

A collage of various patterns and textures. At the top left is a white geometric lattice pattern on a dark background. To its right is a piece of fabric with yellow and black stripes. Below the lattice is a close-up of a person's eyes. In the center is a black fabric with a grid of red, white, and pink beads. To the right is a colorful geometric pattern with yellow, black, and blue. At the bottom right is a wooden surface with circular white lace-like patterns.

HERE / THERE

Exploring men's experience of displacement
through reflections and poetry.

About the project

The University of Bristol and ACH developed a collaborative project together, working with men from displaced communities in Bristol about their displacement journeys. We explored with participants the impact of the settlement process and the price of integrating into a new society in the UK; whether sense of self changed due to displacement, and whether the family dynamics are impacted on in the process.

Open conversations took place in different settings – Fuad Mahamed, CEO of ACH, advised taking men outside of their comfort zone, away from the bustle and security of inner city life, into spaces that would encourage and inspire. He suggested Folly Farm, where 14 men from different generations got together in the summer holidays with Nadia Aghtaie and Sue Cohen from the University of Bristol. Later in the year we congregated at the Watershed and the Arnolfini. By this time the younger generation were at work/college, so the group was smaller. After some initial conversations and the inspired get-together at Folly Farm, we asked writer and poet Edson Burton to facilitate the story-telling process. The project was collaborative, so we did not know at this point what path the journey would take. Edson's magnificent poem – A Father's Heart – transpired from the story telling process.

Edson writes: "In previous years I have delivered creative writing workshops for Bristol Refugee Rights and other groups. I was therefore intrigued by the invitation to work on this project, and aware of the some of the sensitivities involved. Given the themes that we were looking to explore, I was keen to build trust with the group before we committed to writing. Our first meeting provided a rich vein of intergenerational East African experience, but as the group became smaller the group solidified around a core group of older (30+) Somali men.

While our discussions were rich and varied I felt we were in danger of losing sight of the creative writing aspect of the project. Introducing Somali poetry was a breakthrough moment which allowed the group to identify with the creative writing as a meaningful form of expression. By our final week, members of the group were exploring in writing various themes around migration, displacement and identity. But the project is not reducible to a series of outcomes – more important was the process of working together - sharing thoughts, stories, hopes and dreams and forging new experiences, such as

visiting the Grayson Perry exhibition. The latter meetings in different locations provided a wider engagement with Bristol beyond the stated outcome."

'Reflections' in the latter half of this publication, brings together the stories of the men involved in the story-telling. Different stories were told – depending on age, how long they had been in the UK, the nature of their journey, what and who they came with - all stories varied. They also spoke the stories of those around them. But within this complexity there were thoughts and reflections that could be drawn together from different voices – Where We Are Is Not Where We Could Be; The Unwritten Rules etc. 'Reflections' do not set out to be everyone's thoughts or feelings but to capture some of the conversations. All of the lines in 'Reflections' were spoken by the men involved.

The project is part of a bigger programme bringing together an inter-disciplinary team from the Centre for Gender and Violence Research at Bristol University, with academic and partner non-governmental organisations in the Bristol refugee community, and community partners in Iraqi Kurdistan (IKR), together with academics at the Gender and Violence Studies Centre in the University of Sulaimani.

The approach adopted in the research is that knowledge generation about gender-based violence, migration and conflict must arise from the experiences and knowledges of these communities, and that the most appropriate methodologies involve processes of co-production that place equal value on academic and community knowledge and expertise.

With thanks to

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Poetry and Creative Writing: Edson Burton.

UOB: Nadia Aghtaie, Sue Cohen, Kurda Yar, Emma Williamson.

Design: Rose Adderley.

Folly Farm Research Trip



ACH tenants at Folly Farm. Some said the greenness brought back memories of home.



Fuad Mahamed, CEO of ACH, advised taking men out of their comfort zone of inner city Bristol. He suggested Folly Farm.

Some of the men had never been outside of the Stapleton Road area, let alone the English Countryside. He said that holding the group inside would have reminded the men of Home Office questioning. In the open air the conversation flowed.





Mohamed Mujahid took many of the photos. He had been a photographer back in his own country. This was the first time he had had the opportunity to take photographs in Britain.

Field work at the Arnolfini Grayson Perry Exhibition

"Carrying
all the
bad stuff"

Edson Burton;
Poet and Artist in Residence



"His mouth. He looks like he's been quiet. He couldn't tell his stories. All the knives - all the negatives people are saying to him. A person who is being hit all of the time but is still walking. Carrying all bad stuff. If you look at his private parts he is carrying toxic stuff." - M



A few months after Folly Farm and two more workshops we went to the Grayson Perry Exhibition at the Arnolfini Bristol. None of the men had been to the Arnolfini before. They didn't know Grayson Perry's work, but they did respond to his take on masculinity, male identity, and what it is to be a man in problematic environments.



"That's blood..."
Tapestry of postcode violence in Liverpool

"That's
blood"

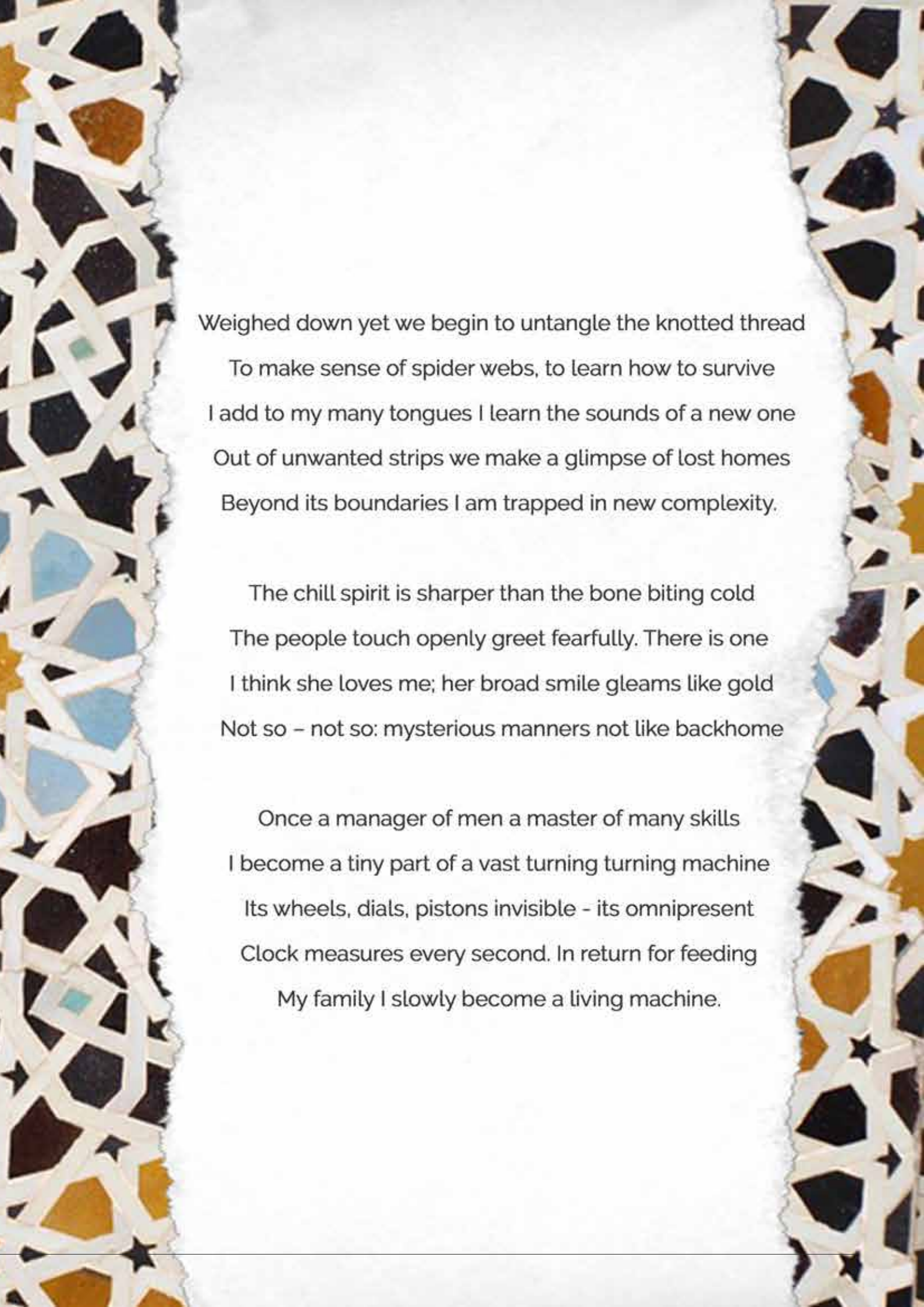


A Father's Heart

Mornings that greeted me: fresh frankincense
The caressing breeze spring's balmy emissary
Dallo rising like full bosoms pressing against sky
My neighbour's cow etched against the sand
The camel's curves bent to the well slurping.
Hyenas night track fading into the distance.

Clear as clean water my fate and promise:
A tribute to mother to father, to kin far and wide,
A good Muslim, student, friend, brother
To the one I see her before she arrives -
A kind husband: together we will make a new line.

Black smoke cancels my journey just as I embark
The thud of bullets and boom of bombs drown the poetry
Of our people - our land is ripped - we who can - scatter
Things I have seen whispered only to ghosts in the silence
We are nomads crossing seas landed in chaotic cities.



Weighed down yet we begin to untangle the knotted thread
To make sense of spider webs, to learn how to survive
I add to my many tongues I learn the sounds of a new one
Out of unwanted strips we make a glimpse of lost homes
Beyond its boundaries I am trapped in new complexity.

The chill spirit is sharper than the bone biting cold
The people touch openly greet fearfully. There is one
I think she loves me; her broad smile gleams like gold
Not so – not so: mysterious manners not like backhome

Once a manager of men a master of many skills
I become a tiny part of a vast turning turning machine
Its wheels, dials, pistons invisible - its omnipresent
Clock measures every second. In return for feeding
My family I slowly become a living machine.

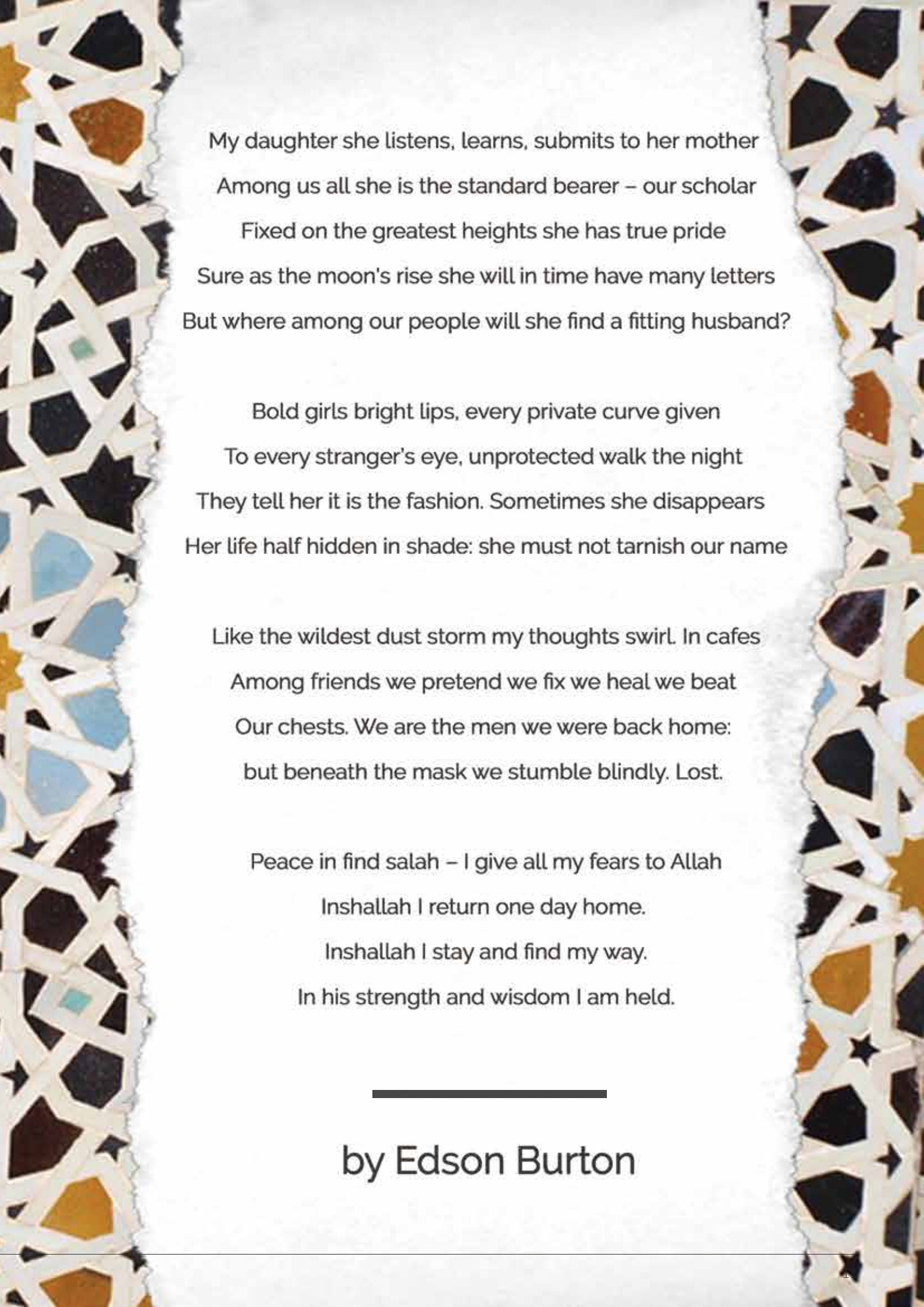
My promise my fate lies locked in a glass case
I try every key but cannot find the release
From the height I wish to reach I fall
Twisted and bent into the shape this land
Has made for me – inch by inch I shrink

Does the one I love does she still love me?
She blossoms here where new doors open
Stretching like a flowing river when I am stagnant water
My word in her ear is but now a quite whisper
Dancing between praise and anger I cannot command her.

What if she risks our family our values our culture for an illusion
For a few diversity brown tokens.
We are 'terrorists' 'refugees' 'ignorant' 'insular'
according to their red top press.

They do not even let White people ancestral lines old as trees succeed

My son hangs upon the corner – becoming like boys
Whose fathers have been broken decades before
On the streets the outer shell makes you a man
What good are my ways what good education?



My daughter she listens, learns, submits to her mother
Among us all she is the standard bearer – our scholar
Fixed on the greatest heights she has true pride
Sure as the moon's rise she will in time have many letters
But where among our people will she find a fitting husband?

Bold girls bright lips, every private curve given
To every stranger's eye, unprotected walk the night
They tell her it is the fashion. Sometimes she disappears
Her life half hidden in shade: she must not tarnish our name

Like the wildest dust storm my thoughts swirl. In cafes
Among friends we pretend we fix we heal we beat
Our chests. We are the men we were back home:
but beneath the mask we stumble blindly. Lost.

Peace in find salah – I give all my fears to Allah
Inshallah I return one day home.
Inshallah I stay and find my way.
In his strength and wisdom I am held.

by Edson Burton

Reflections

The diverse voices of the Men's Group

I came with nothing

I came with nothing. It was zero
Others came in time in peace.
We came in time of war. We had nothing. Zero

If you go through terrible situations
You learn something from it
Motivation
You understand the world better

I came with nothing. You must learn something and transform something.

Where we are is not where we could be

Where we are is not where we could be.
For some people what does that do to us?
We have dreams - then we have obstacles
What does that do to us?

I work
What I am doing is really basic
Not a big job. But you need money
I don't want to go to the Job Centre

You feel broken.
I don't want to be a role model for my children
Some men bring their children into work
Working class for the last 40 years
I don't want that for my children
My role model? Is to go back home, be a minister

If you had wings someone behind you holding you back

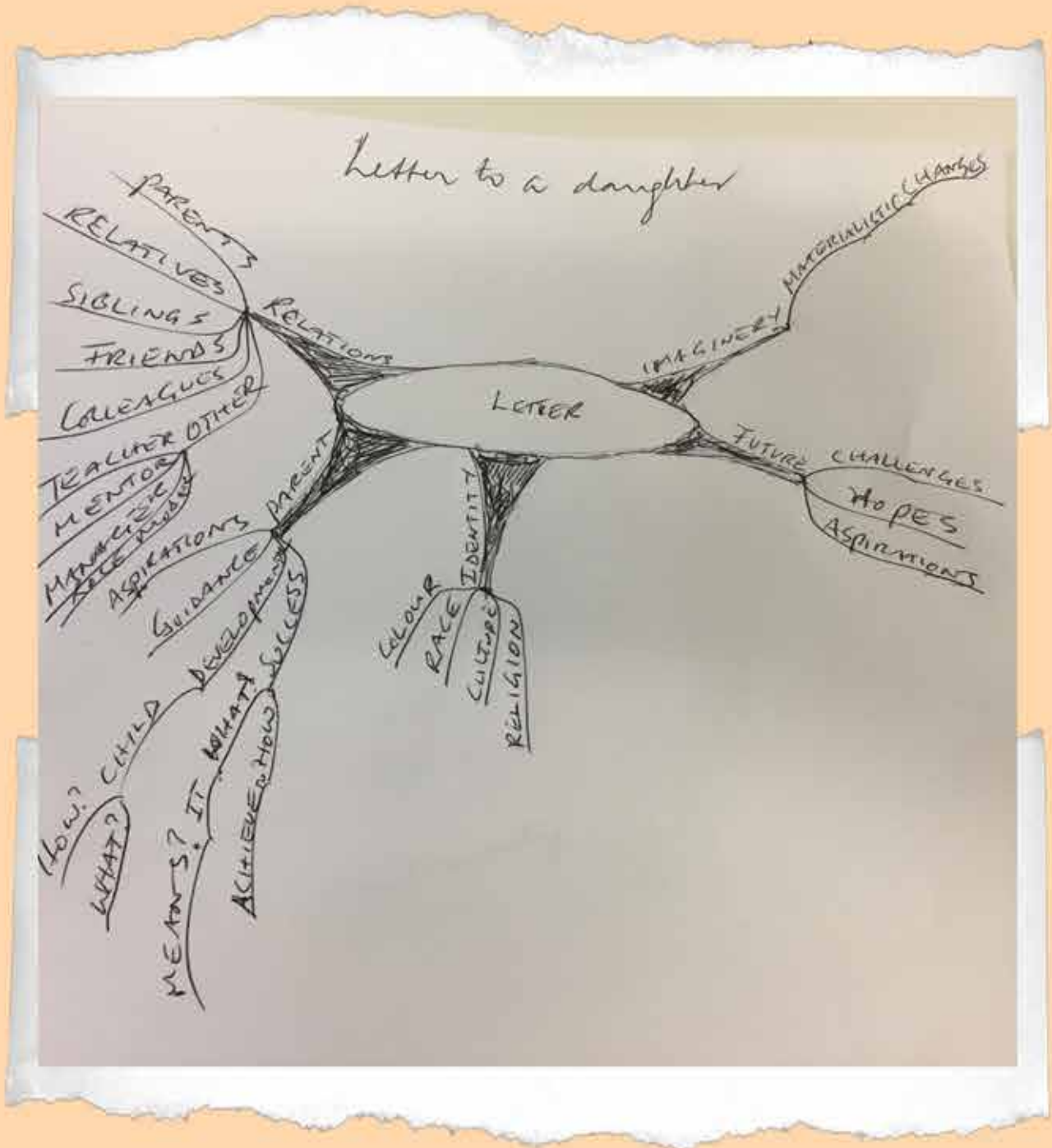
No-one to accept you for who you are
Someone holding you back
If you had wings, someone behind you holding you back.
When walking, a white man might cross the road
Or a woman move her bag to a different shoulder
Protect her mobile phone
Going down the road I'm supposed to be scared not him!
If you are white and male you might have capital

You think all UK life is Stapleton Road

I feel when I came here I needed to have Stapleton Road
It's belonging. Belongingness
Speak a special language- different ethnic languages.
(You) get accustomed to Stapleton Road.
(I) used to travel
Is it fear/lack of confidence?



Picture: Evoke Pictures/Up Our Street



Letter to a daughter

A letter to your child? "Dear daughter keep away from men."
 "And the foxes on Stapleton Road."
 "But that's part of our life."

The boys on Stapleton Road

To be drug dealer you don't need a CV. Best way to get a job? Boys on Stapleton Road.
There are no gangs. They are not gangs, just friends
Hang around each other. Sell things.
It is not your land but you were born here
You are in a place that has many dull eyes.
They think - "Nothing for me here." They have got energy
- they don't know where to spend it. They get into laughing gas.

Family break up. Young men get exploited and join group.
Because dad is not there any more.
Boys need fathers.
Some may have come very, very young.
Level of education low. Low level crime increases.

The unwritten rules

There are so many rules in this country
There are also unwritten rules
Very difficult for those new arrivals to understand the written
And importantly the unwritten rules
If they don't know the system they get in trouble

In the UK - the fake smile.
Unless you know that person what do they mean?
In our culture, if you smile in relation to the opposite sex you are showing affection.
Means you like them.
The rules are strict (here).
The new generation they don't know the system.
They go to nightclubs they meet with a white woman
Then the next morning the woman phones up the police.
Many go to jail.

The difference will come when you've been here a while

Mothers have their own agendas. Fathers have their agenda.
The father wants the children to be better than him. Can be a tension.
He's late. Why late? Father says if late again the door won't be open to him.
The mother says, "Why are you saying this. He will be on the streets."
Mothers see many children on the streets.

Back home the father has the last word. Don't have that here.
My father - I could not say anything to him.
But here they (the boys) say why?

The reality - mothers want to stay here, fathers want to go back.
They think children will grow up safer here.
The mothers they want their children to have a good education. Settle here.
Get information from each other here. See Easton as Somalia.
Friends, family, are all here.
Whereas for us a culture shock - family breakdown a high rate.

When you marry a woman you take responsibility, food, home.
When you come here that is finished. She takes responsibility for the family.
That's when the problems start.
The reasons the fathers they go back they can do things they can't do here.
The difference will come when you have been here a while.

They call the police

They call the police for nothing.

If it's a big issue you call the police - but a little argument?

When pregnant they may be angry - fighting, but in this country they call the police.

So I come back to sleep only.

At home she can go to her aunt, her sister, or her uncle

A shoulder to cry on back home - they don't go to the police they call their mother

But here, no family...friends to speak to her.

There you are married and have children. You have responsibility.

But here they take your rights away - Police and social services.

Police not understanding the culture - they come very heavy handed.

When it's mother and child very heavy handed - not trying to understand the matter.

999 is a big thing.

To the extent we don't call the police.

Hidden abuse another thing. Beating women is not acceptable.

Regardless if a Muslim or a Christian etc. without good manners no ethics.

Sexual harassment, domestic violence, unethical

Anyone abusing - his background is a problem.

99% - alcohol involved, drugs involved.

Maybe they see many things when they were young.



Image: Dean Ayotte

From them may stem the mother of all evils

School and education - from them may stem the mother of all evils.

What is wrong with the system?

The teachers don't understand those they are working with.

Boys need good role models. You are only telling me I'm failing.

Girls are trying harder. Why? 64 million dollar question.

Education is women helping women. Do something and be someone.

Here girls have really fantastic expectations.

Girls listen to their parents, more protected.

Some Somali boys said to a bright friend

"You want to be a white man by being the best in the school?"

When I went to Muslim School completely different. It was positive.

Could go to the teacher. Bring personal issues.

At home the school is like your mother and father.

School is the parent looking after children.

What makes a successful man?

What makes a successful man?

To marry and have children and if it goes in a good way, then that is success

Success as a father. Living a normal life. No family problems.

Want education. Finish education. Then a job.

You feel you have done something. Job and no problems. That is success.

In good health... and also family

If somebody is healing the people doing good things, medical, technology, pioneer, inspire youngsters - then successful

Politics always stressing - you can't stay a success in politics - politics go up and down. I'm desperate. I want to contribute to the community.

I don't feel like I'm somebody else

Ashley Community Housing helped me every time I tried to step forward
Got work, empowered myself, and got to know people.

I don't feel like I'm someone else.

I feel happy. I have a normal life.

I came here which is far from where your Motherland is.

You have to strive to be patient then you should achieve your aspirations.

There is education here. You have to educate yourself.

Tough journey. I'm someone who never gives up.

I've hope. Every day you feel very happy.

I'm just by myself. I look for the positive and learn to teach the others.



 University of
BRISTOL

ACH