ideas on Islam upon discovery of these exciting books that taught you to think of ideas that revolutionise your staid ideas of Islam. An Islam of rigid rituals. I intimated that the Islam we discovered, the brave new generation, was an Islam of freeing one of the fetters of petrifying *fiqh*. It was a vibrant political

Islam. This is not the Islam we left in Malaysia on our outward-bound journey to intellectual freedom.

Again, my father smiled indulgently. Finally, he looked at me and said softly, wistfully, almost.

“My dear dawter (daughter) the Maulana was my teacher at Darul Ulum. You and your dear comrades know him through his books. He was my teacher. I sat at his feet. I saw his life.”

My father told me about the Maulana that only the student could because he took the knowledge directly from the master. This revelation made me see my father in a completely different light—not just the flatbread and chutney-cooking father or the UMNO apparatchik but a man who could be one of those authors of the books I read about in the dizzyingly exciting journey of finding Islam.

I assumed my father was an old-school *Ustaz*, although, in his youth, he identified as *Kaum Muda*. Again, I could surmise that being an alumnus of the much-perceived progressive Aligarh University, he was probably *Kaum Muda* in bent. If he were not *Kaum Muda*, his obsession with me being the first Muslimah with a PhD would not somehow come to the fore.

My father died in 1978 when I was in the final year of my undergraduate degree. He did not live to see me graduate with a PhD. I am convinced I was not the first Muslimah to have read for a PhD. I did not sieve an ocean to get it, but I managed to do something near his second option of moulding the Japanese slippers; I managed to design a process for the fabrication of generic Japanese slipper-like materials.

Arifa Jaman Mariyam¹²

মুসাফির

কহিল রব ডাকিয়া আমায়,
পৃথিবীতে বাজার করিতে পাঠাবো তোমায়!
আমল কিনিবে ব্যাগ ভরিয়া, সময়ের বিনিময়।

The Traveler

The Lord said, calling me aloud,
“I’ll send you to the world’s crowd!
To gather deeds, your bag to fill,
Time shall be your currency and will.”

কিনিতে হলে আমল, জানিতে হবে এলেম।
ইকরা ইকরা ইকরা, পড় পড় পড়।
পড় তোমার প্রভুর নামে,
এর শেষ কোথায় কে জানে!

To earn those deeds, knowledge you must gain,
Read, read, read again.
Read in the name of your Lord Divine,
Where this journey ends, no one can define.

চলিতে চলিতে ক্লান্ত হলে,
জিরিয়ে নিও গাছের নিচে।
রিজিক তুমি পেয়ে যাবে,
হাজিরা দিও সূমি়্য মাম্মার আগে।

¹² Arifa Jaman Maryam is an Islamic book lover, a passionate writer, and a dedicated student. She enjoys reading books, cooking, taking care of plants, and cherishing natural serenity. Currently, she is pursuing her first year of honors in the Department of Zoology. Maryam's ultimate goal in life is to attain Allah's pleasure and live by the principles of modesty and hijab. In the future, she dreams of establishing a library. Her focus and passion lie in acquiring Islamic knowledge and conducting research on it.

As you walk and grow weary,
Rest beneath the shade of a tree so cheery.
Your sustenance you'll find in its due way,
But rise and give thanks before the sun's first ray.

প্রতিদিন শেষ প্রহরের শেষ আসমানে,
আসিবো আমি তোমার সাক্ষাতে।
দুঃখ যত থাকিবে মনে,
কমিয়ে দিও আমায় বলে।

Every day in the last part of the night,
I'll descend to meet you, offering my light.
Pour out your sorrow, unburden your heart,
And lessen your grief with words from the start.

এভাবেই একদিন সময় ফুরোলে,
আসিবে ফিরে আমার নীড়ে।
দেখিতে চাইবো কি আনিলে,
দুনিয়া থেকে ব্যাগ ভরে...!

One day, when time runs out,
You'll return to me, leaving behind doubt.
I'll ask to see what you've brought along,
From the fleeting world where you once belonged.



**The
Arab
Revolt**

OTHER WORDS

ILS