

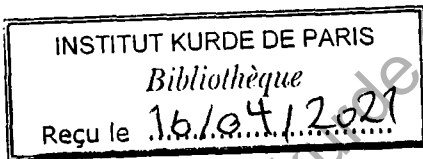
Anthology  
— of —  
Contemporary  
Kurdish  
Poetry



Institut kurde de Paris

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# Anthology of Contemporary Kurdish Poetry



Liv. 7679

Published by  
Kurdistan Solidarity Committee  
and Yashar Ismail

44 Ainger Road  
London NW3 3AT  
tel/fax 071-586 5892

© December 1994

ISBN: 0 9524991 0 X



We gratefully acknowledge the financial  
assistance of the London Arts Board

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# Photographs

1. Kurdish woman and her children who fled from Turkish bombing attacks to south Kurdistan. (May 1994 Richard Wayman)
2. Kurdish youth learning Kurdish folk dance in a basement in Istanbul. They could have gone to prison for this. (September 1991 Ed Kashi)
3. Kurdish women at demonstration in London against the massacre of the Turkish army in Kurdistan. (July 1991 Carolyn Austin)
4. Kurdish woman gives victory salute, Kurdish New Year celebrations, Barfi, northwest Kurdistan. (March 1993 Richard Wayman)
5. After the bombing of Lice. (November 1993 Mark Campbell)
6. Yildiz Alpdogan, a Kurdish woman in the dock of the State Security Court in Diyarbakir, charged for 'terrorism' who was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. (summer 1991 Ed Kashi)
7. One of her six 'disappeared' sons, Saddam's 'Anfal', where 180 000 'disappeared' from Qushtapa camp in south Kurdistan. (Martin Pope)
8. After the exodus: displaced children in south Kurdistan. (Martin Pope)
9. Kurds celebrating Newroz (New Year). (March 1994 Peter Grant)
10. Kurdish women guerrillas. 18-year-old Jaiyan (pictured left; her name means 'Life') was killed in the spring of 1994 in a mountain camp on the Turkey/Iraq border. (July 1992 Richard Wayman)





# Acknowledgements

Poems translated from Kurmanji Kurdish

by Andrew Penny and Baran Rizgar

*I am on a Journey, A Letter from Prison, Karnveli Hill*

Poems translated from Sorani Kurdish

by Kamal Mirawdeli

*Land, The Gun, In my Country, Comparison, The Seeds, My City, Life and Death, New Year Feast and Freedom, Nazim Hikmet talks with Humanity, The poem which ends, ends not, Martyr, Mother you are not Winter, A Song for the Departure of Siyamund, The Unknown Soldier, Vigilance, Where have you come from?, Eva, The Road of the Gun, Kurdistan: the Land of Blood.*

Poems translated from Sorani Kurdish

by Mohammed Khaki and Sara Macdonald

*Bombardment, Butterfly Sleep, Homesickness, My Wish*

Editors

Estella Schmid, Sheri Laizer and Kamal Mirawdeli

Typesetting and cover design

Philip Loxton

Cover photograph

N Kasraian, *Kurdistan*, Oriental Art Publishing, Sweden

*(Details of ancient designs on Chikh or the straw mat. Each of the straws is adorned with colourful wool before being woven into a mat. To create designs radiating the real life and a view of the existence which has taken roots in the forgotten history of the tribe.)*



## FOREWORD

# Harold Pinter

The suffering of the Kurdish people gave birth to these poems. What they express, however, is not only pain and sorrow but resistance – an absolute determination to survive appalling persecution. The suppression of the Kurds is a brutal and largely ignored outrage of shocking proportions. These poems are naked, passionate, vivid and arresting. They spring from direct and immediate experience. This is a deeply moving anthology.

# Introduction

SHERI LAIZER

As the 20th century comes to a close, Kurdish literature and poetry is experiencing a vital regeneration comparable to a renaissance. Undismayed by the repression and undeterred by the prohibitions and bloodshed in Kurdistan, the Kurdish people continue their struggle for the lawful recognition of their rights, the defence of their culture and their very existence. They defend their lives with two powerful weapons: language and the armed struggle. Poems, songs, a flood tide of new books on Kurdish life and history reach out across the generations and maintain the continuity of identity against all odds, inspiring pride in the past and hope in the future. This cultural resurgence sustains the Kurdish momentum to resist the hidden war which rages in the villages and mountains of their homeland.

In making our selection for this short anthology of Kurdish poetry, we looked for certain qualifying features: the poets should all be living poets writing at the time of our selection; they should be poets who had broken with the old classical forms of Kurdish poetry and whose imagery was immediate, less reliant on symbolism than the preceding generations. This would make the poems in translation more accessible to English readers. The poets and their poems would originate from the four main parts of divided Kurdistan – Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria – even if the writers had been forced into exile on account of their work or because of their loyalty to their Kurdish roots.

The poems chosen for this anthology have been selected on their individual merit and counterbalance each other. The work of well-known poets sits beside the work of other younger or newer poets whose reputations have still to be established. We also wished for the poems to cover the most essential aspects of Kurdish life at this period; endurance and commitment, side by

side with a powerful longing for freedom, for peace and release from the constant suffering and repression of ordinary Kurdish people whose lives over the past century have been played out against the background of a terrific struggle for survival and due recognition of their rights.

As the Kurdish poet Ferhad Shakely says, "There is a strong link between the condition for poetry and the political condition at any given moment. By following the history of Kurdish poetry, its periods of stagnation and expansion, we get an interesting picture of the place and conditions for literature in society. And although the relationship between literature and political situation is a complex one in many ways, it is a fact that in periods of relative freedom and prosperity literary life has flourished..." (Hannah Branness, *Kurdish Poetry with special emphasis on Goran, Kurdistan Report*, March 1992)

In the poems featured here, certain underlying themes occur again and again; the love for Kurdistan and the natural world of mountains, plains, rivers, flowers, sun, moon and stars; admiration and veneration of the Kurdish freedom fighters, known either as guerrillas, or peshmergas ('those who face death') as with Rafik Sabir's *Road of the Gun*; the male poets' love of women and the torment of unrequited love – due to feudal traditions, war or exile; the tragic loneliness of exile and the poets' overwhelming longing to see Kurdistan again; images of rage at the loss, destruction and brutality witnessed in the course of war, but at the same time pride and honour in fighting for one's people and country such as in Jiyan Adar's poem, *I am on a Journey*; the difficult struggle of Kurdish women for greater independence and equality within a traditionally patriarchal society – an equality being won by Kurdish women fighting for a free Kurdistan alongside their men both in exile

and in the cities, towns and villages of occupied Kurdistan, or, as in the poem, Karnveli Hill, among the guerrillas in Kurdistan's mountains.

But what must be remembered are the constraints under which Kurdish poets, writers, and songwriters give expression to their ideas and emotions.

In Turkey (north Kurdistan), although the Kurdish language is no longer illegal in its spoken form, there are severe restrictions on when it is able to be used. All Kurdish patriotic, political or national sentiments are forbidden in speech, writing, music and in broadcasting. Books, magazines, audio cassettes and films are subject to extreme censorship by the Turkish Government which refuses to acknowledge the distinct ethnic identity of the Kurdish people living within its present borders. Kurds outside Turkey are referred to euphemistically as nationals of the country dominated by the ruling majority – eg as Iraqis, Iranian citizens, Kurdish-speaking citizens of Turkey etc.

In Iraq (south Kurdistan), although the Kurdish language has not been subject to such annihilating treatment by the various governments of Iraq, successive regimes have always sought to contain Kurdish aspirations and limit Kurdish 'autonomy' in practice, even if not in name. The Kurds have been subject to a campaign of genocide in Iraq by the ruling Ba'ath party which came to power in 1963. Although there was a brief period of hope and comparative freedom during which time Kurdish music and poetry also flourished in Iraq, the collapse of the Kurdish movement in 1975 saw many Kurdish intellectuals flee to safety abroad. The most dedicated of the writers, singers and poets continued their creative lives in their countries of exile but these compositions inevitably reflect the writers' enormous

longing to return home: home to a land of peace, not of strife and destruction.

In Iran (east Kurdistan), Kurdish culture – literature, poetry and music – flourished in the period before the two world wars, and during the brief heyday of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in 1946 when Kurdish aspirations for self-rule experienced a short dawn of fulfilment. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, however, cultural expression of every kind has been repressed in Iran and the Kurdish liberation movement in the northeast of the country has suffered setback after setback with successive assassinations of Kurdish leaders. Although the regime tolerates some classical Kurdish and Persian music and poetry, contemporary sentiments must be cloaked in stereotyped imagery. In this anthology, we have not included such revered Kurdish poets from east Kurdistan as Hemin, because their work belongs to an earlier generation of classical Kurdish poetry and cannot be considered 'modern'.

This is by no means an exhaustive collection. This short anthology simply aims to introduce the reader to Kurdish poetry while recognising that although, inevitably, the unique rhythms and nuances of the original poems in the Kurdish language become dispersed in translation, the emotions and imagery remain vibrant and intact, inviting us into the true heart of Kurdistan.

# About the Poets

SHERKO BEKAS, son of Faiq Bekas, is one of the most famous Kurdish poets. Sherko was born in 1940 in Sulaymaniya in Southern Kurdistan (Iraq). He was educated in Sulaymaniya and Baghdad and published his first collection of poems there in 1968. His poems reflect his close association with the Kurdish liberation movement which he joined in 1965, working in the movement's radio station – the Voice of Kurdistan. During the period 1984–1987 he lived with the Kurdish *peshmergas* (freedom fighters). Since 1987, Sherko Bekas has lived in Sweden where he continues to write. In 1987 he was awarded the Swedish PEN Club's Tucholsky Prize. In the same year he was awarded the freedom of the city of Florence.  
(Summary from *Index on Censorship*, by H Sinjari, 1988)

RABUN BELENGAZ was born in 1969 in Karakocan in the Turkish-occupied part of Kurdistan. His family migrated to Australia when he was only six years old. Belengaz finished his studies at Sydney University, graduating from the Faculty of Engineering. At that time, he became interested in the Kurdish question and in writing and reading poetry. He left Australia and settled in Europe in 1993 to write and devote himself to raising international awareness of Kurdish issues.

AZAD DILZAR was born in Koya in south Kurdistan in 1947. He worked for many years as a primary school teacher and music tutor, as well as on his writing and poetry.

MARIF OMAR GUL was born in south Kurdistan in 1956. He studied law at Baghdad University where he gained his BA in 1982. He obtained an MSc in Law from Kiev University in the Ukraine in 1990 and is currently completing his PhD in International Law at the same University. He has published two volumes of poems.

LATIF HALMAT was born in Kifri in south Kurdistan in 1947. He is one of the post-Goran vanguards of modern Kurdish poetry. He has been working as a journalist for most of his life and has published five volumes of his poetry.

ADAR JIYAN (pseudonym) was born in 1957 in the village of Dengize near the town of Savur, in Mardin province, northwest Kurdistan. He graduated from the Imam Hatip College of Mardin and studied at the Education Institute in Urfa. He worked as a teacher in primary schools in Mardin and Elazig provinces. Adar was arrested and imprisoned for using the banned (Kurdish) letters x, q, c and w. After his release he was sent to exile in Yozgat. He now works there as a teacher and is married with two children,

MOHAMMED KHAKI was born in Saqqez, east Kurdistan in 1953. He has written four volumes of poetry. He obtained a diploma in journalism in Tehran in 1973 and worked in East Kurdistan as a journalist and as an editor and newswriter for Kurdish radio until 1989, when he left Iran for Sweden. He has lived in London since the end of 1990, working in the field of human rights and on behalf of refugee communities, as well as researching for Amnesty International, while continuing to develop his career as a poet and writer.

KAMAL MIRAWDELI was born in south Kurdistan in 1951. He studied for his BA in English at Baghdad University, after which he taught English in secondary schools between 1973 and 1981. He left for exile in England in 1981. He obtained an MA in cross-cultural studies (1983) and his PhD in Literature (1987) from Essex University as well as an MSc in economics from the London School of Economics (1991). Mirawdeli emerged as a writer, literary critic and poet in the 1970s and since then has written on a wide range of subjects covering literature, history, politics and philosophy in Kurdish, Arabic and English and has published two volumes of poems.



ABDULLA PASHEW was born in Bahrka village in Arbil in 1945. He has been living in exile in Russia, Libya and Sweden since the late 1970s. He received a PhD in Literature from Moscow University. Pashew has published three volumes of his poems.

RAFIQ SABIR was born in Qaladiza in south Kurdistan in 1950. He gained his first degree (BA) in the Kurdish language from the University of Baghdad in 1974. He joined the Kurdish movement in 1978 and his life as a peshmerga became the source of many of his poems. He obtained a PhD in the cultural history of the Kurds from the University of Sofia in 1988. He is presently living in exile in Sweden where he has published a complete volume of his poetry. He was one of the new post-Goran generation of modernisers of Kurdish poetry.

SHAHIN B. SOREKLI was born in 1946 in the Kurdish town of Mazra near the town of Kobani (Arabic name: Ain El Arab), 30km east of the Euphrates on the Syrian-Turkish border in west Kurdistan (Syria). After finishing his secondary studies in the Syrian city of Aleppo in 1965, he left for Europe where he studied in Austria and Germany for three years. He arrived in Sydney, Australia in 1968 and has lived there ever since. He has Australian citizenship and is married with two sons. He resumed study in 1974 and graduated from Macquarie University in 1978. He now teaches high school in Sydney. Between 1979-1984, Shahin was the President of the Australian-Kurdish Association, the first of its kind in Australia. In 1982 and 1983 he presented a weekly radio programme in Kurdish and English on 2 SER FM. Since 1985 he has been the co-ordinator/presenter of the Kurdish Language Programme of SBS radio.

Shahin has published five books in Kurdish. He has also written many literary, educational and political articles, short stories and poems for various magazines and newspapers in Kurdish, English, Arabic and German.

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# Sherko Bekas

from SMALL MIRRORS

I

LAND

When I touched the bough of a tree  
it trembled in pain

When I held out my hand to the branch  
the trunk started to weep  
when I embraced the trunk  
the soil under my feet shuddered  
the rocks groaned

this time when I bent down and collected  
a handful of earth  
all Kurdistan screamed.

1985

V

THE GUN

To make the mountain happy  
the trees asked the wind  
to play music with them like flutes

To alleviate the garden of tedium  
the bird asked the river  
to let its waves hold hands and dance

And in order to set the poetry free  
the land asked the peshmergas guns  
to set fire to this dark night  
and die in the arms of the sun.

XI

## IN MY COUNTRY

In my country  
newspapers are born dumb  
radios are born deaf  
televisions are born blind

and those in my country  
who want these to be born healthy and free

They make them dumb and kill them  
they make them deaf and kill them  
they make them blind and kill them

this is what happens  
in my country.

## XIII

### COMPARISON

Twelve midnight exactly  
two mated hands  
precise  
like Kurds and sorrow

Twelve o'clock midnight  
like my imagination  
a clean bright dinner table  
twenty cigarettes  
and only one key word

after one o'clock  
two separate hands of the clock  
like me and the eye of my country

After two o'clock  
like exiles and asylum seekers  
pen, paper, and items on the table  
all disparate and confused

After three o'clock  
ashtrays full of butts  
and tobacco ash  
a room full of smoke

Beside it  
a sleeping poet  
a vigilant poem.

1989

XVII

THE SEEDS

We were millions  
we were old trees  
newly growing plants  
and seeds.

From the helmet of Ankara  
they came at dawn  
they uprooted us  
they took us away  
far away.

On the way the heads of  
many old trees drooped  
many new plants died in the cold  
many seeds were trampled under foot  
lost and forgotten

We grew thin like the summer river  
we diminished like flocks of birds  
towards the time of autumn  
we diminished to mere thousands

We had seeds  
carried back by the wind  
they reached the thirsty mountains again

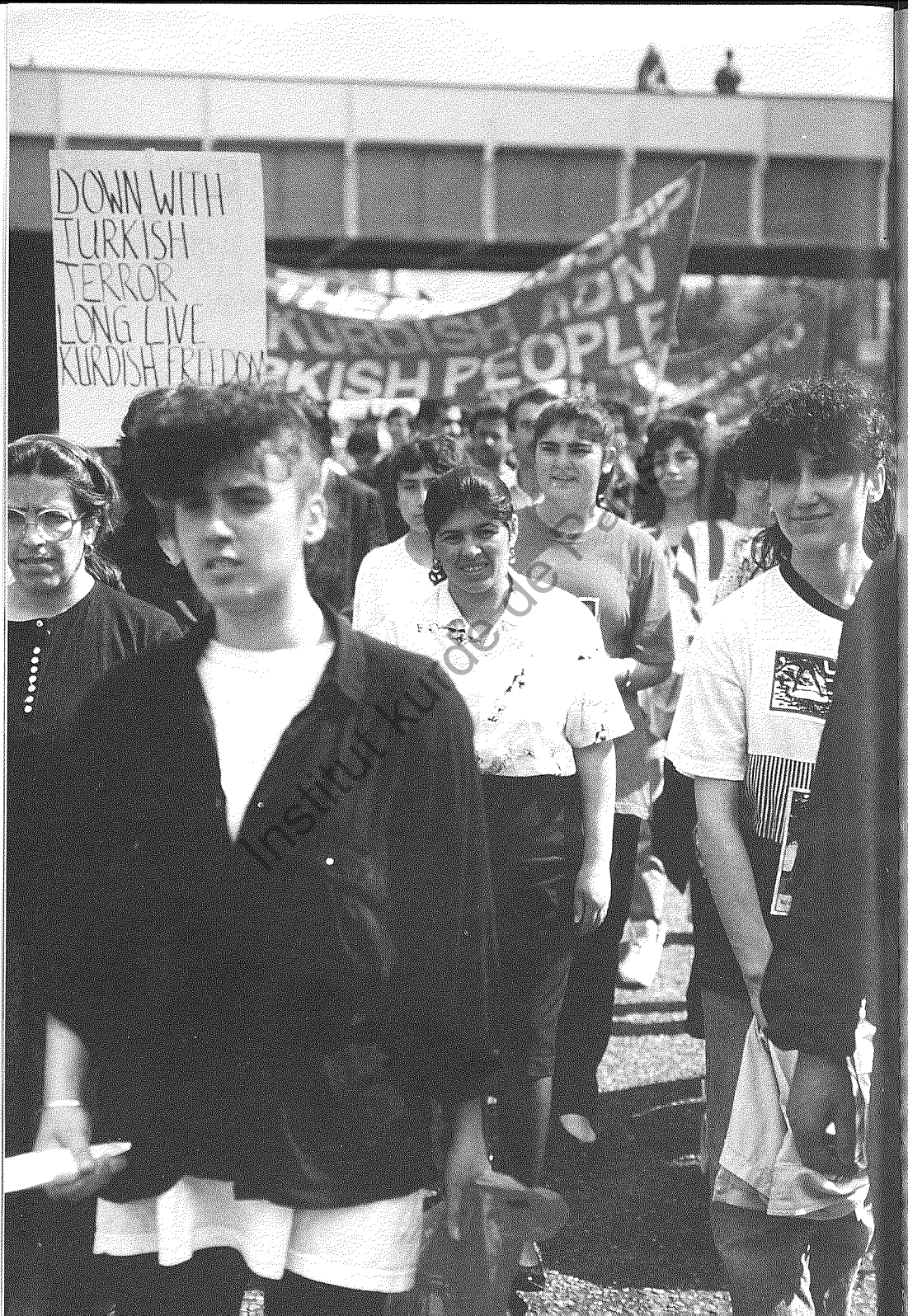


they hid inside rock clefts  
the first rain  
the second rain  
the third rain  
they grew again  
Now again we are a forest  
we are millions  
we are seeds

plants  
and old trees  
the old helmet died!  
And now you the new helmet  
why have you put the head of the spear  
under your chin?  
Can you finish us off?

But I know  
and you know  
as long as there is a seed  
for the rain and the wind  
this forest will never end?

20 September 1987 Stockholm



# Rabun Belengaz

NORTH-WEST BY SOUTH-EAST

What am I doing here ? In this bare room?  
Again finding thoughts framed in a window  
weaved by the past roads like what's her name's loom  
as nicotine stains the fingers yellow.  
And notice more and more limitations;  
the walls, windows and shallows of mirrors  
The cattle-fence of emotions  
note the symbolism as a bird soars.

The park in snow, naked martyred trees staked  
in the ground; from my cup of tea vapour  
lifts sinuously as the soft flakes faint  
and like Alice trip into a barrow  
as I think of how to use this snow, its  
purity pleading for expression. But  
all I can think of are the muddy prints  
a link of steps left by somebody not

long ago resembling this printed page.  
And that the time it takes for this snow to  
fall and cover all trace will take as long  
as for these thoughts to diminish back to  
the same blank page as I started with. It's  
like they say, nothing is great unless it saves  
from the eternal, and staring at this  
snow, this page, and know, I see no roses.

## II

But beneath the cold quilts of snow I know  
the earth sleeps, how each patient tree's root grips  
the nerves have ploughed deep and won't let go. How  
these trees endure like defiant clenched fists  
and not because they are aware of next  
summer, but remember, as I endure.  
Thoughts of dispersion, the nomads are lost.  
I begin here again, the end, with dear

Kurdistan I've forgotten who you are  
and the years have bleached all memories  
and regardless, the past lies waiting. Here  
behind glass, this fast falling snow mirrors  
the weather that's in my mind, proves me lost.  
The ancient war of nomad and settler.  
A sharp wind sets a leaf slapping against  
the pane of glass and I can't remember

like Catherine's hand pleading, let me in,  
but I'm learning to bury all past pains.  
Twenty years of exile, dear Kurdistan,  
and what remains are vague recollections.  
I could imagine, among these green leaves,  
large red roses, but no; till next summer.  
I breathe ghosts of smoke that float through the trees  
and stripped bare, disappear into thin air.

## STC's GHOST AND THE CRITIC

STC            No, not I build. A slug  
                 leaving no trail, a bug  
                 instead of a bee stir-  
                 ring. No refining fire  
                 but stuck in thick gross ice

Critic          O poor STC. Yes,  
                 promised a chest of gold,  
                 in the end you were sold  
                 out, given a few leaves,  
                 and hope drained in the sieves.

STC            It was Wordsworth, the cock,  
                 and that man from Pollock  
                 held me back, I could've been  
                 someone because I've seen  
                 it all, blue moons, red moons  
  
                 even the rare white moons

Critic          I understand, it's sad  
                 it seems that they all had  
                 something to do with it.  
                 Reason you couldn't have built.

                 But for a royal flush:  
                 You read the stars, and played  
                 the cards, you watched and prayed  
                 as she threw the dice, tossed,  
                 and cried, you've lost, you've lost.  
                 Black hag in the heart's plush.

## WAKING IN THE DARK

Waking in the dark. Where am I?  
The rows of heads in this cavern  
like Charons load, no. Turning I  
lift the window's plastic curtain,  
frames a sunrise of orange peels.  
I remember now, how the wheels

left the tarmac; felt the speed rope  
my spine, and as the plane hoisted  
itself dragged up, detached and snap,  
no strings attached, I was released.  
Waking in another belly,  
(leaving home (a relief really))

feeling a bit like Ulysses,  
repeating, it little profits  
that an idle king among these  
barren crags, for me barren streets.  
Streets I stalked hungry for the flesh  
of misery, to suffer for fresh

images. Now thousands of feet  
above the Atlantic, the plane,  
a Yeatsian swan, another street,  
makes it's way for the sphere's northern  
parts, where I eagerly wait, for  
a new constellation of stars.

# Azad Dilzar

## MY CITY

(To underdeveloped Hewler)

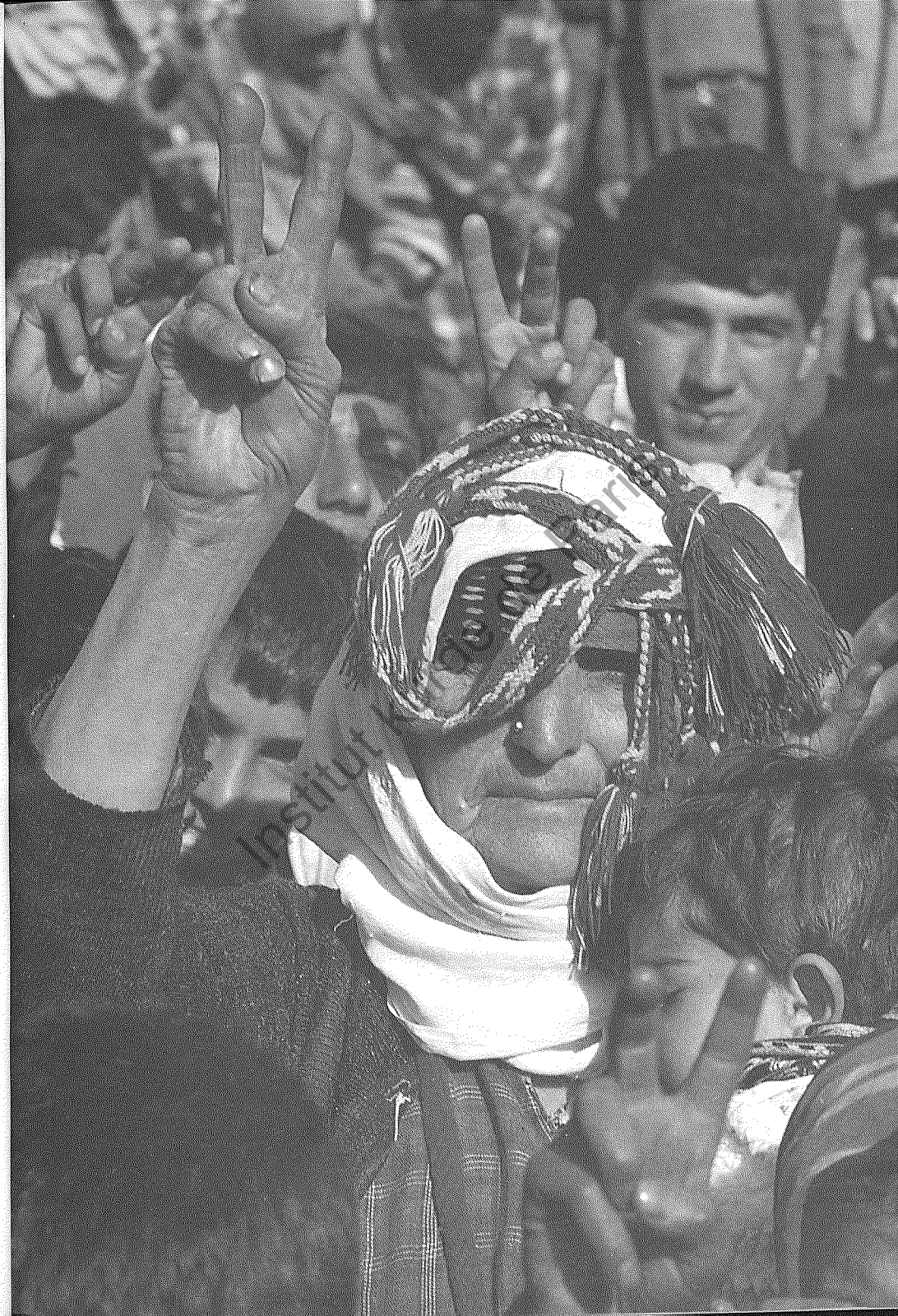
My city is deep in slumber  
slow and being left behind  
in the caravan of progress  
even though it is the most ancient city of the world  
cemetery and memorial to four gods  
even though Xenophon's 10,000 soldiers  
passed through it  
the arena when Darius and Alexander  
battled each other  
even though its age is more than 4000 years  
my city is still a child  
just learning to walk and talk.

The mad and the insane are numerous in my city  
thousands, beggars and unemployed  
many firm-muscled youths  
are shoe shiners or porters  
or messy-haired dervishes with skewers  
Most of the people in my city  
are hungry and without bread  
although the wheat of its Qaraj Plain  
is famous all over the world  
My city has no peer in its misery  
it is like a fallen drunk  
ranting aimlessly



Its streets are very narrow  
with no statues  
its square is full of colourful flowers  
without halls for music and dance  
its nights are full of songs  
its girls and boys are beautiful and handsome  
the fort and the castle of my city are very gloomy  
among the rows of minarets  
they look like a paper bag driven by the storm.

Institut kurde de Paris



# Marif Omar Gul

## NEW YEAR FEAST AND FREEDOM

For my New Year present, Father  
I want neither gifts nor beautiful clothes  
My contribution  
is freedom to my country.

If you wish me to be with you this Newroz  
To return home and embrace your hopes

Go and look for me on every street  
where thirsty trees endure  
in every home deserted by laughter

look for me  
ask about me

if you didn't meet me there  
then there is only one more place where we can meet  
it is in the trenches of the peshmergas

Father, when your weary son  
struggles with the mountain  
even ascending stage by stage  
he will eventually reach the summit  
after some moments of rest  
So, Father, why do you feel so disappointed  
no matter how many feast days go by  
your son will not return until the day of freedom!

## LIFE AND DEATH

We are used to our date with the snow  
We either halt the advance of our enemies  
or we die in the mountains  
No enemy soldier's knees can resist the snow  
armour is of no avail  
as soon as a battalion of peshmergas appears  
they stop their march  
for our mountains are either ringed with fire  
or obstructed by snow  
when they dare to climb the mountains  
look, how many rows of dead bodies they leave

1986 Qandil Mountain

# Latif Halmat

## NAZIM HIKMET TALKS WITH HUMANITY

When I was born, sorrows were as normal  
as the wind;  
death as normal as stones and shadows  
happiness, just like  
the cigarettes and matches at petrol stations,  
was forbidden.

Silence was a favourite medal  
on the breast of any coward poet.  
words were knives seeking  
the throat of their utterers.  
Then came I and set fire  
to the roots of fear  
and sowed the clouds of love  
on the winds of the seasons.

In the country of hunger and drought  
I made my poetry the river of perfumes  
and cursed a century  
in which poets are caught, from fear,  
in the traps of gold and money.  
and birds are caught, from hunger,  
in various traps and snares.

On the mountains, in the plains and valleys  
I cried:  
O my hungry homeland  
I love you and I love you  
here I am ploughing this land  
with my eyelashes

turning it into farms and orchards  
which grow red flowers and beautiful poems  
for the children of the coming world  
a world of freedom, love and peace

## THE POEM WHICH ENDS, ENDS NOT

(excerpts)

Stones feel neither happiness nor sadness  
they do not hate nor love any one  
stones do not have hearts to fall in love  
neither do they have hands to write letters and poems to their  
lovers  
neither do they fantasise about pursuing them  
from street to street  
stones do not have feet to run away  
when the guards go to arrest them.  
they do not have mothers to weep for them  
when they die  
they do not have fathers to discipline them  
when they misbehave  
they do not have a specific country  
to sacrifice themselves for;  
wherever they happen to be  
they find a place to rest  
and stick to it firmly

stones never remember their past  
nor feel nostalgic about it  
for otherwise stones would once have written  
a poem or a letter

In spite of all that  
our forefathers said  
"Stones are weighty in their own places"  
So are human beings.



This age is the age of empty and decorated words  
it is the age of fake and begging poets  
it is the age of the commercialisation of thought, faith, mind  
and heart  
it is the age of free death, individually and collectively  
at the turnabout of every street  
death is waiting  
wherever you least expect  
death is your guard and in your service

This age is the age of confusion and complication  
every word is curtailed by hundreds of automatic and  
electronic tricks  
to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie

let us learn to discriminate between  
the good and the bad  
let us love Truth more than ice-cream,  
hair-clasps, necklaces, and kisses.





# Adar Jiyan

## A LETTER FROM PRISON

A letter came from prison  
telling of the life within  
saying: The prison has become  
the centre of resistance

A letter came from Eruh  
saying: The people have sacrificed their souls  
rising up to see the caravan off  
from Kars to Elon.

A letter came from Gebar  
smelling of spring  
saying how Egid and the lion-hearted  
fought on the 28th of March

A letter came from Botan  
written in sweat  
saying how Nusaybin  
is becoming the centre of the uprising

A letter came from Mardin  
written in blood  
heart-rending  
rubbing salt into the wound

A letter came from Bagok  
like a page of history  
so long that it never ends  
And I read it night and day

A letter came from Amed  
carrying greetings  
and the lions and tigers have set to  
in the region of Serhed

A letter came from Farqin  
smelling of love  
telling the people the good news  
of an independent motherland

A letter came from the motherland  
with greetings from the people  
rising up, becoming  
the dawn of liberation

A letter came from the mountains  
calling to the world  
saying: "Come and witness  
the raging battle in Kurdistan."

2 March 1993

#### I AM ON A JOURNEY

I can't wait, it's late  
I am on a journey, I'll go  
Before me is a fight and a struggle  
I am on a journey, I'll go

No matter how far it is  
Say from the North to the South  
Even if it is like travelling  
on the edge of a sword  
I am on a journey, I'll go

Even if enemies are on that road  
If the very soil and stones turn into snakes  
If all envenomed strike at once  
I am on a journey, I'll go

Even if the bullets rain down  
If the enemy comes like shedding leaves  
If the army of the oppressor comes  
I am on a journey, I'll go

Even if the collaborators conspire  
With the traitors against me  
If so many thorns are on the road  
I am on a journey, I'll go

I will defend that road  
I can witness the liberation

I am slowly drawing near  
I am on a journey, I'll go

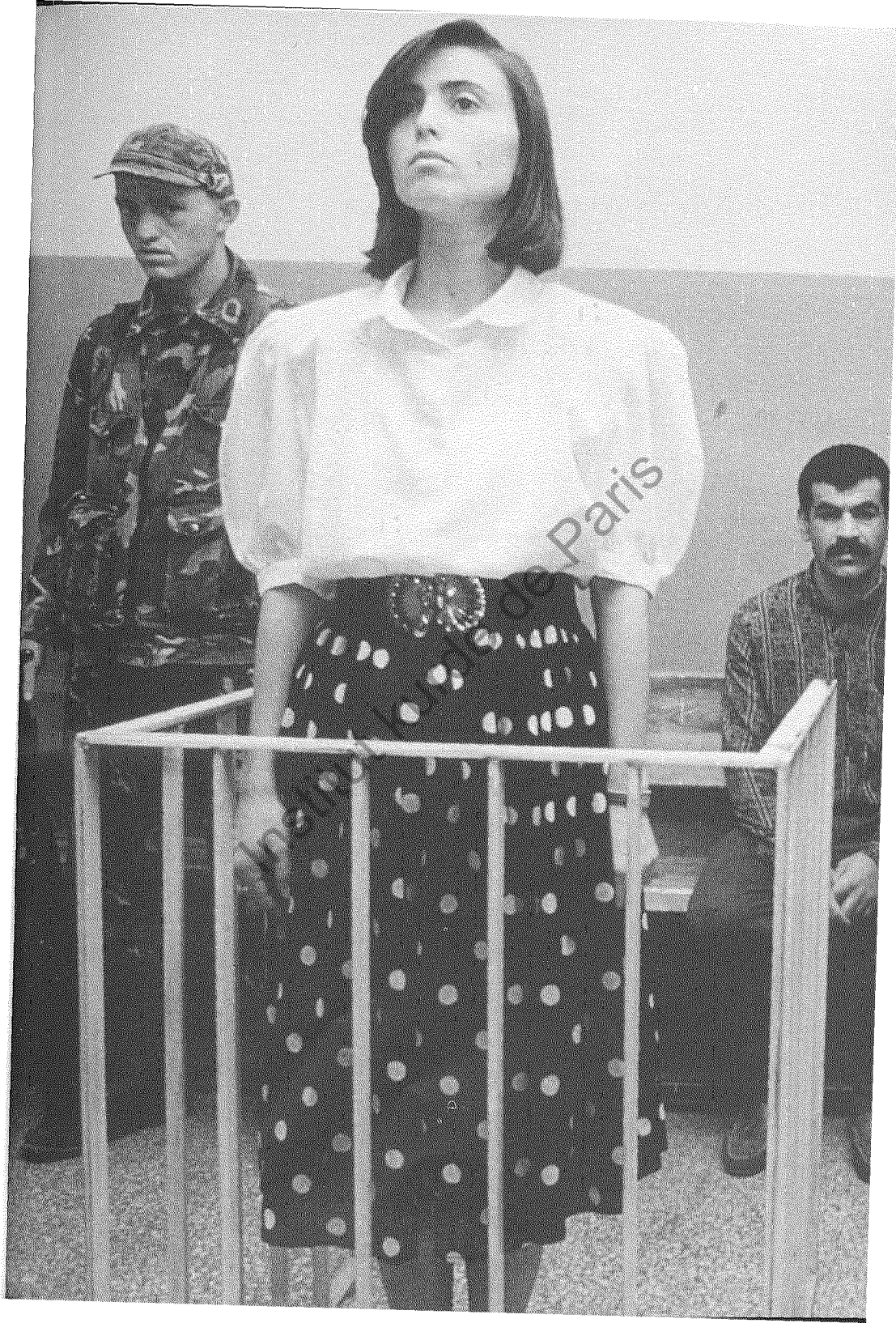
A road with crests and valleys  
For freedom and independence  
I will never return  
I am on a journey, I'll go

I am on a journey, the road lies before me  
My enemies have increased  
Should even all the world attack me  
I am on a journey, I'll go

I will never stop, never return  
I have but a single road, not two  
The road is that of my motherland  
I am on a journey, I'll go

Summer, Winter and Fall  
I do not tire at all  
This road is the road to Kurdistan  
I am on a journey, I'll go





# Mohammed Khaki

## BOMBARDMENT

Ex... plo... sion...

A child's severed arm flying

Delicate deer legs breaking

Poor butterfly through the dust crawling

Ex... plo... sion...

Houses collapsing

Schools flattened

Corn alight with a thousand burning nests.

Bridges blasted

City destroyed, in ruins.

Explosion

    groaning

        wailing

            agony

Nearby the wireless bulletin howls: "Success!

Enemy target attacked and destroyed."

## BUTTERFLY SLEEP

(for my daughter Alan)

Hey! migrating birds

returning from the East of homesickness,

have you seen my little daughter?

Wind!

Why are you silent?

Have you seen the tresses of my sad, tiny bird?

Waves, be calm.  
Reed-beds, be still  
Wind, don't disturb the forest.

Butterflies, flap your wings gently  
else you'll startle the sleeping gazelles  
from my daughter's eyes.

### HOMESICKNESS

If one day  
your jasmine sweet memory  
came with the zephyrs of spring  
ruffling the pages of my poetry –

Which drop of rain  
would wash away my homesickness?

### MY WISH

In my dreams,  
I come to your tent  
filling my shepherd's basket with  
the songs of mountain starlings.  
I am making a bed of sweet violets  
entwining my arms as honeysuckle  
for you.





# Kamal Mirawdeli

## MARTYR

Mother! don't say  
My son passed away alone

Here is the sky  
Washing me with the rains of her eyes

The autumn has made me a coffin  
From its yellow leaves

And this is the land  
Opening her arms wide to me  
And hugging me to her breast

No, dear mother!  
Don't say "my son died alone"  
The land which I worshipped all my life  
Consumes my blood drop by drop,  
And gives me an abode in her heart.

## MOTHER, YOU ARE NOT WINTER

Mother, you were not in such bad shape last year.  
Your hair was long and black.

When did this never-melting snow  
Fall upon your head?

How did this inextinguishable flame  
Rage in your heart?

Mother, you are not winter  
To bring together snow and embers

How is it you drink  
The last sips of yourself?

As if you have returned from hell  
In the company of a black cloud:

Your pink lips are full of wrinkles  
In which smiles are buried.

Mother, are you looking for yourself?  
Who stole you from yourself, mother?

Your eyes search for your sight,  
Your ears yearn for your hearing,  
Your tongue pines for your voice,  
Your lungs for your breathing  
Your soul, you are alive, seeks for your life?

I wish I had never seen you so  
You were not in such bad shape last year.

This is me, mother.  
Please recognise me.  
I am your sight, your hearing, your voice.  
Breathe me in with your deep sighs.  
Let me give you the blood of my heart

Mother, please don't go away!  
Wait  
Wait with me  
Wait until tomorrow!

## A SONG FOR THE DEPARTURE OF SIYAMAND

It scares me when the end of time  
Tolls the bell of the call for separation  
When a black shadow  
Engulfs the last halo of your sight

I am scared of a time when like a madman  
I look around in all directions  
I look nearby, I look faraway  
Except for the flame of a red sorrow  
On the horizon, I can detect nothing

I am scared of a time...  
The time has come  
The wind of departure has blown  
Load your luggage  
Wither the last bud of a smile  
Close your eyes with a sad heart  
And say, "Good bye, love!"

I am far away, you are far away  
The roads are closed.  
Trees mourn their roots.

Hey, here is a henna party for your wedding!  
Nay, it is the blood of dreams crimsoning horizons!

I am afraid of myself, of people, of shadows,  
Of the sun and the sea  
Of the pen and paper  
Of the desert, of the nights, of fences  
Of every whisper  
Of every whisker  
Taking the road of your roadlessness.

Every passing hour of the clock  
Cuts down the green tree of my lifetime

Then I was spring, I wish I were autumn  
The sky's tears would refresh  
my mourning flowers

It's night now.  
My lamp burns slowly, dimly  
It is listening to the last sentence of your story

A new shoot suddenly springs up  
This is the spring of your winter season.

# Abdullah Pashew

## THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

When a foreign delegation goes to a country  
they take a wreath of flowers to the tomb  
of the unknown soldier.

If tomorrow

a delegate comes to Kurdistan  
and asks me; Where is the tomb  
of the unknown soldier?

I say, Sir,

on the strand of every river  
on the bench of every mosque  
before the door of every church  
every cave

on every rock in the mountains

on any tree in the gardens

in this country

on every span of land

under every metre of the sky

do not worry; bend a little lower

and lay down your garland.

## VIGILANCE

Two thirds of the night have passed  
Sleep my baby  
Put your head on my palm  
Lie in my arms  
Don't wait for me  
Tonight I will be wakeful  
I won't sleep

You are an easy sleeper  
Nature is stern-faced and its breath is hard  
I am afraid that the sound of the wind  
the glimmer of the trees  
the roar of the clouds  
and the pouring of the rain  
will, God forbid, awaken you  
or untie the little links of your dream chain

Sleep my baby  
Put your head on my palm  
Lie in my arms  
Don't wait for me to sleep  
I will be vigilant over you.  
I will not sleep.

# Rafiq Sabir

WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM?

To Yilmaz Guney

At this midnight where have you come from?  
How could you shake off the dust of bondage  
and rise like the sun in these foggy evenings  
of winter?

It was a land of ice, which way have you come?  
It was in the cross-fire, which way have you come?  
Kurdistan was full of wild wolves,  
sunken deep in crime, which way have you come?  
How could you learn the precepts of civilisation  
and sing lullabies in the land of wolves?  
Which way have you come?

Under this heavy rainfall, are you lost in dreams,  
a rainbow, or a cascade of steam?  
In these times of starvation and  
under the ruins of these seasons,  
are you the face of the horizon,  
or a flower of wheat?

One usurped dawn  
we will awaken with you  
and find traces of our identity in your dreams  
We shall fill Kurdistan with love,  
rainbows, lullabies and truth.





EVA

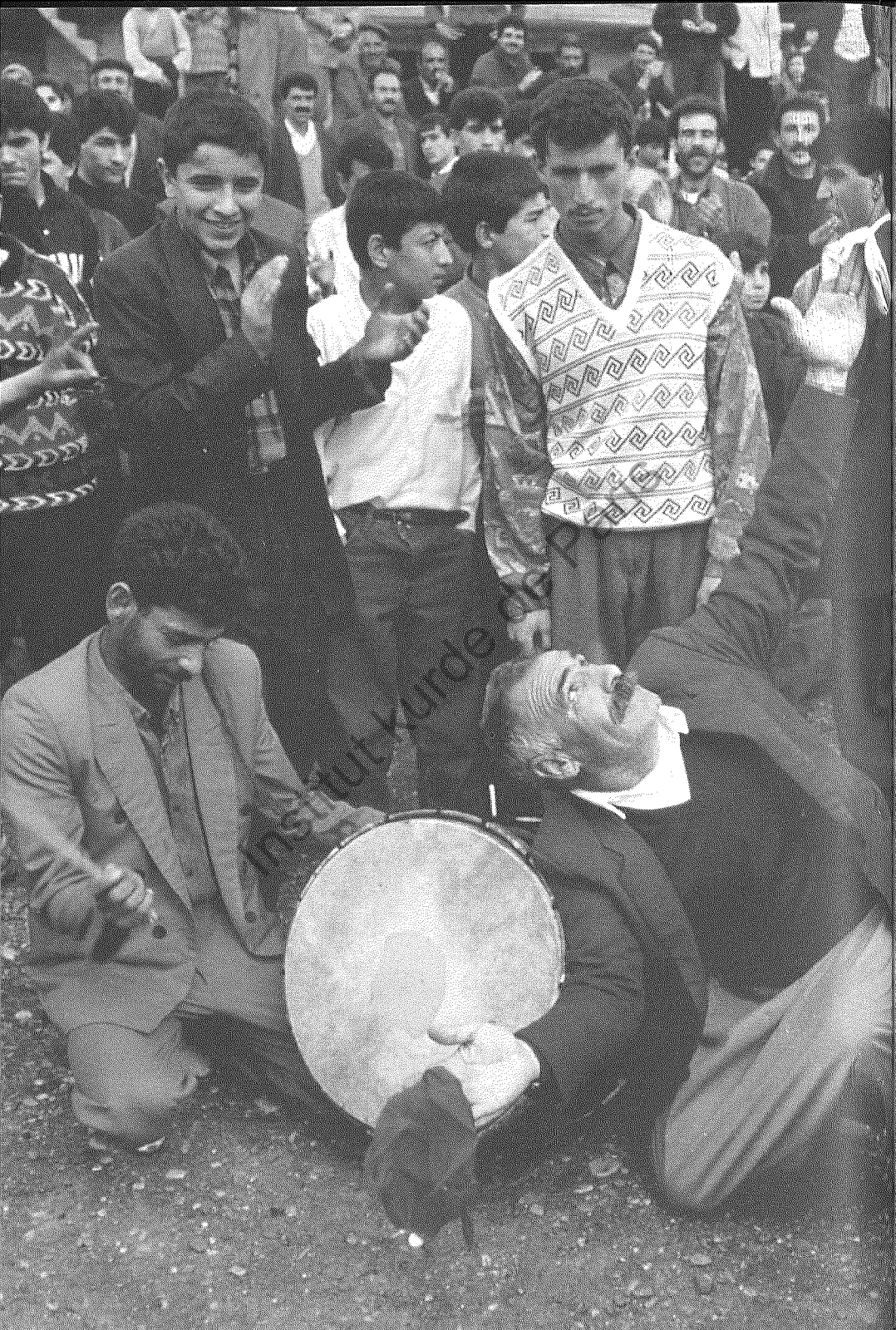
When you were fire  
You neither burnt me  
nor warmed me up

When you were a river  
you neither drowned me  
nor rocked me in the lap of a wave of yours  
Now you are a still whirlwind  
blowing tens of times a day  
neither resting by me for a while  
nor taking me away with you for once.

#### THE ROAD OF THE GUN

I had a small blue sky  
The occupiers brought it down over me  
I had a little stream of dark blood,  
a bundle of honey dreams  
and a collection of books  
they plundered them all.

But when they came  
to change my skin  
deform my face  
I wore the snow and thunder  
carried my homeland on my shoulders  
and took to the road of the gun.



# Farhad Shakali

## KURDISTAN: THE LAND OF BLOOD

In the evenings when light  
Leaves the drunk and sorrowful windows of your room  
You sit down, reflecting on the dark and misty glass,  
Counting the raindrops one by one  
When they strike the drunk and sorrowful windows of your  
room.

Looking far away.

The sky has become a dark dim chador

There isn't the space of a flower in it

To enflame your feelings

You kindle your eyes and see

The earth has become a blood – coloured veil

Providing no rim for the location of your heart.

You know and are certain about it

What a night will ensue

This sad evening.

You know that tonight

All your dreams will hang

From the gallows of this city,

and you have to exhibit all your aspirations

and desires like old clothes,

On the walls of showrooms and museums

So that they may be dried

By the prehistoric sunrays

Along with your far – reaching visions

You will survey the plains and valleys

And all the roads and avenues of this Time

And wonder in what city, what village

They might have arrested him, flogging him,

Clubbing him to death.

You wonder at this time

In which home, which room, on which bed,

A lovely young girl is offering her body,  
Like a red apple to her sweetheart  
You wonder now, at what place,  
There is someone, an unknown unnamed someone,  
who can not find his way,  
No one knows about him  
And the Heavens do not receive his voice.

Your thoughts are like a stray migrating  
flock of birds wandering from one country to another,  
from one forest to another.  
It will be now, or a little later,  
They will sit on an electric cable  
and stop chirping  
Taking refuge in a long nightly dream.

Contemplating  
You reflect on the heart of your thoughts.  
Then – the horizon of your hopes and dreams  
Was still rosy  
You were radical,  
You were setting foot inside the region of blood and death  
You were a gypsy  
Heeding not the boundaries between  
one season and another.  
You didn't know the limits of life's abode;  
The whereabouts of the gates of death,  
Day and night were the same for you.

I sit at the threshold of night's window.  
and through the tunnel of darkness  
I look towards a chink of light  
And call to it.  
O! Kurdistan  
Cradle of pain, glory and love.  
Land of blood  
Earth of wounds.

I sit at night's window  
And look down the long road of darkness  
Perhaps a breeze carrying your fragrance will blow in  
Perhaps tonight an angel has gone astray  
And found his way to this region  
Carrying a white torch  
Whose glimmer resembles the sparkling  
Of the stars of my homeland's skies.  
I dream  
I wish tonight there were such a rainfall  
As would let all the trees blossom  
Let all the birds learn how  
to sing *night and day*  
Perhaps then in my lonely  
heart a bud, a cloud, would open, too.  
I sit and think  
My heart would turn into a lofty cloud  
Pouring down over rosy summits  
Mingling with the evening twilight.

# Shahin B Sorekli

## DO YOU KNOW WHERE KURDISTAN IS?

Our world is growing smaller  
Long live the satellite  
Yet, do you know where Kurdistan is?  
Do you know who the Kurds are, my friend?  
What the hell  
Why should you care?!  
There are more important events taking place:  
The World Cup in Italy and Wimbledon  
So, drink your beer, relax.  
Who the hell are the Kurds  
Why should you care?!  
The Cold War is over, Europe is uniting  
And there is no blood to be seen in your city  
Except on the soccer fields now and then,  
And that is not so bad, my friend.  
So, enjoy your beer and relax  
For all is fine in the world, in your world,  
Or so you wish to think  
Who will win the World Cup?  
Would it be Argentina?  
Or, maybe Germany?  
And in tennis:  
Would it be Becker?  
Or, maybe Edberg?  
Be patient, my friend, be patient.  
Science is at your service  
And your TV will bring the live telecast  
Right into your living room.  
The world has progressed, grown civilised;  
So drink your beer and get ready for the action.  
How quickly things can change!  
A united Germany, a united Europe is on the way.

The big swallows the small, as always,  
 And the power belongs to gold, black or yellow.  
 GDR is no more  
 The Wall has gone  
 And the East, bankrupt, is opening the door.  
 Whatever happened to class struggle?!  
 Out of fashion nowadays,  
 Environment is in;  
 Peace too, of course,  
 Peace amongst countries,

Not amongst nations,  
 Peace for places where your TV can reach  
 And your government wants you to see.  
 Have you heard of Kurdistan, my friend?  
 Do you know where it is?  
 And Halabcha?  
 What does it mean?  
 Is it a tree, or a river somewhere?  
 Why the hell should you care?  
 I will tell you anyway;  
 I will be brief, you will not miss the match.  
 Halabcha, a little town in southern Kurdistan:  
 March 16, 1988: the massacre of 5000,  
 Quick death under the cover of darkness.  
 God forbid, I am not talking of seals,  
 Not of kangaroos, and certainly not of whales!  
 Only of Kurdish children, men and women  
 Gassed by poison sold by your companies,  
 For profit had to be made;  
 And who are the Kurds anyway?  
 No flag they have in front of the UN building, no friends.  
 Do you know who the Kurds are, my friend, do you care?!  
 The world is changing, yes it is;

Fast or slow, the news is reaching everywhere,  
But not in Kurdistan,  
A country torn apart, a nation constantly tormented,  
A nation with no right to appear on your screen.  
Have you heard of 'aid', my friend?

3

Have you heard of 'co-operation', of 'friendship'?  
Words that can mean profit for some  
But oppression for others,  
Those who are not called nations,  
As they are not members of the United Nations,  
they have no friends interested in relations.  
Kurdistan is closed to cameras, my friend,  
And you will not see her "intifada"  
Nor her destroyed villages  
And it does not matter how many times  
Kurds are massacred,  
You will not scream: SAVE THE KURDS  
For Kurdistan is closed to cameras, my friend,  
And you will not see.  
Forgive me for taking your time, lover of peace,  
But do you care?!  
One day, if you care to care,  
Maybe after the games,  
When the rating season is over  
And your box is full of boring stuff  
Search for the Kurds, for Kurdistan,  
Then ask your conscience:  
Don't they too have rights in this world,  
Just like whales, lakes and trees?!



And should you decide to know the Kurds and care:  
Ask your government  
To stop giving aid  
To stop selling bombs  
Which end up murdering a proud and ancient nation.  
You may even carry a sign reading:  
Save the Kurds and Kurdistan.

June 1990

### THE NIGHTLY VISITS

Three times I was born  
Once in Kurdistan  
A land governed by oppression  
Where human rights have no meaning  
Where history is written in fire and blood.  
My second birth, Vienna, 1965  
Beautiful as it may be  
Vienna had little for me  
For I was a foreigner and ran out of money.  
So my wandering began  
Until I reached Bonegilla  
My third birth: October '68.  
Today when I look back  
I realise how much Australia has given me  
Yet in heart and mind I remain captured by my first birth.  
Every night I hear the cries of my mother from her grave  
Calling me not to forget the graveyards of Kurdistan.  
Once I asked: Why graveyards, mother, why graveyards?  
And she replied: Kurdistan lives on graveyards, my son.  
After midnight, I leave my body in Sydney  
And fly over oceans to the land of agony and torture  
Where by suffering and dying  
The Kurds have kept a nation alive  
But I rarely make it to the grave of my mother  
For there are many graves in Kurdistan

Graves of every kind.  
From Halabcha to Dersim, Karkouk to Agiri  
Mahabad to Botan, Hewler to Cudi,  
Those massacred by forces of evil keep on screaming  
Inviting you to witness their struggle after death.  
Sad and exhausted I return to Sydney.  
The other night when my mother called again  
I implored: Let it be, please dear mother  
Spare me the graveyards of Kurdistan for a night.  
With a sigh so deep she enquired:  
Can you really sleep, my son?!  
She gently embraced my soul  
And returned it to Kurdistan.

March 1992

## NEWROZ

Newroz is the symbol of struggle and resistance  
for a nation deprived of freedom and peace.  
Newroz is the desire to create a New Day  
in a country by force divided, in darkness for years.  
Newroz is a page of world history  
for years forged and locked behind iron gates,  
A book written in red blood  
with pages scattered over every corner of a land  
where pure white snow begins to melt in March,  
and the bright yellow sun of Zoroastra in Spring  
turns the land of the Medes into a green carpet  
Newroz is the fury of those massacred in Ararat,  
The cries of those in Dersim burned in closed caves,  
The sighs of the Kurdish mothers and wives  
whose husbands and sons were hanged in Mahabad,  
The agony of the five thousand gassed in Halabcha,  
The pain of two million refugees fleeing chemicals.  
Newroz is the aspiration of young men and women  
who each day die so others may live free.  
Newroz is the return of the sun,  
The defeat of the darkness,  
Hope for a better tomorrow  
in Kurdistan.

March 1992



# S.T.

Dedicated to the martyr, Beritan, by  
a woman guerrilla and friend, signed ST

## KARNVELI HILL (HOW I LOVE THESE MOUNTAINS)

I am angry and resentful, and a bit weary,  
I have fought this awesome pain, and  
my heart is pregnant with screams  
like a song of unrequited love

The heart in my young body  
rages with a stormy yearning.  
Take the kettle from the fire  
roll a cigarette from the tin

You smoke Mus tobacco, I know  
like threads of carpet silk.  
How I love these mountains  
whose savage virgin beauty

we have honoured with our guns  
these mountains which have shielded  
us like a mother's womb  
from the sword of Turks and Arabs

And Persians, hanging over us.  
It is our fate, this passion  
which locks my hands like twin volcanoes  
over the barrel of my gun

The childlike hands are gone  
these silken strands of my hair  
the more the women fight  
the more beautiful they become.

You may not say it, but I know  
my pen does not tell of struggle  
Abidin must draw the lasting  
pictures of this struggle

Life is one, the struggle is one  
the path is one, the comrades are one  
and as I vow to follow in your path  
to death, I shout your name

Martyr Beritan!

25 October 1992  
Karnveli Hill, The Southern War

Institut kurde de Paris



The suffering of the Kurdish people gave birth to these poems. What they express, however, is not only pain and sorrow but resistance – an absolute determination to survive appalling persecution. The suppression of the Kurds is a brutal and largely ignored outrage of shocking proportions. These poems are naked, passionate, vivid and arresting. They spring from direct and immediate experience. This is a deeply moving anthology.

Harold Pinter

Published by  
Kurdistan Solidarity Committee  
and Yashar Ismail

ISBN: 0 9524991 0 X

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London NW3 3AT  
tel/fax 071-586 5892

Institut Kurde de Paris



IKPLIV107619