

3. SABA HAMZAH (YEMEN/The NETHERLANDS)

I am the Bridge yet I cannot break me

I have been postponing a lot of writing
I am waiting for the right time, the right genre, the right language
I postponed too much
That all the thoughts are fighting in my head like a tsunami
Flooding me with them

Sometimes I feel the only way to express myself is in English

وأحيانا أشتي أكتب بالعربي
لكن ليس أي عربي
بل بلغة البن المريرة
بالعامية اليمنية السمراء
المحمصة مثل ذاكرتي وتجاربي

Maar soms vind ik het heel moeilijk om ze niet in Nederlands uit te leggen
Ik wil graag mijn zonen mijn شتات te lezen

Maar misschien is dit niet waar
Misschien wil ik gewoon met hun spelen
Ik doe dat
Ik zeg: wat betekent dit in het Arabisch?
Ze proberen het uit te leggen
Maar soms, zegt de jongste
Waarom, waarom moet ik Jemenitisch leren!?? Ik WOON in Nederland!!

I love his way of protesting
I love his arguments
BUT
I also love languages
They bring people together
Maar soms
They set them apart

أقول حينها: ما جدوى الكتابة؟؟

فيرد صوتي
سأكتب
سأكتب حتى يتدفق حائطي
من الوادي .. للجبل
وتصدح الكلمات كالصدي
فتخلق لي من قلب الصمت صوتا

International Writing Program Panel Discussion Series (Fridays 12-1 pm)

Iowa City Public Library

9/1/2023 - *Languages on The Fault Lines*:

Tammy Lai-ming Ho (Hong Kong), Mary Rokonadravu (Fiji), Saba Hamzah
(Yemen/Netherlands), Nektaria Anastasiadou (Turkey)

For electronic texts, visit <http://iwp.uiowa.edu/archives/iowa-city-public-library-presentations>

This poem is part of an article that I co-authored with my dear friend Kolar Aparna for a feminist issue on the politics of refusal. Our essay "Languaging as Refusal" focused on questions such as: Who is the subject-object of refusal? What is the language of refusal? How to speak from our burning guts that refuse to refuse in a language that doesn't speak to our daily lives and struggles? How does one listen to the silences in histories of slavery, war, patriarchy, colonial trauma, and gender violence passing through our bodies while writing?

In the accompanying essay, we reflect on these questions by interspersing pieces of texts, experiences, visuals, and poetry, by entangling biographies, traumas and memories situated in our everyday contexts and processes of teaching, writing for healing and for a living.

In 2021, after only 3 years of living in the Netherlands, I was nominated for the prestigious literature award El Hizra for my first poem in Dutch. I wrote the poem in Dutch during a period of quarantine that evoked a lot of emotions and traumas that I wanted to document in written words.

I wrote the poem in Dutch because I wanted my kids, who were more fluent in Dutch than in Arabic or English, to read me. My kids regard me as the perfect mom, the superhero, and I am proud they see me this way, but I wanted them to see me for who I really am, with the fault lines in my mind and body. I wanted them to learn that a mother, whether a parent, language, or land, is and can never be always perfect.

When I was asked to make a film recording of the poem, the committee suggested that I might want to read the poem's translation into English or Arabic. But I chose to record it in Dutch.

I still remember the fear I experienced at the studio, but it was a moment of fear that I wanted to document. And as a friend said once, this is our reality, and languages roll in new ways on new tongues. It was not the Dutch audience I was afraid of. I was afraid of my particular audience: my own kids. What if they felt ashamed, what if they corrected my pronunciation, or what if they said nothing??

When the poem was published online, my kids watched it, and to my surprise, they all came to me, hugged me so tight, and told me they were "trots op me"! I immediately asked: And my Dutch!? They said: "je deed heel goed!" They said they were proud of me, and I did really good.

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