



“We shall not
cease from
exploration”

Words from the Field.

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A Words pamphlet.

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Introduction

The Words programme for Creative Encounters set out to look at, and share, research through poetry.

I am really interested to see how each of the writers have put the 'I' - their personal experience - into their work. I believe these poems enable us to see the person, and what their work means to them; alongside giving an insight into the areas they each work on.

From Malaria to Neuroscience, Hebes to Health

Inequalities, the breadth of the poetry is as wide as the research on display. I hope these poems enable you to have a new, and different, relationship not only with their subjects, but with the writers as individuals too.

David Cain.

Dr Catherine Merrick

My research group studies malaria parasites. We conduct molecular-biology experiments on parasites grown in the laboratory, and also study features of the genomes of these parasites from malaria-endemic areas (Africa, S. America, Asia, etc.). Malaria parasites have fascinating fundamental biology: they are very different from our own human cells. Furthermore, there are compelling reasons to understand them, to develop new anti-malarial drugs and to mitigate the burden of malarial disease. Malaria is responsible for about half a million deaths and hundreds of millions of cases globally each year.

For this Creative Encounters project, I have written poems reflecting on two aspects of my scientific work.

Firstly, the reality of studying malaria – a tremendously important infectious disease that affects the daily lives of millions of people. How can we understand the causative parasites and better treat the disease? What is the lived experience of malaria researchers doing science in malaria-endemic areas of Africa?

Secondly, what is life like, more generally, for an academic scientist – what makes a scientist tick; what do we find frustrating or beautiful; what is it really like inside the mythical ivory tower?

I hope that readers will gain some insight into both of the above aspects.

This is the Scientist

‘Scientists do not discover in order to know, they know in order to discover. That inversion of purpose is more than just a trait, it is the essence of the matter.’

Professor E.O. Wilson, from his book ‘Biophilia’.

This is the scientist, donning a white coat.

Feeding her cultures, writing her lab notes,

Loading up tubes in a centrifuge rotor,

Thinking past the hum of its high-speed motor.

Juggling pipettes with experienced fingers

– Science needs the dexterous, not just thinkers – .

Separating proteins out from the DNA,

Running out some gels in an ice-cold gel-tray,

Rushing from the cold-store back to her benches

(One climbs lots of stairs in the science-lab trenches).

Waking up at dawn to catch the perfect cell stage,

Staying on til midnight when the cells just won't age.

Sitting long hours in a microscope darkroom

Scrying out cells in green fluorescent gloom.

Patiently optimising each experiment

Sorting the artefact out from the non-event

Constantly scheduling and multitasking

Working through her lunchtimes and just hard-grafting.

This is the daily routine of biology labs.

Slow, exacting work and small triumphs.

Many failures. Re-evaluations. New ideas. Patience.

Pizza.

While in the adjacent office, different challenges

Plague, in parallel, the senior researchers...

Emailed demands and emailed commands,

Emails from vendors, committee agendas,

Emails from admin and emails from madmen,

Emailed spam and financial scams.

Budgets to balance and schedules of charges,

Budgets with queries scrawled in the margins.

Grant applications in need of writing

Paper rejections needing fighting

Postdocs with technical problems, griping –

Somebody's cells are mysteriously lysing

Students want pastoral care and advising

Peer-reviewed manuscripts due for revising

(with all the attendant compromising)

And the back-of-the-brain, trying-to-stay-sane

insomniac struggle to understand

why experiments didn't go as planned.

And the background existential worry

That we might be wasting public money.

Could the ideas be neater or smarter?

Could we be getting the data faster?

Is the hypothesis watertight?

Is there a chance that we're just not right?

So the tasks mount up and a deadline looms

and by Friday the scientist run on fumes

There is little free time for the fundamental

blue-skies-thinking that's quintessential

for researchers to fulfil potential

For those big-picture brainstorms in all of their detail

without which the work will eventually de-rail

since science is never too big to fail...

And fifty percent of the time it fails...

But when the science succeeds, then it is beautiful.

Beautiful like an equation, an arabesque, a perfect chord.

No professional experience can be more satisfying

than science

that works.

For a scientist does not discover in order to know,

But knows in order to discover more.

And that is not a trait

It is the essence of the matter.

The best of ideas are kingfishers

The best of ideas are kingfishers: brilliant, fugitive.

So elegant you know they must be true.

The briefest flash of sapphire and viridian.

You cannot seek them out. They're rare and few.

So elegant you know they must be truthful.

But most ideas are not that type at all.

You cannot seek them out, the rare-and-few type.

Most ideas, though, are sparrows, beige and small.

Most ideas are not that type at all, in science.

Most ideas are not flashy or inspired.

Most ideas are more like sparrows, beige and smallish.

But important, even though they're less admired.

Most ideas are not flashy or inspired.

Yet I'm studying the sparrows all the time.

They're important, even when they're less admired.

They build structures for the kingfishers to climb.

So I spend my time in labs and study sparrows

Still alert for likely streams and wetland trees

They're the structures that the kingfishers appear on

I'm awaiting bright ideas such as these.

In the lab, alert for likely streams and wetlands,

New ideas so elegant they must be true.

New ideas that bring together years of sparrows.

The best of ideas are kingfishers, brilliant blue.

Insisting on life

There's a cricket in the flow cytometer.

For hours it has been singing, singing, singing.

The noisy ghost inside the science machine.

Demba is philosophical:

“It's one of Allah's creatures, only living.

Who can blame it?”

He settles down with screwdrivers and slow, deliberate
care

dismantling the flow cytometer.

While back at my bench, with a sheaf of pipettes

I'm dissecting the mysteries out of malaria parasites.

The cricket, still invisible, sings on.

It's only living, living, living.

Insisting on life.

In The Gambia, all Allah's creatures do insist
on life

on life at baffling scale and profusion.

Giant geckos guzzle up my kitchen cupboard
cockroaches.

On campus paths, I step round Nile monitors like
beached grenades.

There are monkeys in mobs in the baobab trees,
there are bright skeins of sunbirds
and sand-snakes

and spiders like soup-plates.

At Demba's place, the bathroom door

is partly gone to termites.

The door still works. The termites, too, are only living,
living...

Who can blame them?

By now, in the lab, he's surrounded with fragments
of carefully-placed flow cytometer.

The cricket, briefly silent, sings again.

Still unafraid.

Defiantly insisting on its life.

At my bench I take up my pipettes, petri-plates and
polymerase

to dismantle, with painstaking care, more malaria
parasites.

All over West Africa, they too are living

Invisible throngs of them, living.

In deep crimson caves in the bloodstreams of children,

in bone-marrow catacombs,

cloisters and cells of the brain.

In the guts of mosquitoes; the pale pulsing mess

of salivary glands where they wait to egress...

Malaria parasites: multiplying, living and living.

Who can blame them?

Insisting on life.

Articles of faith

The power is out again.

Above the ward, the ceiling fans have click-shush-ticked
to stillness

letting a stifling miasma of sweat, stress and sickness
settle down over salt-stained skin.

The patients shuffle stoically.

Nobody stops work or passes comment.

Inside the tiny treatment room, a single bulb has faded
leaving only dust-strung twilight.

The air in here is hotter than my blood – as thick and
moist

yet the boy on the gurney looks strangely dry,

thin limbs an ashy umber in the half-dark.

Around his neck, three jujus on their dirty leather thongs
point baldly at his nakedness.

They're 'for protection', people tell me.

He moans and convulses,

his eyes squirming backwards in their sockets.

Ebako grips his wrist to stop the needle jerking free.

Anaemia has failed to thin his blood:

the sample tube is still half-empty.

Time and biology seem to slow down

under pressure of heat

under pressure of unwelcome scrutiny.

Ebako didn't ask you –

“Can we watch this? Do you mind?”

Here in West Africa,

doctors are scarcer than good scotch or good plumbing,

mothers are cheaper than palm wine.

A nice bedside manner is one of many things

you do not even know you can't afford.

Ebako, in any case, doesn't speak Mandinka.

This child, in any case, is not his son.

Now, glancing away from the child, from the tube,

from the slow crimson ebb of malarial blood,

I catch your eyes as you are crouched beside the gurney.

Beneath the bright headscarf, your face is impassive

My own, I realise, is not so guarded.

Reflected in it, all this looks obscene

and you have seen this.

Seen me see this.

You reach across your child's naked penis with a fold of
cotton sheet.

And what – if I had language – could I say now?

What possible apology could cover all the complicated
things for which I'm sorry?

Like Ebako, I have not yet learned

to speak enough Mandinka.

But maybe – if I had language – I would ask your name
and his name

Maybe offer you my own name in return.

Maybe offer, absurdly, to sew up my doctorate,

book-smarts and best-of-intentions

into a little leather bag to bless and save your child.

“Look, the dusty magic that you trust is old and feeble:

it cannot keep your children safe from sickness.

Take my articles of faith instead.”

But you’d have as little use for such a juju

as I’d have for one of yours.

Your child stirs again, eyes fixed on phantoms.

The cotton sheet falls open.

This time you do not reach to re-adjust

LZ

LZ is a political neuroscientist examining how and why brains become ideologically extreme.

This collection *Poli(tics) and Nightmares* grapples with the themes of how ideologies infiltrate the human body, what it means to embody our politics, and the immense plasticity, creativity, and potential of the human brain to respond and resist toxic dogmas.

Poli(tics) and Nightmares

On the laundry line

I watch my brain

Wash it clean

Dry it out

And pause,

If we all took

A second look

Would our minds sway

Or would they fall?

Ideology and I

Ideology as Love; Ideology as Fear; Ideology as Addiction; Ideology as Tears; Ideology is Hatred; Ideology is Faith; Ideology is not just pure ideas, stuck inside our heads; Ideology so Great; Ideology so Sad; Ideology to Utopia, or Dystopia from Afar; Ideology we Believe; Ideology we Reject; Ideology we never imagined, encountered, or even met; Ideology that tyrannized us with infallible logic; Ideology that seduced us with tales of magic; Ideology for which we abandoned, shrieked, and slammed the door; Ideology crumbled into pieces, besides us on the kitchen floor; Ideology sliced and opened, dissected and sewed up; Ideology to which we dedicated our life and aching heart; Idea idea logic logic, Ideol Ideologic; Id Id Ic Ic; I I I; Ideology is I. Ideology is Nigh. Ideology Goodbye.

Blank slates, we are not

If the brain is wider than the sky

If the brain is deeper than the sea

Then why does it so easily unravel

When it resides in you and me

Lobe to lobe

Synapse by synapse

Neurons intertwine

Lacing around

Toxic dogmas

Ideologies like

Hungry snakes in the mind

Indoctrination

Inked with oil

Leaves traces on the brain

Footprints

in

the

spongy corners

Of your cortices and

My cerebral veins

Purified pollution

Emitted by doctrines and rules

Render 'brainwash' a euphemism

Ironic and cruel

To cleanse a mind

Into obedience

Oppression

And shame

Sterilizes creativity

Expunges away our name

Blank slates, we are not

Blank slates, we should never be

Our brains are alive

Blushed and inflamed

By electricity

Plasticity

Multiplicity

Duplicity

Eccentricity

And authenticity

That should never be washed away

Because blank slates, we are not

Blank slates, we should never be

And I prefer a brain chaotic and round

Unbound

(At times, unsound)

Rather than one

Violently laundered

Into hollow rigidity.

(mind & body) blown

can dogma be undone

clone and re-clone

once the baby

until they penetrate

is on their own,

the innocent's

a militarized adult

all-too-human bones

disciplined and grown

ordered for their parents'

(every body moans)

sins to atone

toddlers in shelters or

(it is all they've ever

soldiers in the blazing sky

known)

wish not to perish

ideology & history

without a final cry

*

below, they hear a

muffled groan

up above, a silent drone,

the bones are later blown

*

the prisoner's dilemma is

such;

mind must collude or

body be hushed

stop caring so much

victor or victim

dying or the living dead

they are all

smudged & blurred

in the forgotten end

no war is won

by buy bye a gun

can dogma be undone?

nationalized child

NATIONAL-IZED CHILD NATIONAL-IZED CHILD

NATIONAL-IZED CHILD

NATIONALIZED

darwin proposed (secretly)

that a brain washed baby

BRAIN WASHED BABY BRAIN WAHSED BABY

BRAIN WASHED

would fear the gods

like they feared snakes

biting tongues

learning scars

lasting

lasting aches

mother holds

her baby to cry

wishing never

to whisper goodbye

instead she is humming a lullaby

lying

LULLABY

LYING

LULLABY

to lull the baby

dull the baby

into a beauty

beauty sleep

so they never

feel the pain

run

scared again

from sirens

of soaring

planes

MILITARIZED MAN MILITARIZED MAN

MILITARIZED MAN

MILITARIZED

evolved

and grown

he has always known

a gun to the head

is no one's end

it is only his beginning.

from the start

we have all

been sinning.

TELEVISED TRAGEDY TELEVISED TRAGEDY

TELEVISED TRAGEDY

TELEVISED

as though

by surprise

he is paraded like

a saintly prize

now canonized

and colonised

his conversion is complete

in death

in theatre

mother broken weeps

no one apologize

to no one

hurt so deep

fuck

these cruel sheep

our child is sound asleep

Identity Poli

Tics and nightmares

When no one understands

Each other since every bad

Dream is a figment

Of our machine minds

Figmented (fragmented?)

Into little ones

And oh-s

Of neural circuitry

So unique to me and my

Politicized body

I carry the thought

If no one awoke

Quickly I would not be

Here

It is such

A violence

Becoming

A woman

Such a violence

To be (between?)

Here I hope

Identity stops

Obscuring the

(Twi)light

We need to blindly see

The translation

That must be

Possible for you

And me

A shade

Determines

Our skin in the game

Blue or red

White-black-gold

(Shimmer) as we whisper

I hear you

It is more than

Voice it is a crying jolt

Before we melt or bolt

(Away from) identity

Beholden to ancestors

Blood and descent

Share where we have been

Why we are bent

Neural Trees

When Santiago Ramón y Cajal painted neurons

Trees grew

Outwards

Sideways

Along the

byways

Of the mind's fertile corners

& hidden nooks.

To grow and blossom

We must climb

Out of our cherished

Sacred books.

Anne Thomas

Anne Thomas is a PhD candidate in Plant Sciences at the University of Cambridge and an aspiring poet.

Exploring, observing the natural world, and blending words, science, and nature are her favorite things. Anne is asking how mountains generate biodiversity. The challenging habitats and rocky barriers of mountains can drive plants to evolve new species, which may be key for the highly diverse hebes, a group of over 120 flowering shrub species native to New Zealand. Hebes grow in many habitats, from lowland riverbeds to alpine slopes, but especially in the mountains.

These poems inhabit the world of alpine plants from many vantage points, ranging from field botanist to evolutionary biologist to the plants themselves, from nooks and crannies in cliffs to the lab, from the wide sweep of evolutionary time to the precariousness of the future. My hope is to share the intimacy and multi-dimensional wonder of close observation of plants and to spark curiosity about the work that goes into reconstructing and imagining plants' evolutionary past and future. This kind of curiosity is crucial for investing in the conservation of these plants and their ecosystems—and also enriches our lives. With that in mind, I plan to continue writing and publishing these stories as poetry.

Field Guide to New Zealand Veronica

Hunting hebes,

you climb east-facing cliffs

scramble rocky river gorge

hike to treeline through sparse mountain scrub.

Phyllotaxis: decussate

that is, look for

leaf pair

rotate right angle

leaf pair

again, again, again,

squared-off spiral up the stem

jazzy ladder

to diamond leaf bud

waiting to spring and spread

into more rungs.

Find rock shelf, crevice, seepage

pick your way up scree slope

look for limestone outcrop

or margins of ephemeral alpine pool.

Inflorescence: simple lateral

raceme of

crowded, spiralled,

pedicellate flowers

that is, find

fountain and froth of flowers

four white lobes

framing demurely the shock

of hot pink anthers

where the pollen calls

and the green-nestled ovules

waiting to swell

into capsuled fruit.

Range through fellfield, herbfield

streamside, rockslide

tussock grassland, cloud forest

coastal bluff, bare greywacke

road cutting, bog, sand, beech shade, snowbank—

Take the leaf-ladders

and the froth-flowers

and the rock-hound roots

shrink them to cushions

spin them out to long-leafed trees

round them down to springy shrubs

press them into rawhide whipcords

spread them through golden grass

tuck them into cracks—

huddle in the cold, reach for the light

wander alone between rock walls

for five million years

and find

one-hundred-and-more

variations on a theme.

If you loved rock and light like a hebe

with all New Zealand to hide in,

where would you go?

What would you be?

Phylogeny, or A Leaf Has a Long Memory

Look at this leaf

firm on its springy stem

squeezed where a seed lodged

in a limestone crack after a capsule

popped on the plant rooted in rock above

to which a bee once brought pollen from over
the cliff

and the chromosomes found each other.

Pluck this leaf

to harvest chromosomes coiled with

leaf-code, stem-code, rock-rooting code

an inheritance latticed with accidents:

A flipped to T, G slipped to C, refolded proteins
or silent jots-become-tittles tell the story
to be laid open in the leaf.

Look at the leaf

crushed to dust in the test tube

ready for the chemical alchemy

of centrifuge and pipette, enzyme and heat:

essence unfurled, swirled, chopped and copied

until a mountain is made of a molehill

of leaf-letters.

Look at the letters

aligned and inscrutable on the screen

pieced together by computer algorithm

sleuthing the deep-buried footnotes of leaf—

ribosome, hormone, the space between—

leaf-cousin by leaf-cousin, their cascade of
edits

sifted side-by-side into snippets of sense.

Trace the branches

spun from crushed leaves and leaf-letters

and mathematical model ticking back time

pressing into lines the slow drama of glaciers

calving and halving ranges, the bee-flow of
pollen,

chromosomes doubling, leaves finding new
shapes

and new branches on the family tree.

A leaf has a long memory.

We do our best to tease it free.

Alpine Elegy

I am alpine.

I hunch and hug the ground

where the wind sears

and summer is too cold for trees.

I like it here.

I'm found nowhere else.

My ten-millionth-great grandparents

clung to coastal rocks

when the land was low and warm

blanketed in beech shade.

Lifting land meant shifting luck

for their children:

new rocks, wind, and light.

They climbed.

After mountains rose,

glaciers descended.

My ancestors were ice-dodgers

as the crust heaved down and up

their home-slopes.

They sent out seeds

with luck and pluck.

Some survived.

It's been quieter.

For ten thousand generations

my kin and I have calibrated

to this high band of land,

its stable chill, its harsh peace.

The alpine made us.

We made it our own.

But I sense change in the wind—

winter losing its edge

snow blanket growing bare

shady strangers creeping in

no longer kept at bay by freeze.

I will my children upslope.

I hope I gift them lucky genes.

And when they find only sky?

Dr Mona Jebril

Dr Mona Jebril is an interdisciplinary social scientist focused on conflict-affected areas and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Mona is currently a Research Associate at the University of Cambridge Centre for Business Research. Previously, Mona lived in the Gaza Strip for 22 years, during which she worked as a teacher at Gaza's public schools and a lecturer at two of Gaza's universities. Mona holds an MSc in higher education, and PhD in Education from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge respectively. She is a winner of Said Foundation Second Prize for Academic and Personal Achievement and the first scholar ever from the Gaza Strip and the second from Palestine to be selected for a Gates Cambridge Scholarship.

I am always looking for innovative ways to disseminate my research. In the report which I produced from my work (<https://www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/cbr-special-report-the-political-economy-of-health-in-the-gaza-strip.pdf>) , I could include the analysis of my data, but I couldn't include the affective experiences for the interviewees: their feelings, their anger, their hopes, and frustrations regarding the situation of healthcare in the Gaza Strip.

Conveying themes from my research through creative words was very helpful to capturing these experiences. Although the topics discussed in the poems are difficult and could be traumatic for someone new to this context, poetry has the 'magical' capacity to introduce such a complex topic in a succinct way, and also with a sense of beauty and lightness. Such a capacity makes it easy for someone who is not specialised in the political economy of health in Gaza to engage well with the topic, without making such an empathetic engagement traumatic for the audience.

Between Explosion and Implosion

Poems on the Political Economy of Health in the Gaza

Strip

Reversing a Legacy of De-development

(An excerpt from the poem on the de-development of
Gaza healthcare)

How can a plant be nurtured and grow?

In a land that absorbs the water of life so slow.

How can institutions of trust be built?

On a soil that, throughout history,

Not, for planting at any time, meant,

Bleeding backward on a pace that is painfully swift.

An occupation legacy,

Of severe destruction at best.

This 'de-development', we should urgently reverse!

Before the situation, in the Gaza Strip, gets even worse.

For patients, doctors and nurse,

The Gaza health sector, we should reform.

Although our resources are very scare,

Never, we should accept this curse.

We can re-try. We can re-plant,

On the 'de-development' land,

Let's dig searching for new golden sand,

For a hidden water well on which planting could grow,

For a resistant soil that could overcome the destruction

woe,

With the Gaza Strip, let's all work together, hand in
hand,

How difficult things might currently stand,

When building trust as one band,

We can fertilize,

The Gaza 'de-development' land.

Explosion...Implosion

(Healthcare professionals under war in the Gaza Strip)

Explosion... Explosion...

Doctor, doctor! Run, run.

Don't you hear the bombs and gun, Explosion, hide,
hide,

People's pain splashed roadsides. Bleeding red, bleeding
soar,

No one can bear it, here, anymore.

Explosion... Explosion...

Doctor, doctor! Run, run.

Don't you hear the bombs and gun,

I am a doctor. I can't run!

I'll save people hurt by bombs, rockets and gun,

Here, I am, for whoever, needs me,
Afraid, yes! But let what is done, be done.

I am a doctor...

I'll follow those whose life is at stake,
Those who might be sick, injured, or disabled, Who do
not know, in this war, what to make, For emergency
hospitals, them in my ambulance, I will rush and firmly
take,
Only together, we should our way, out of this war, safely
make.

Explosion, hide, hide,

People's pain splashed roadsides. Bleeding red, bleeding
soar,

No one can bear it, here, anymore.

Explosion...Implosion

(Healthcare professionals under war in the Gaza Strip)

Implosion...Implosion

Oh, what's this from inside!

The health system couldn't stand,

This massive increase of demand,

When resources and, even, cancer drugs are banned,

But the Israeli occupation is not even giving a helping

hand,

To patients who suffer pain that no one could ever stand.

See, this man is deadly bleeding.

For hospital, we must hastily go,

This child was passing by, when, his dad's

murder, he suddenly saw,

How can a child ever forget the trauma from a

scene, that is in cruelty raw?

See, this school with all its classes shattered, Its alphabet

decorated blackboard,

With red blood, severely, battered,

How can peace, be taught, for the new

generation, when their schools didn't by war violence
mattered?

See, this woman is deadly bleeding. For hospital, we
must hastily go,

I am a doctor. I feel deeply tortured. These patient
tragedies should have been

by international CCTVs captured.

Gaza's health system has been, by decades of
occupation, seriously raptured,

And Palestinian schism fragmented efforts for the health
sector to be nurtured.

Implosion...Implosion

Doctor, doctor! Our hospitals have space for none,
People flooded for help since yesterday's rise of sun,

Specialised staff to countries abroad have nearly all
gone,

For poor work conditions in the Gaza health sector could
be second to none, Yes, those with kin staff, some
hospital beds, they, have unjustly won,

Blame them, not harshly though

For what they have done,

They've just feared their loved ones would be,
otherwise, suddenly gone!

Local wards from hospital beds, out, they always run,

And applying for hospital permits to Israel, Most

patients, in waiting and waiting, were completely done,

Yet, at the end, they were granted none.

Outside.... explosion, inside.... implosion,

That's the occupation intrusion,

Health Policy making in the Gaza Strip has only become
an illusion, Full of dilemmas, chaos, and confusion,

Deeply, conflict, in the health sector, has become

interwoven, Making the norm of people's experience

their bitter exclusion. Violence, in the Gaza Strip, is still

in wider diffusion.

Where have all justice voices gone?

In Gaza, people are deprived of their right to be,

The blockade is harshening their lives, so as, to force
them on their knee, Despite this, Palestinians insist, their
land, they would never flee,

But when all roads are closed, what can be done?

By political agendas, the Gaza health sector is deeply
run.

Living in Multiple Siege

(A poem on females' experience of mental health in the Gaza Strip)

Doors are closing on me,

Multiple sieges haunting me,

With lots of feelings torturing me,

Anxiety? Depression? Or PTSD?

Whatever these terms could even be,

I'll keep it a secret inside me,

Or, for rumours, I'll be an easy prey,

Won't be allowed, to what, I always dreamed to be,

Doors are closing on me.

I'm very tired, I can't clearly see,

I'm drawn by waves of a deep dark sea,

In Gaza, misjudgements on women are rendered free,

Awareness of mental health remains at a significantly low degree.

Going to counselling clinics, despite progress, is a taboo
to see,

For women, some of whom are still perceived, as only,
wives to be, Confidentiality? A challenge that policy
makers, so often, decline to see. So, I'll better keep it
inside me,

But doors are closing on me.

Doors are closing on me tight,

I keep thinking day and night,

How, alone, I would this darkness fight?

If employment in Gaza, I can't find,

This border siege rocks my mind,

My frustration, no longer, I'm able to hide,

Memories of loss and damage are not easily put aside,

They come in nightmares, in flashes, in a massive

explosive stride, Luckily no one can see them wide,

When in my room, I choose to hide,

Yes, by social rules, I silently abide,

But doors are closing on me.

Doors are closing on me since I was a child
Under occupation, I couldn't feel safe, even, in a bicycle
ride,
Or to fly, in the wide sky, my aunt's gift of a colourful
kite,
Jetfighters are always there to fight,
The tranquillity of Gaza's stars at mid-summer's night,
Which it disturbs by throwing a frightening red light,
Or launching a sudden killing strike,
On a family whose children were enjoying an ice-cream
they fondly like, For they never, in their lives, could go,
instead, for a natural hike.

Doors are closing on me. I am in a social siege. I want to
step aside, Friendship for me has always been a
struggling site,
If, I, of mental health complain, some friends could my
heart easily bite

I could, rarely, meet people of different cultures,
nationalities or same mind kind, I joined in friendship,
there, whether I did or didn't mind,
Under blockade, I see others happily stick side by side.
But doors are closing on me.

Even for my family, I can't flee,
They'll assume my mental health defines me,
And put assumptions, on what future, my life would turn
to be,
Or tell me I am always wrong only to conquer me,
For gender inequalities, exist, even when camouflaged
by what is bright to see, No, it is wise to choose not to
show them the real me.
But doors are closing on me.

Doors are closing on me from my mind within,
Why for people in Gaza, seeing the outside world, is
treated as if a sin?

What if I just want to travel to visit Germany to see dear kin?

Or take a PhD or train as a veterinary doctor, who treats Gaza deadly- injured hen, Or join international conferences, and proudly several prizes win?

Why the occupation dares to put Gaza youth ambitions in a rubbish bin?

Why can't I access libraries, museums, or visit the famous clock tower of Big Ben. Doors are closing on me.

Doors are closing on me from the world,
All by the name of the failed Oslo accord,
Which progress towards real peace, it has immensely slowed,

And see, since then, how many contradictions, the Israeli government has showed.

If Palestine is a state to be, why can't to the West Bank, Gaza people even take a road? Doors are closing on me.

Doors are closing on me from our factions, not only
from Israel or abroad, Let's achieve Palestinian unity and
take our community forward,

Hamas and Fatah, isn't it the time to drop the factional
animosity sword? And commit yourselves to Palestinian
community support,

To which, in the first place, you faithfully vowed, Why
do you pretend not to see?

That because, of you, fighting each other,

Doors are closing on me.

Doors are closing on me mad!

How can among this noise, and negativity band,

One can possibly strive or even rightly stand,

Or equip a qualified doctor or raise a well-educated lad,

When conditions of health, work, education, and the

environment are getting so, so bad,

When salaries of governments are reduced to third of
what people had previously had, When history of
Palestine is claimed fabricated,
When Palestinian land, economy, and development are
seriously blockaded,
When even access to drugs and medical treatment to
cancer patients is hugely complicated,
When emergency ambulances struggle under skies that
are militarily barricaded,
When I am told that my trauma from these multiple
sieges, in Gaza, is better be mascaraed,

Doors are closing tight... tight and tight on me, Please
stop here.

Open the doors, for the Gaza Strip, with me.

Thinking Reform

(A poem on the dilemma of reforming the health sector
in the Gaza Strip)

How can health reform be achieved?

In the Gaza Strip where destruction is deemed,

For generations to be the daily life perceived,

Start from here, start from there,

Whatever you do, you end nowhere,

Round, round and round,

In a cycle of suffering, Gaza patients are miserably
bound.

Work for the moment, some may say,

For tackling health emergency, your full attention pay,

Postpone your comment on Gaza health sector's endless
dependency,

Until a time of peace, may come one day.

Short-term reform of the health sector is the best way.

Hey, hey, others may say,
Don't be in your fantasy absorbed,
In the Gaza Strip, politics cannot be ignored,
Aren't they the cause of restrictions imposed?
Can't you see the jetfighters hovering there above?
Patients are bleeding of bombs, with severe lack of
drugs, Unless short- and long-term reforms are
combined, Palestinians' right to health will remain to be
denied.

Start from here, start from there,
Whatever you do, you end nowhere,
Round, round and round,
In a cycle of suffering, Gaza patients are miserably
bound.

Hey, hey, others may say,
A hybrid approach is a self-defeating hypocrisy,
Isn't foreign aid subsidising the Israeli occupation which

claims to be the only Middle East democracy?

Combining short- and long-term reform is not necessarily right,

As you might have thought at a quick hinted sight.

Start from here, start from there,

Whatever you do, you end nowhere,

Round, round and round,

In a cycle of suffering, Gaza patients are miserably bound.

Hey, hey, others may say,

Enough occupation blaming talks, if you may,

Why don't you look inside, if you may?

For 15 years, the Gaza has been for Palestinian divisions a prey,

To bureaucracy, wasta and what you lay,

If you address these,

The injustices of the occupation will be clearly signalled out at bay, So, internal health reform is certainly the best way.

Start from here, start from there,
Whatever you do, you end nowhere,
Round, round and round,
In a cycle of suffering, Gaza patients are miserably
bound.

How can we think of possibilities?
When all reforms bounce back
To where we started,
To decades old 'de-development' crack,
Let's all free nations get on slack,
Totally, rejecting the flawed Oslo pack,
Let's discuss instead what we should act,
To ensure freedom, resources, and provide access to
patients,

in the occupied Gaza Strip, that they seriously lack.

Unless Peace and health efforts are intact,

Round, round and round, In a cycle of suffering,

Gaza patients will remain, very miserably bound.

A Voice in the Desert

A poem on behalf of those who feel unheard by the
powerful

A voice in the desert is echoing itself, The train had
passed away,

Leaving pain on the shelf.

With resonance, I shout,

I avoid delving,

In those common feelings of my abandoned self.

A voice in the desert returns what I say to me, No
answer, no conversation,

Except my voice echoing itself back to me.

A pain, that bounces back to me.

That I'm unable to contain inside me, No river, no ocean
is there,

To take it away from me.

I go round, in, a round circle,
With haste I move left and right,
Hoping this pain may voluntarily... from me drop, Or
that my shouting... would then stop,
But all I hear is my voice,
Echoing and echoing itself to me.

How can a voice be a voice?

Without reaching someone...

Without touching someone...

How can a voice be a voice?

Without being heard...