

2/25

घर

Home/Koti



Edizioni



Text – Anna Kananen and Sierra Salazar

Picture – Jalmari Sarla

“Home” hardly fits the anxiety-ridden, stressful world in which we operate today, where empathy for other people’s basic human rights is spun into hatred to feed into a political agenda; where everything is “unprecedented, unprecedented, unprecedented” and stability is more akin to a distant dream one can barely remember when facing the cold shower of reality that is the present.

Nowadays, searching for the meaning of “home” can feel disorienting. The feeling of being at home is certainly not evoked only from the domestic space that home is all too frequently overused to refer to. How can it be such, when so many have lost any comfort that could be found under that roof or lost the physical space entirely?

Just a few months ago, Tufts University doctoral student **Rümeysa Öztürk** was taken from Massachusetts on March 25 by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, and deported to a Louisiana immigration detention center for six weeks. Previously, she had criticized the university’s response to Israel’s war in Gaza in an op-ed piece for student magazine *The Tufts Daily*. This dissent among students, like Öztürk, calls for the accountability of universities in the wake of Israel’s blatant disregard for international law and, in the words of Öztürk and her co-authors, “deliberate starvation and indiscriminate slaughter of Palestinian civilians”. While for others speaking up is not always an option, we refuse to shy away from discomfoting or seemingly ‘prohibited’ topics.

In a time where academic freedom is more and more in jeopardy, we will, as always, continue

to uphold students’ voices. In this issue, these recent events are explored by alum **Reetta Aalto**, who navigates dialogues on Russia and the USA with her US-born husband through the use of Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*. In *The Wound Called Home / Там, де болить дім* by **Yevheniia Kuznetsova**, she details the entire reorientation of one’s home when it is at the center of Russian imperialism. This not only tells the story of her own experience after February 24, 2022, but that of her family in the face of Soviet *dekulakization*. Generations of displacement upend the feeling of home entirely, and this blurriness is explained through **Tommaso Valastro**’s interview with Armenian activist **Arshak Makichyan**. For decades, Arshak’s family has been at the target of imperialist and autocratic ambitions.

For **Vera Boitcova**, as a queer performance artist and political activist from Russia, she faces the concept of home in a place where her identity is meant to be invisible. With their own experience as a feminist and queer activist, one of our writers – by the pseudonym of **N.** – undertakes their relation to home specifically as it relates to their birthplace, Istanbul, in light of the March 2025 protests. **Sara Harju** and **Juho Pitkänen** share intimate glimpses into the Balkans through their poetry on longing, belonging, place, and time. An entirely different experience of home is detailed through the research of **L. De Magistris** on the intersection of home, displacement, and belonging among deaf displaced people from Ukraine in Finland.

In this issue, home is neither static nor safe. It is questioned, fractured, and at times, rebuilt. Ultimately, home is not only a place, but a political act. 📖

Greetings *from* the **Sasha Board**

At the beginning of the spring semester, it often feels like there's plenty of time for all sorts of things and events. Then suddenly it's late spring, full of deadlines, and everyone's just trying to keep up amidst the rush.

Still, even during the busiest times, we at Sasha managed to organize a variety of events. One of the highlights of this spring was the excursion to Tampere and the Nootti Museum. We were genuinely happy to see so many of you there. It reminded us how inspiring it is to meet fellow students and professionals face to face, especially around shared interests that bring us together.

Since this issue's theme is Home, I wanted to reflect a bit on the role of a student association, especially in master's studies, where students come from diverse academic backgrounds. A community like Sasha has the potential to offer something valuable: a space to connect with like-minded people and just be, in the middle of all the studying and adulting. Even though we're often juggling school, work, and travel, it feels

pretty special that we can still come together and build something meaningful. As the board, we're committed to fostering a safe, fun, and inclusive environment, and I hope that sense of community continues in some way even after people have graduated.

We also want to remind you that Sasha is always open to your ideas, whether it's a new event you would like to suggest or just something you want to chat about. This summer, we'll be hosting our traditional Foreign Agent Picnic on June 15, and we'll keep you posted about our fall plans. Of course, any kind of unofficial hangouts are welcome too!



A huge thank you to everyone who joined our events and contributed to this new issue of Gazeta. I hope your summer is full of warmth, rest, and even a little boredom – you know, the good kind that gives your mind space to wander. See you around!

Sara Harju
Sasha ry's Event and Equality Coordinator

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*Там, де
болить дім*

*The Wound
Called Home*

Text & pictures – Yevheniia Kuznetsova

Дім. Одне слово, три літери, але безмежна кількість сенсів. Що відбувається з цими сенсами, коли твій дім прагне захопити інша держава? У відповідь на таке запитання немає єдиної правди. Усе, що я можу запропонувати, — це власну перспективу. Та як сказав мені одного разу друг: «Мета — не віднайти одну відповідь, а розпочати її пошук».

Я — українка, переселенка російсько-української війни. Для мене поняття дому — це одна з найболючіших тем. До 24 лютого 2022-го дім зводився до батьківської «трешки» у київській хрущовці й двоярусного ліжка, яке я ділила з сестрою. Потім дім зменшився до офісної кімнати в Ужгороді: вісім людей, матраци вкривали підлогу, і розкладний диван, що скрипів кожної ночі. Згодом я опинилася у Фінляндії й уперше за двадцять років відчула цей привілей власної кімнати та простору. Я розібралася у бюрократії й вивчила як добратися до центру без Google Maps. Та чи робить це місце моїм домом?

Розуміння дому формується під впливом багатьох чинників: географії, спогадів і, що не менш важливо для мене, історичного контексту. На жаль, частина моєї родової пам'яті пов'язана з існуванням поруч із терористичною сталінсько-радянською машиною, а

Нome. One word, four letters — yet countless meanings. But what happens to those meanings when your home becomes a target for invasion? There is no single truth in response to this question. The only thing I can offer is my perspective. As a friend once told me: “The goal isn’t to find the answer — it’s to begin searching for it.”

I am a Ukrainian, displaced by the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the idea of home is a painful topic for me. Before 24th of February 2022 it meant my parents’ three-room flat in a “khrushchyovka”, Soviet-era block, and the bunk bed I shared with my sister. After the invasion, home shrank to an office space in Uzhhorod: eight people, mattresses on the floor, a folding sofa that groaned every night. Later I found myself in Finland and, for the first time in twenty years, felt the luxury of a room of my own. I mastered the paperwork, learned to reach the city centre without Google Maps — but does that make it home?

Our sense of home is shaped by many things: geography, memories, and, for me especially, historical context. Sadly, part of my family history is entangled with the presence of the Stalinist-Soviet regime — and now with Russia’s modern aggression. Looking back, I see how this once-invisible (and now painfully visible) thread runs through generations of my family, poisoning everything it touches.



нині — з агресією сучасної росії. Оглядаючись назад, я бачу, як цей невидимий (а зараз дуже навіть видимий) зв'язок пролягає крізь покоління життя моєї родини, отруюючи все, чого торкається.

Іронічно, що я не перша у своїй родині, хто змушений замислюватися, де мій дім. Родина моєї прабабусі, хай їй щастить у її 96 років, — з Чувашії. Цей тюркомовний народ із Поволжя на початку ХХ століття також опинився під оком радянської політики розкуркулення. Маючи невелике господарство, її батьків без суду оголосили «куркулями» і депортували до Середньої Азії. Перевезення товарними вагонами без сидінь,

Ironically, I'm not the first in my family forced to ask: "Where is my home?" My great-grandmother's family — she's now 96, may she thrive — came from Chuvashia, a Turkic-speaking region of the Volga area. In the early 20th century, they were also targeted by Soviet dekulakization policies (the Soviet campaign of political repressions, including arrests, deportations, or executions of millions of supposed kulaks and their families). Owning a modest house was enough to be labeled "kulaks" or "kurkuls" ('wealthy' peasants)¹ without trial and deported to Central Asia. Packed into cattle trains without seats, heat, or toilets, they traveled for weeks. Food was distributed once a day, if at all. Many, especially children and the elderly, died of disease and starvation along the

¹ "Kulaks" or "Kurkuls" were mostly farmers of small-holdings, or generally landowning peasants (regardless of how little land they owned). They were considered "counter-revolutionary," capitalist forces by the Bolsheviks. For more information on dekulakization, see: "The Harvest of Sorrow" by Robert Conquest (1986) or "Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine" (2017) by Anne Applebaum – Ed.



опалення чи туалетів тривало тижнями. Їжу видавали раз на день або й узагалі не видавали, через що в дорозі багато людей, особливо діти й старші, гинули від хвороб і голоду. У цій депортації моя прабабуся Валя втратила старшого брата. Вона пройшла через роки важкої праці, Другу світову війну, переїзд до України — лише щоб через дев'яносто років знову опинитися під загрозою знищення.

Сьогодні, з огляду на російське вторгнення, моє розуміння дому переступає рамки фізичного простору. Воно виходить за межі стін київської квартири й охоплює цілу мережу культурних кодів: сакури в Ужгороді, каву на Подолі в 119, щорічне миття пам'ятника Сковороди з могилянцями, звуки повітряної тривоги й ППО. Це і «плечики», і «вішачки», і «тремпелі» та пам'ятники Шевченку у всіх містах. Це

way. My great-grandmother Valia lost her older brother during this journey. She survived years of forced labor, World War II, and eventually moved to Ukraine — only to find herself, ninety years later, once again facing the threat of destruction.

Today, in the shadow of Russia's invasion, my idea of home has moved far beyond the walls of my parents' Kyiv apartment. It now stretches into an entire network of cultural references: the sakura trees in Uzhhorod, coffee at “119” in Podil, Kyiv, the annual ritual of washing the Skovoroda statue with fellow Mohyla students, the sounds of air raid sirens and air defense systems. Home is also plechyky, vishachky, trempeli (the same object, shoulder pads, named three different ways in our dialects). It's the Shevchenko monuments in every city. It's the cry of “Samsa, hot samsa!” (a savoury pastry in Central Asian cuisines)



«дев'ять чи десять» без додаткових пояснень, це «Самса, гаряча самса!» в Одесі таі копчені бички на пляжах Керчі. Це все — межі спільного дому.

Проте саме цей дім нині намагаються зруйнувати: росія влаштувала різню в Бучі, знищила Маріуполь, обрушила Каховську дамбу, убила мого друга Гліба. Домами для мене також стали Мар'їнка, Бахмут, Авдіївка, Сіверськодоонецьк... міста, яких уже немає.

Тож що таке дім, коли сусід — росія? Це відчуття постійної тривоги, гіркий присмак втрати й водночас безумовний зв'язок із спільнотою, що доєднується до армії, волонтерить й відкриває допоміжні “банки”. Водночас, намагаючись жити це життя тут і зараз, бо завтра може не бути. Це безкінечний пошук нових відповідей — про те, як зберегти себе, свої спогади й культуру всупереч бажанню сусіда знищити все.

І хоч у мене поки немає остаточної відповіді, я переконана: дім — це не лише стіни й дах над головою. Дім — це спільна пам'ять і непохитна віра, що одного дня ми зберемо уламки й відбудуємо цей простір заново. І саме це бачення надає мені сили продовжувати пошук і берегти пам'ять про всіх, кого росія позбавила дому і життя. 🇺🇦



drifting over Odesa's beaches, and the smoky flavor of gobies along the shores of Kerch. These are the outlines of a shared home.

And yet, this home is under attack. russia committed a massacre in Bucha, razed Mariupol, destroyed the Kakhovka dam, and killed my friend Hlib. Cities like Marinka, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Sievierodonetsk, places that have become part of my idea of home, no longer exist.

So what is home when your neighbor is russia? It's a constant state of anxiety, the bitter taste of loss, and at the same time, an unshakable connection to a community that joins the army, volunteers, starts fundraisers. It's the daily attempt to live this life fully—because tomorrow is not guaranteed. It's a continuous search for new answers—how to preserve yourself, your memories, and your culture, despite a neighbor bent on erasing it all.

While I don't yet have a final answer, I know this: home is more than walls and a roof. Home is shared memory and a firm belief that one day, we will gather the fragments and rebuild that space anew. That vision is what gives me the strength to keep searching and to honor the memory of those whom russia has robbed of both home and life. 🇺🇦



Rebuilding Home Through the Place of Resistance

*“Yolum nerede bileceğim,
yerim nerede bulacağım”¹*

Text – N.

Pictures – N., Sude Alkış

Oruç Aruoba

Last December, when I went with friends to participate in anti-fascist protests in Helsinki, I experienced a feeling I had never experienced here before. Coming across a big crowd on the tram—the most crowded tram ride I had seen in Helsinki!—who were headed to protest as I was, I felt like I was headed somewhere very familiar. When we got off the tram, I was worried about where to go and how to find my friends, but by following this familiar crowd, I found my friends easily. As we approached the area, the sound of bells or the collective chants of the crowd, the various banners, slogans, and the flares, which are a must for every protest, took away the apprehension I had before going and replaced it with a slight excitement. When I started chanting “Ei natseja Helsinkiin, ei natseja mihinkään!”² with the group gathered for protests in the icy cold of Helsinki, in the shadow of police repression, I was able to place that warm feeling; I felt at home.

It was actually a difficult process to get used to Helsinki—I still have a relationship with this city that I love and hate at the same time, I don't know where to place it. Coming here, I knew it would be very different from İstanbul, the city I grew up in and made me who I am. Still, I always felt the absence of the blueness of the sea, the smell of the Bosphorus blowing into my nose with the wind, the sound of a ferry whistle, the cries of the seagulls, the *simit*³ and tea I bought from the street vendor on the way to school in the morning, and the lack of the cats and dogs of our neighborhood that I knew by name and petted before entering my house. It took me a long time to get used to the taste of the pulla or the Baltic Sea, which felt very unfamiliar as a sea or silent seagulls or the calm streets. Most of all, hearing a language that I did not understand and was completely foreign to me in daily life was preventing me from getting accustomed. I found myself becoming more and more withdrawn as I couldn't say “*kolay gelsin*”⁴ when passing by

1 “I will know where my path lies, I will find where I belong.” - Oruç Aruoba, Turkish philosopher, poet.

2 “No Nazis in Helsinki, no Nazis anywhere!”



a vendor or a cleaning person doing their job; as I questioned whether it would be appropriate to smile at the cashier or the people I met in the elevator and wish them a “good day.” For the first time when I chanted slogans in Finnish with my friends, I felt a new association and closeness with the language. My first reaction was the feeling of being back “home” and later I found myself questioning this feeling on a deeper level. Really, what was the meaning of “home” to me?

I was fourteen when I realized with certainty that home was not a concrete concept, we were already moving out of our eighth house, but instead of moving to the next house, I was going to be placed in a dormitory. At an early age, I thought moving from one house to another every other year, like in my family’s situation, was something very common and was surprised to meet people who had lived at the same house for the most of their lives. From all the moving around, the same repetitive rituals were on my mind: packing up our belongings, finishing up boxes, farewells to an empty house we called home for a couple of years, saying goodbye to friends, arriving at our new home, and opening up boxes. I always wanted to start with the boxes of books; I think setting up my desk with the fun world map poster from National Geographic Kids hanging right above it and my books placed neatly in my bookcase made me more comfortable. This was my way of embracing my *new home* but I would always mourn what I had left behind in the places we had moved to.

In that last moving process, this cycle was broken. My books, the world map that found

its place in every house we had moved into, and every other item which made me feel like a belonging there were put away in my family’s storage—where they still are to this day. That was when I realized home was indeed more than a physical connection, more than four walls, belongings and family; home is a concept one builds for themselves and I found myself in an inextricable search for the structuring of this concept for many years.

This March, whilst still searching for answers on the concept of home, I had to face a sharp reality that threw me back again. The resistance that started in Istanbul and quickly spread across Turkey, intensified by the demand for democracy, struck me from a completely different place. The feeling of being stuck as I watched the developments from afar, the anger bubbling up inside me that I didn’t know where to place, and more than everything, a deep longing for home. This longing for home had deeper connotations than just feeling homesick of the city I called home and felt like I belonged. I felt a deep sadness and helplessness that I could not quite put my finger on as I followed the developments from Helsinki. I also realized that I was in a different kind of pain when my friends and acquaintances were among the arrests that followed the start of the resistance, or when I was texting people I knew every day asking “Are you back home safely?” and following the developments every minute of every day.

I was not there in person but I was very familiar with that feeling of anger, with the energy of the crowd because I was a part of that unity during my activism years, chanting and standing together in solidarity had

3 A circular bread encrusted with sesame seeds, commonly sold by street vendors in Turkey.

4 A common Turkish expression used to wish someone ease in their work. Said to people while they’re working — whether it’s a shopkeeper, construction worker, or colleague — it conveys support, respect, and encouragement. Literally means “may it come easy.”



become my home. This feeling of home stemmed more from an existential place, feeling accepted as who I am and feeling safe. Most importantly, it included the acceptance of the emotion, anger, that I had accumulated inside me for years and never knew where to put it. As Sara Ahmed⁵ said, beyond individual experiences, emotions play a role in the construction of spaces, belonging and orientations. Emotions overflow from us reaching others', colliding, in-

“This feeling of home stemmed more from an existential place, feeling accepted as who I am and feeling safe.”

⁵ Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.


tersecting or merging. I was able to find a place for myself in a space where my feminist anger against social inequality, state violence, male violence which I had witnessed for years, and my own identity struggle, was not suppressed, but made visible. I felt at home for the first time when I was able to exist without hiding my anger, and this collective anger rising from the site of resistance blended with great enthusiasm and joy, creating a sense of unity and belonging.

“I don't have an answer to what home is yet, and maybe I don't want to.”

The cornerstone of these sentiments, our feminist night marches, which started traditionally at Taksim square following the path to the İstiklal Road, had changed its dimension after experiencing a violent police intervention in 2019. In the following years, even though we found our place in the narrow alleys stretching from Siraselviler to Cihangir, police barricades covered a wider area each year. Still, we continued our chants and protests with slogans “let the husband come, let the father come, let the state come, let the baton come; rebellion for

rebellion's sake, freedom for freedom's sake!”. Even with the changing locations, our voices, cheerful songs, dances accompanying angry chants bore the familiar patterns.

It was impossible to ignore the impact of these patterns and the resistance practices of the feminist and queer movements, the two strongest movements that have been able to survive in the shrinking civic space in an increasingly autocratic political climate and repressive regime that has rapidly intensified in the last decade, on the largest social movement of this decade. As a matter of fact, I once again was able to see how the feminist marches and queer protests which I was a part of for years were able to hold the civic area from afar.

The feeling of desperation following the protests from afar, without being able to physically participate, swung me to the very beginning. Once, home was a place of resistance to me, but now I was in a void with uncertainties. This time I look deeper inside myself beyond the spaces, protests and communities, and I am met with a self that resists becoming a home for itself. Maybe this is a part of my journey. In his book *The Year of the Hare*, Arto Paasilinna says “He had his own world, this one, and it was fine to be here, living alone in one's own way.” It is at this point that I feel that I am on a new path again and I am thinking about the meaning of living where I am right now, the way I am. I don't have an answer to what home is yet, and maybe I don't want to. Yet, despite everything, I am still searching; I am still resisting; I am still afraid to settle in a place, a person, a memory; I am still hoping to belong. 



Am...
Ka...
İS...
Sağ... larınız...
mızd...
lenin direği anedir
mezb...
tal...

Kotimatkoja

eli runoja Balkanilta

Balkanilla vietetyt pidemmät ja lyhyemmät ajat ovat saaneet meidät ajattelemaan paikkaa ja aikaa, kaipausta ja kuulumista. Vieraista kaupungeista on tullut tuttuja kirjoittamalla. Nämä runot ovat syntyneet iltakävelyillä, bussimatkoilla ja hetkissä, joissa ajatuksemme ovat vielä siellä mistä lähdimme.

Teksti — Sara Harju ja Juho Pitkänen

Muistan kuinka viima ikkunoissa tuntui kodilta
tuuli, mereltä
se puuttuu täältä

Mutta alan löytää paikkaani kuulumattomuudesta,
välitiloista
löydän itseni yhä uudelleen ristiriidoista,
lämpenevästä keväästä, kirsikankukista, ruostuneista ovista, roskalaatikoista

Annan itselleni luvan unohdella sanoja.

S

toissa pimeytenä. naapurissani minareetti
porasi reiän pikimustaan taivaankanteen:
maan päälle tuhansien kiljahdukset

tiputtelivat päälleni kahvinpurua
särisevältä nauhalta heijastuvaa seireenilaulua

toisinaan iltaisin
minareetti ja ajoittain vuorikin
antautuu supattamaan minulle

J

Usvarihmat tanssivat turkoosin joen mutkassa,
vuoret tekevät pas de bourreén
taakse sivulle eteen

Bussissa, liikkeessä, kotona,
kotimatalla,
matka on eniten kotona mitä tiedän

Rinteet pimenevät ympärillä,
bussi vajoaa pehmeään ja
olen sylissä,
niin oikeassa paikassa kuin nyt (ja nyt)
on mahdollista olla.

S

Sinä napautit tuhkat parvekkeelle, vai olinko se minä,
ja ystäväsi jonka kanssa olit kerran kolmen kimpassa ja siitä tuli draamaa,
aurinko laski, graffitikaupunki,
lämpö silitti kattoa,
sinun asunnossasi oli kotoisaa pikkutunneilla,
toista oli hätistellä yöperhosia sen aktivistin patjalla, vaikka en vaihtaisi sitä
ikinä mihinkään.

Aamulla matkustimme lähiöön ilman meikkiä,
otimme turistikuvia ja tatuoinnit,
suutelimme ties missä, kävimme suurmiesten haudoilla
ja vilkuilimme, olimme onnekkaita,
puhuimme sodasta ja lesbofeministeistä,
kielillä ja ilman,
toisista asioista jätimme puhumatta.

Vielä myöhemmin tulin luoksesi toiseen suureen B:llä alkavaan kaupunkiin,
taas parveke, tupakat, sänky ja valokuvat.
Kun viimein palasin pohjoiseen vihreälle kujalle,
lähetin sinulle viimeisen viestin.

S

Hetkessä
olin erossa kaikesta
silmäilemässä derviäsiä huhtikuisena väkiyönä
omasta uskostaan kalpeutuneena,
uppoutuneena syntiin ja lihaan

Derviäsiä,
joka irtautui synnistä tekkensä kimmeltävälle sisäpihalle
kuunteli äänehtivää vuorenrintettä,
raivosi kalmaisille kasvoille tai siteerasi väärin koraania tai mitä vaan
pakotti itsensä löytämään pyhän lapsuudenkodin

Puikin itsekin sinne,
missä kaakkoistuuli työntyy tärykalvoihin
missä juutalaishautuumaan valkoiset paadet,
keltaisena helmeilevä Sarajevo
pyyhkivät mielestäni synnin, tarpeellisen ja tarpeettoman

Valottomuudessa
urakoin kaupungin tiiliseinistä itselleni suojaisan sisäpihan
kun ympärillä järisi
kun räpälemäiset kissat rosvosivat kadut
eikä puhelimeeni saapunut lohtusanoja

Odotin
juutalaishautuumaalla tai tekken sisäpihalla,
rakennelmissani, jossa päätin panna toivoni kaikkeen sortuvaan
salakielellämme jaarittelin kaupungille,
jonka ottomaanikatoilta taivas pyyhki suolaista hikeä.

J

Kirkkaimmilla vesiväreilläni maalaan vuoria
vasten taivaalle levitettyä kangasta.

Kuivuttuaan puen vuorille yöasusi,
joka on tehty syvänsinisestä silkistä.

J

Illanviileät kissat saman autiotalon pihalla,
sen jonka omistaja katosi 90-luvulla
kukkien valkoiset torvet huutavat pensaiden lomasta
pimeään kuin äänettömät suut

Ja minä kävelemässä kotiin yöllä keltaisessa valossa
otsatukka pystyssä
olen tanssinut hikisten miesten keskellä ja saanut poskeani vasten
sänkiä hyvästelyistä
rakkaiden ja tuntemattomien

Ja helle joka lyö sääriin keskipäivässä,
asfaltti imee kuumuuden, musta halkeava pelti
vettä tippuvat ilmastointilaitteet ulkoseinissä,
poliisit parlamenttitalon edustalla,
sumuiset auringonlaskut Kalemegdanilla

Ja laatikollinen sitruunoita portailla,
pitkin tummaa lämmintä katua
pari surullista kalaa ravintolan edustalla betonialtaassa

Tašmajdanin kellertynyt ruoho yskii,
vauva vilkuttaa minulle rattaista, vilkutan takaisin
päivät nitisevät uusina ja vanhoina, karusellini pyörii, se on
kiikkerä ja kimaltaa.

Sasha ry

FOREIGN AGENT SUMMER PICNIC

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Tämä kaikki on vain vähän LIUKKAA

Miten löytää yhteys toisiin ja edes jonkinlainen tunne merkityksellisyydestä maailmassa, jota hallitaan hämmentämällä, kysyy Aleksanteri-instituutin alumni, elokuvantekijä ja kirjailija Reetta Aalto esseessään, jossa hän tarkastelee Hannah Arendtin klassikkoteosta *Totalitarismin synty* nykyajan linssin läpi.

Teksti – Reetta Aalto

Kuvitus – Lotta Aro

– **E**n ole onnellinen, mieheni sanoo yllättäen eräänä huhtikuuisena aamuna, kun olen takki päällä astumassa ulos ovesta.

– Mitä nyt?

– Ei mitään, hän vastaa ja huitaisee ilmaan kädellään.

– Tämä kaikki on vain vähän liikaa.

”Kaikella” hän tarkoittaa Yhdysvaltojen tapahtumia. **Donald Trumpin** aloitettua toisen presidenttikautensa tammikuun lopulla mieheni on seurannut toisen kotimaansa uutisia herkeämättä. Jos televisio ei ole päällä, hänen korvanapeissaan pauhaa jokin ajankohtaisia aiheita ruotiva amerikkalainen podcast.

Lähden ehtiäkseni bussiin, mutta mieheni sanat jäävät pyörimään päähäni.

Opiskelin Pietarissa 90-luvun lopulla ja 2000-luvun alussa. Opettelin venäjän kielen ja kulttuurin ja pian niistä tuli osa identiteettiäni. 24. helmikuuta 2022 kaikki muuttui. Maa, johon olin niin monin tavoin sitonut itseni, oli yhtäkkiä arvaamaton ja vaarallinen kuin psykoosiin vaipunut väkivaltainen kumppani. Oli aika ottaa ero. Vaati paljon työtä ja kalliita terapiatunteja kivuta siitä kuopasta, johon hyökkäyssota minut sysäsi. Mieheni oli tukenani, käski kävelyille ja juomaan vettä sekä muistutti, ettei jokaista sota-aiheista

Telegram-ketjua ehkä kannata seurata tai ainakaan klikata niiden kuvia auki.

Mieheni ei ole mistään kotoisin, minulla on tapana sanoa. Vanhempiansa kansainvälisten urien takia hän kasvoi eri paikoissa ympäri maailmaa, eikä tunne olevansa kotona oikein missään.

– Haluan olla kotisi, sanoin hänelle tuomarin edessä, kun meidät vihittiin.

Nyt en tiedä, mitä tehdä mieheni ahdistuksen kanssa. Minuakin hirvittää, kun kaikki perusturvallisuutta ylläpitävät rakenteet murenevat: demokratia, oikeusvaltio, ihmisoikeudet. Tältä se sitten kai tuntuu, kun imperiumi sortuu.

Tartun lukupiirissä aloittamaani **Hannah Arendtin** *Totalitarismin syntyyn*. Ehkä se tuo selkeyttä ajatuksiini tämän kaiken keskellä.

Saksanjuutalainen Arendt pakeni natsihallintoa Yhdysvaltoihin vuonna 1941 ja alkoi kirjoittaa Totalitarismin syntyä heti sodan jälkeen, kun tiedot kuolemanleireistä saavuttivat hänet. Hän halusi ymmärtää totalitarismia, sillä vain ymmärtämällä sitä oli hänen mukaansa mahdollista estää sen paluu. ”[Y]mmärtäminen tarkoittaa sitä, että kohtaa todellisuuden ennalta suunnittelematta, valppaasti, ja kestää sen, olipa se mikä tahansa”¹, hän kirjoittaa.

1 Arendt 2024, 10.

Arendtille kaikki autoritaarinen vallankäyttö ei ollut totalitarismia. ”[T]otalitarismi eroaa olennaisesti muista tuntemistamme poliittisen sorron muodoista kuten despotiasta, tyranniasta ja diktatuurista”², hän kirjoittaa. Siinä missä muunlaisissa hallintomuodoissa ”[k]oskemattomaksi jää koko yksityiselämän piiri, kyky kokea, keksiä ja ajatella”³, totalitarismissa kaikki elämänalueet – politiikka, kulttuuri, yksityiselämä ja ajattelu – alistetaan valtakoneiston ja ideologian kontrolliin. Arendtille totalitaristisia valtioita olivat vain natsi-Saksa ja **Stalinin** Neuvostoliitto.

Maailmansotien välissä Euroopassa oli myllerrysten seurauksena valtava määrä kodittomia ihmisiä, jotka jäivät kansallisvaltioiden tai yhteiskuntaluokkien ulkopuolelle. Hämmäntävinä aikoina ihmiset alkavat helpommin seurata vahvoja johtajia ja liittyvät ideologisiin liikkeisiin. Yksinkertainen maailmanselitys – oli se sitten totta tai ei – tuo turvaa. ”[I]hmismassoja riivaa halu paeta todellisuutta, koska kodittomina ne eivät enää siedä sen sattumanvaraisuutta, käsittämättömyyttä”⁴, Arendt kirjoittaa. Natseille tunteen johonkin kuulumisesta toi rotu, bolševikeille työväenluokka.

Kodittomuus ja mihinkään kuulumattomuuden tunne ovat tuttuja ilmiöitä myös nyt, kun rakennemuutoksen aiheuttama työttömyys sekä köyhyyden, sotien ja ilmastonmuutoksen aiheuttama pakolaisuus koskettavat yhä laajempia ihmisjoukkoja. Aiemmin turvaa tuoneet

asiat, kuten uskonto ja perhe, ovat menettäneet merkitystään. Työstä on tullut ihmisen omanarvontunnon mittari, sitä ei riitä kaikille. Apuun ovat jälleen rientäneet ideologiset liikkeet, jotka lupaavat yhtenäisyyttä ja menetetyin mahdin paluuta. Make America Great Again! Можем повторить!

Totaaliseen valtaan pyrkiessään eliitti alkaa sepittää valheita ja luoda mitä fantastisimpia uhkakuvia. Siinä missä natsi-Saksa käytti omiin tarkoituksiinsa tekaistua tarinaa juutalaisten maailmansalaliitosta, **Putin** lainaa Stalinilta. Kansa on valmis hyväksymään valheen faktana, sillä se tuntuu tutulta. On turvallisempaa seurata vahvaa johtajaa, olla osa suurta yhteistä äiti-Venäjää kuin alkaa käydä läpi menneisyyden veristä likapyykkiä.

Ukrainalaisten ”natsien ja narkomaanien” ohella Venäjän vihollisiksi on leivottu koko niin kutsuttu läntinen maailma, ”gender-ideologian” turmelema ”Gayropa” sekä imperialistinen ja itseään täynnä oleva Yhdysvallat. Kansallisten myyttien laarin pohjalta on kuopaistu myös uskomus Moskovasta kolmantena Roomana ja Venäjän tehtävästä oikeaoppisen kristinuskon säilyttäjänä. Isänmaallisessa musiikkivideossa⁵ keskiaikaiset venäläissoturit nousevat viljapellosta ja kirjaavat hevosillaan peitset tanassa kohti länttä puolustamaan kaikkea sitä puhdasta ja hyvää, mitä vain Venäjä voi olla.

2 Arendt 2024, 529.

3 Arendt 2024, 547.

4 Arendt 2024, 423–424.

5 Venäläisen laulajan Vika Tsyganovan kappaleeseen ”Wagner” tehty musiikkivideo, joka julkaistiin syksyllä 2022.

Yhdysvalloissa MAGA-fanaatikot haikailevat menneisyyteen, jossa kunnan kansalainen saattoi vielä rehdillä teollisuustyöllään elättää valkoisen, kristityn heteroydinperheensä, johon kuuluivat isä, äiti, poika ja Aito avioliitto banderolleista tuttu vasarahai⁶. Trumpin Yhdysvaltoja uhkaavat muukalaiset, jotka syövät kissoja ja koiria⁷ ja kuuluvat rikollisjärjestöihin, mistä todistavat heidän rystysiinsä tatuoidut (lue: photoshopatut⁸) kirjaimet ja numerot. Uhka ovat myös muut talousvallat, Eurooppa, rajanaapuri Kanada ja mahtava Kiina, joita kaikkia Trump pyrkii kurittamaan mittavin tuontitullein. Vihollisia lymyää myös oman kansan keskuudessa, yliopistokampuksilla ja kansalaisjärjestöissä. Niitä ovat myös kaikki, jotka ovat jotain muuta kuin cis-normatiivisen ajattelutavan mukaisia miehiä tai naisia. Trump on tehnyt transihmisistä aikamme juutalaisia.

Liityin Facebookiin vuonna 2007 samaan aikaan kuin mieheni, jonka olin tavannut vain hieman aiemmin. Alussa somettaminen oli verrattain viattomalta tuntuvaa puuhaa. Tökimme toisiamme ja kirjoitimme yksityisviestien kaltaisia tervehdyksiä ystäviemme seinille. Olimme sinisilmäisen avoimia ja – ainakin jos kuviin on uskomista – aina humalassa.

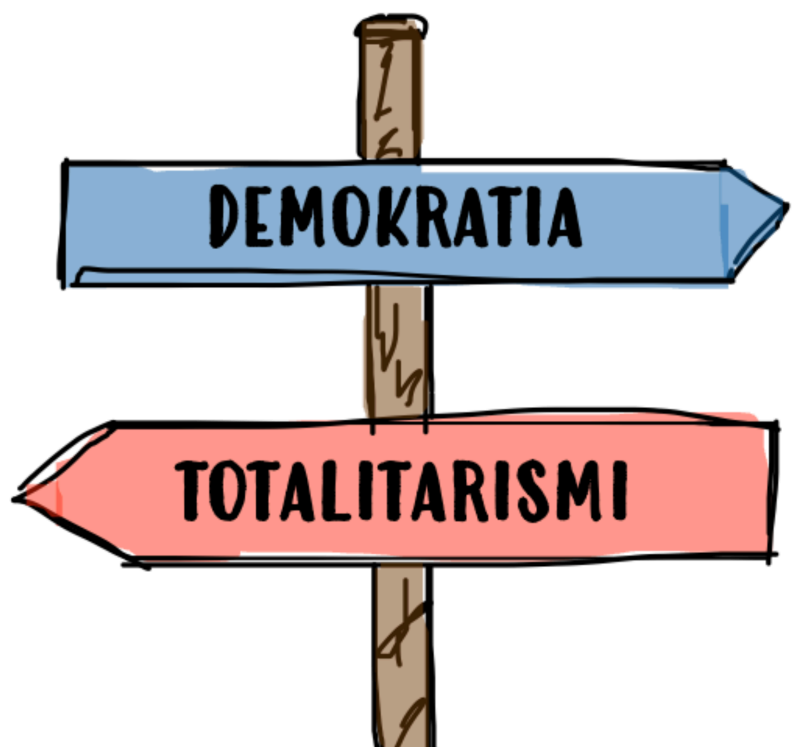
Aloin havainnoida somen nurjia puolia vasta 2010-luvulle tultaessa. Twitterin myötä keskustelukulttuuri alustoilla raaistui, maalittaminen ja muu kiusanteko yleistyivät ja vastaan alkoi tulla yhä useammin harhaanjohtavaa tietoa.

Venäjä kävi kiivaaseen infosotaan, jonka lopullista laajuutta ja vaikutuksia voimme

yhä vain arvailla. Eräällä viimeisimmiksi jääneistä Venäjän matkoistani ennen pandemiaa ystäväni näytti minulle Pietarin metrossa kuvatun videon, jossa nainen ruiskuttaa valkaisuainetta jalat levällään istuvien miesten haaroihin. Myöhemmin video paljastui Kreml-mieliseksi propagandaksi. Sen tarkoitus oli saada ystäväni kaltaiset venäläiset vakuuttuneeksi länsivaikutteiden – tässä tapauksessa feminismin – mielettömyydestä.

Putinin Venäjän ja muiden autoritaaristen valtioiden tavoitteena on jo pitkään ollut hämmennyksen ja hajaannuksen kylväminen länsimaisiin demokratioihin. Nyt tulokset ovat kaikkien nähtävillä: luottamus demokratiaan, oikeusvaltioon, tutkittuun tietoon ja tiedonvälitykseen on heikentynyt niin Yhdysvalloissa kuin meillä Euroopassakin.

Arendt ymmärsi valtaapitävien kiinnostuksen ihmisten välisiin suhteisiin: ”[P]oliisi näkee unta, että yksi silmäys toimiston seinän jättiläismäiselle kartalle riittää millä hetkellä hyvänsä osoittamaan, kenellä on suhde kehen ja miten



läheinen”⁹, hän kirjoittaa salaisen poliisin kuvitteellisesta utopiasta. Nyt toimiston seinästä on kuitenkin tullut totta.

Teknologiamiljardöörien näyttävä osallistuminen Trumpin virkaanastujaisiin herätti monissa huolta, eikä suotta. Nämä miehet omistavat eräät suosituimmista sosiaalisen median alustoista, joilla ihmiset jakavat kaikki yksityisimmätkin tietonsa. Vääriin käsiin joutuessaan alustojen keräämä tieto voi osoittautua vaaralliseksi. Tämän takia harva ystäväistäni käyttää kiinalaisomisteista TikTokia. Kuka kuitenkin olisi vielä muutama vuosi sitten osannut arvata, että ”väärät kädet” voivat olla myös Yhdysvaltojen ylin johto.

Eräänä päivänä vähän ennen vappua mieheni lähettää minulle videon, jossa kaksi kissaa loikoilee ikkunalaudalla päät vastakkain niin, että ne muodostavat sydämen. Kuvaruudun alalaidassa lukee: Me and you in another universe. Kissojen jälkeen algoritmi arpoo minulle tekoälyllä tehdyn videon, jossa ”Trump” ja ”Putin” soittavat levyjä. Väliin on leikattu kuvia ohjusten

laukaisemisesta. Syntyy vaikutelma, että presidentit kontrolloivat ohjuksia miksauspöytänsä takaa. Tämä kaikki on todella jo vähän liikaa.

– Trump käskää sotilaat kaduille, mieheni meuhkaa illalla television ääressä katsoessaan uutisia Yhdysvalloissa järjestetyistä mielenosoituksista.

Tämä ei ole tieto, vaan arvaus, hänen mielensä maalaama mörkö, kuva siitä, miten hänen toinen kotimaansa ajautuu fasistiseen pakkovaltaan. Muistutan häntä siitä, että arendtlaisesti ajateltuna Yhdysvallat ei ainakaan toistaiseksi ole totalitaristinen valtio, sitä ei ole vielä edes Venäjä. Niin kauan kuin nyrkkiä voi **Dostojevskin Kellariloukon** ihmisen tavoin heristää edes taskunsa suojissa, ei totalitarismi ole voittanut.

– Pitäisikö tehdä jotain konkreettista ruutujen tuijottamisen sijaan? minä ehdotan, vaikka en itsekään oikein tiedä mitä.

Vappuna menemme marssille. Teinikäinen lapsemme on liittynyt



nuorisojärjestykseen, jolla on marssilla oma blokkinsa. Hakaniementorilla punalippujen alla mietin ukrainalaisystävääni, joka paettuaan hyökkäyssotaa Saksaan kokee vaikeutta osallistua Ukrainan tukitapahtumiin, sillä häntä ne muistuttavat Neuvostoliiton aikaisista marsseista, joilla piti toistella ulkoa opeteltuja iskulauseita. Minä taas – itsenikin yllättäen – kailotin täyttä kurkkua aseita Ukrainaani heti hyökkäyssodan alettua. Suru ja kauhu lamauttivat, kun viha taas antoi virtaa. Tuntui tärkeältä olla yhdessä ja pitää ääntä.


Marssi etenee kohti keskustaa. Pitkänsillan kupeessa olevan Pilailupuodin näyteikkunassa Trump-nukke näyttää lyyhistyvän harteillaan istuvan Putin-nuken painosta. Vielä joitakin vuosia sitten spekulointia Venäjän vaikutuksesta Yhdysvaltojen yläpuolelle johtoon pidettiin salaliittoteorioihin verrattavana hourehtimisena. Nyt se on yleinen pilkan aihe.

Kansalaistoria lähestyessämme lapsemme laulaa muiden nuorten mukana Kenen

joukoissa seisot. He heristävät nyrkkejään kohti Eduskuntataloa ja huutavat:
– Tunkekaa leikkaukset perseeseen!

Virnistän miehelleni ja hän hymyilee takaisin. Tuntuu hyvältä olla ulkona, ihmisten parissa. Apatia on tiessään.

Arendt ajatteli, että aktivismissa kaikki voimat tulee kohdistaa totalitaarista valtaa käyttämään pyrkiviä vastaan. Hän uskoi ihmisten yhteen tulemiseen yli puoluerajojen, solidaarisuuden hengessä, sillä: ”kaikki spontaanisti osoitettu ystävyys on totalitaarisen herruuden kannalta yhtä vaarallista kuin avoin vihamielisyys juuri siksi, että itse spontaanisuus on arvaamattomuudessaan kaikkein suurin este ihmisen täydelliselle alistamiselle.”¹⁰

Aurinko tulee esiin, kun **Yeboyah** astuu keskuskirjaston kylkeen pystytetylle lavalle. Hän omistaa kappaleen ”for girls, gays and theys”. Muunsukupuoliseksi identifioituva ystäväni kääntyy meitä kohti ja levittää käsiään innostunut ilme kasvoillaan. Tanssimme lavan edessä ja hymyilemme. Mietin: tässä me olemme. Emme ehkä onnellisia, mutta melkein. 

Lähteet:

Arendt, Hannah 2024. Totalitarismin synty. Suomentanut Matti Kinnunen. Viides painos. Tallinna Raamatutrukikoda. Tallinna.

6 Vuonna 2015 sosiaalisessa mediassa kiersi meemi, jossa oli kuva Helsingin tuomiokirkon portaille levitetystä Aito avioliitto ry:n mainoslakanasta ja teksti: Oikeaoppiseen perheeseen kuuluu äiti, isä, poika ja vasarahai. Vitsi oli siinä, että mainoslakanassa olevan logon tyttölapseksi tarkoitettu saporopäinen hahmo todella muistutti vasarahaita.

7 Trump väitti vaalikampanjansa aikana vuonna 2024 haitilaisten maahanmuuttajien syövän lemmikkieläimiä.

8 Peukaloitua valokuvaa käytettiin todisteena El Salvadorin CECOT-vankilaan keväällä 2025 lähetetyn Kilmar Abrego Garcian kuulumisesta rikollisjärjestykseen MS-13.

9 Arendt 2024, 500.

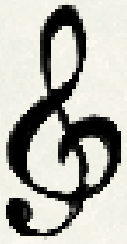
10 Arendt 2024, 523-524.

HOME IS SOMETHING ALREADY

Interview
with
Arshak
Makichyan

**THING THAT HAS
ADY BEEN LOST**





Text – Tommaso Valastro

Arshak Makichyan was raised in Russia, in an Armenian family with a long history of displacement. He founded Fridays For Future Russia in 2019, and through activism he found his own voice. After he spoke out against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, he was deprived of his Russian citizenship, and he now lives between Armenia and Berlin. In this abridged version of an exclusive interview, he explores what home has meant through his lifelong battle for global, local, and personal justice.



Tommaso Valastro:

“Home” can be a blurry concept. Thinking back to your childhood, your adulthood, and the different moments, places, and people that composed your life so far, when, where, and with whom have you felt at home the most?

Arshak Makichyan:

When I was one year old, my family had to migrate to Russia, and I became a migrant. This feeling of “belonging” is something that I haven’t really felt for a long time in my life. I grew up in Russia, and my family lived in rented apartments most of their lives. I didn’t have this feeling of home, and I was experiencing racism already as a kid, even in kindergarten.



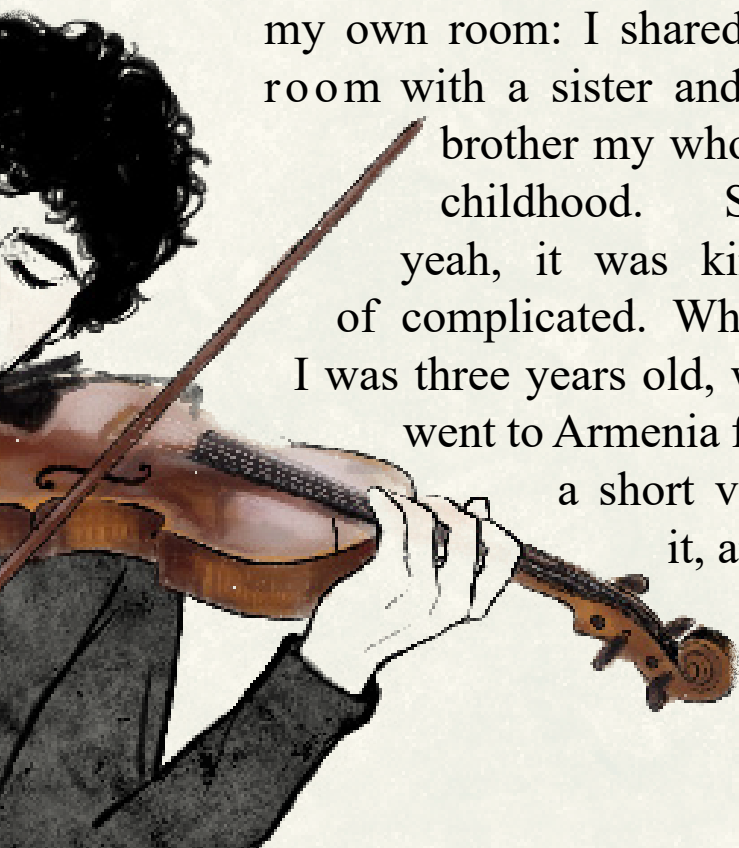


I don't really know why I decided to become a violinist, but I started playing violin professionally when I was seven years old, and I think for me it was a way to escape from this reality: I didn't really have a real home, I didn't have this kind of feeling that a lot of people actually have. In this world of music, I think I was trying to find a place where I could be more comfortable and express myself... because yeah, I think as with many, many people, most of the time I didn't even have my own table, my own room: I shared a room with a sister and a

brother my whole childhood. So, yeah, it was kind of complicated. When I was three years old, we went to Armenia for a short visit, and

when I was about nine years old, I went back on my own. I think that in Armenia I felt this sense of belonging while staying with my relatives. When I was staying, for example, at my aunt's place or at my grandparents' place, I had this feeling that I was at home, like a feeling of safety. And every time that I was visiting Armenia, I didn't want to return to Russia, which I had to do. Even though I was studying in a good musical school for talented kids, I never wanted to go back. For me, home always was somewhere else, far away.

During my last year at the Moscow conservatory, I was standing on Pushkin Square, and I was protesting every Friday. The place where I was protesting became a new home for me, because I found my own voice. My activism helped



me to share my personality, and also to be more attached to the place where I was living. Because of my activism, I travelled more in the Russian Federation, and I connected to other indigenous struggles. I felt truly connected to them; we had a cause that could unite us. At the same time, I started feeling at home as part of humanity, because I was part of the Fridays For Future movement. I was posting my protests on social media, and I was getting support from all around the world. I wasn't just feeling part of the Russian civil society, but mainly part of a global civil society fighting for climate justice.

In the end, "home" is something that is easily destroyed. I have lost my "home" so many times, and then I had to build from scratch. [...] This fear of losing your home, or the

reminiscence of your home, is really something that is shaping the Armenian identity. I am also watching and reading a lot of stories of my friends from Artsakh, how their houses are being looted by Azerbaijani settlers, and it's really horrible. So, in my experience, "home" is something very distant, and something that is threatened all the time.

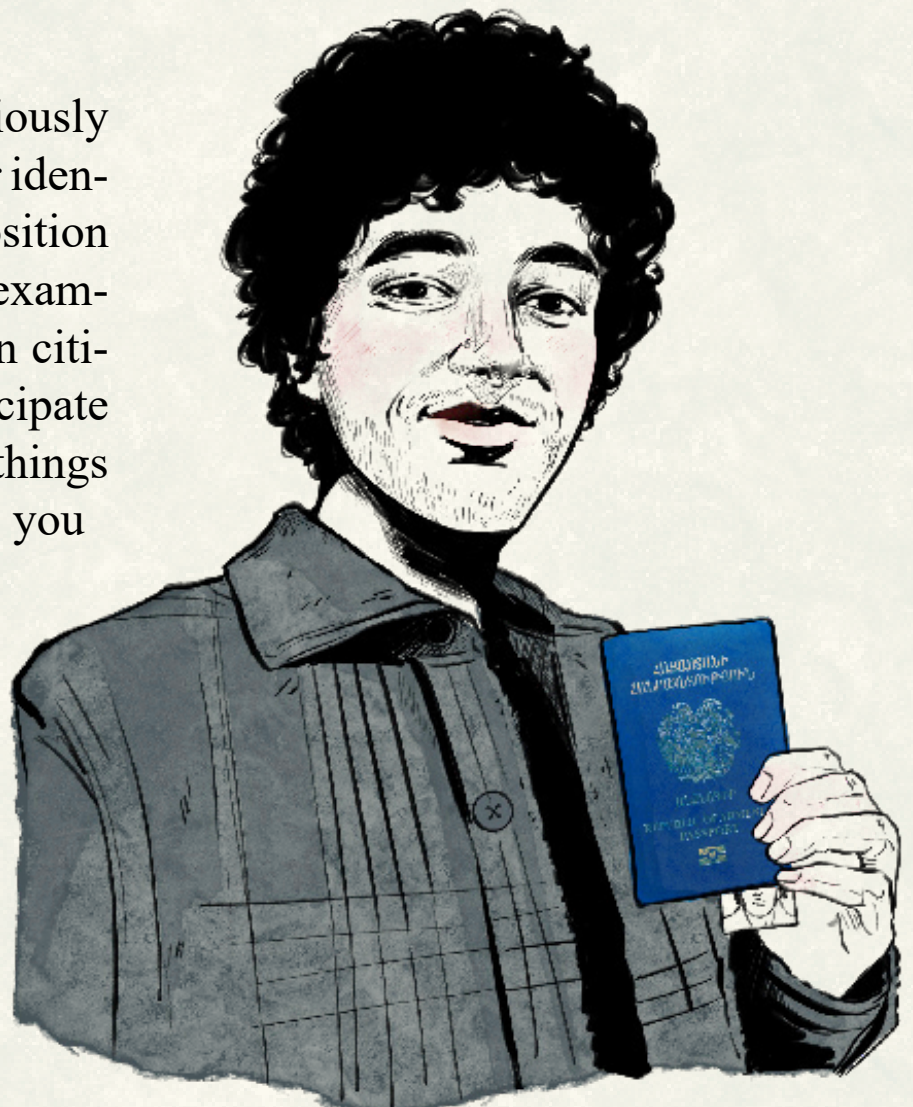
Valastro: In what way does citizenship shape your identity now, and how would you define it in relation to your feeling of home?

Makichyan: I think citizenship is many things at the same time. From one side, it's responsibility: you are not responsible towards the state, but towards your fellow citizens, as well as towards for example migrants that come to your country. As a Russian-Armenian I feel responsible

for what is happening in Ukraine and for Russian colonialism, from which Armenia also suffered for centuries. I think that we live in a real world, and citizenship gives you some privileges: you can participate in elections, you can vote, and you can participate in crucial processes. As an activist I was even thinking to run for the Russian parliament at some point (*laughs*).

Citizenship obviously changes not only your identity but also your position in this society. For example, I'm not a German citizen and I cannot participate in elections. Saying things as an outsider makes you more impartial, your voice is neutral in a way: if I were a German citizen, I would probably feel responsible for the German

past in some way, as Germany participated in many genocides. I would also feel responsible for what is happening right now in Palestine, because the Western world is supporting it. There are many layers to it, and I already feel partially responsible for these things because of my residency here. As a migrant I understand that I have limited



rights, but I also have limited responsibilities, and I can be deported any minute, especially now that a lot of people are being deported from Germany and from the US. Citizenship matters in this sense.

Ideally, we should be citizens of the world, and people should be able to migrate and decide for themselves. But since we have these borders, we must also understand that we also have some responsibilities. As an Armenian, I'm speaking out against Turkish colonialism, showing how Turkey was built on stolen lands and properties from Armenians. I think the same argument applies to Europe; I think reparations should be paid. People from other countries, if they want, should at least be able to stay, because right now in many of these countries it's impossible to stay due to

war, economic crisis or other problems. And I can see how Europe has participated in the creation of these problems, even today. For example, I was criticizing Europe for financing Putin's regime, buying fossil fuels. And then, during the blockade [of Artsakh], Europe signed a gas deal with Azerbaijan, which was terrible and I would say that they are complicit in the genocide in Artsakh.

There is a lot of hypocrisy in Europe: people proclaim themselves Christians and almost participate in a genocide against the first Christian nation in the world; at home they are like against Muslim people, a minority in Europe whose rights are not protected. I feel this hypocrisy, because I want to build a just world where Christians feel safe in Western Armenia or in the Middle East and where

Muslim people feel safe and at home in Europe.

Valastro: Last March the Armenian parliament approved the EU integration act, which calls on the Armenian government to begin the process of gaining membership of the EU. Would Armenia's EU accession widen the borders of your home and give you agency to fight for justice within the EU?

Makichyan: For Armenians becoming part of Europe is kind of a dream, because Russia is putting a lot of pressure there, exploiting Armenia's economic dependence on Russia rooted in a colonial past. At the same time, military deterrence can give Armenia some safety from possible invasions from Azerbaijan and Turkey, so it's kind of a political necessity for Armenia. But I think that right now Europe is in crisis, and

values don't really play an important role in Europe. They say that they uphold human rights, then they finance Putin for decades. They say they uphold human rights, and they go buy gas from Azerbaijan. They say they uphold human rights, but then they commit crimes against migrants in Europe and then they deport them without any trials. Europe can be something inspirational and universal for a lot of people, and I like the idea of Europe, but I don't like how it's being implemented.

I also don't like that most Europeans just live in their own bubbles without thinking or caring about other people. If Europe doesn't fight for human rights and the implementation of international law, they will probably lose their democratic institutions. Because

obviously people like Putin are trying to influence this, they are fighting against this, and you can see how there's a rise of right-wing parties threatening these institutions. "Alternative for Germany" is one of the most popular parties in Germany. Right-wing parties are in power in the Netherlands and in Italy. Italy is selling arms to Azerbaijan! The Italian prime minister says, "I am Christian!", and in the meanwhile she is selling arms to a country that committed genocide against Christians two years ago.


I hate this hypocrisy, and I hate that behind everything there are always only economic reasons. If everything can be bought, then you don't have anything. Because if there is a price for everything, most likely there will always be somebody who can pay more. I

believe that there are some things on which you cannot put a price, it's a question of human integrity. If I just wanted to be rich and let the Russian regime corrupt me, I would be rich by now, and I wouldn't be this homeless, stateless (at some point) person. But for me it's about human integrity. And I feel like European people don't really understand how privileged they are: they have a lot of fears, though they probably didn't have any horrible experiences in decades. To keep these privileges, they are willing to sacrifice something really important, and that's the problem in Europe.


Valastro: How does the relationship be-



tween values and heritage shape the border between us and them? Feeling at home with people that share your values and feeling at home with people that share your origins is not always necessarily the same thing. How do you reconcile these two aspects of home in your own perception?



Makichyan: Maybe there is no home, we will all die! *(laughs)*. Obviously, it's important to speak out on these issues, because if we are alive, if we are part of something, and if we have our own experiences, we should tell the truth and we should fight for justice. But in the end, I think it's really important to remember that all of us will die, that all of us are humans *(laughs)*. I'm not fighting against other people. I have no hatred towards Turkish people, I have no hatred towards

Russian people, I have no hatred towards Azerbaijani people. I believe in the reconciliation of our people, but I want to have a real reconciliation that will be just to everyone. [...] As an activist, I'm speaking out more about Armenian issues, because I feel I can be more effective, and I can raise issues that no one is really raising now. But as a climate activist I feel united with other people, I feel part of something bigger. I think we should build societies that are home for everyone, so this paradox between belonging to some people and then being also a global citizen is not actually a paradox, you can do both: you can be an Armenian and also a global citizen. If you are a good Armenian then you can also be a good global citizen and vice versa. 

KOSCHEY'S DAUGHTER



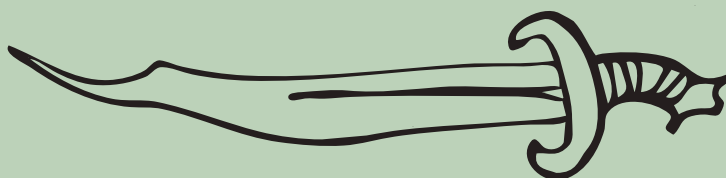
Text – Vera Boitcova

Illustrations – Lucina Rudloff, Photos – anonymous

As an artistic researcher, I have spent years exploring migrant dramaturgies of belonging, and being focused on trying to determine what “home” means for queer refugees. It is a personal question, of course, rooted in almost desperate need to define the answer for myself. The majority of my research participants either see home in other people, or do not see it at all. For them, it is never about a physical space, be it a country, a city, or a house. However, unlike

my interviewees, my understanding of home is still attached to a place. Not necessarily to a specific one, but to an idea of it. A place that can actively affect a person. A place that can hold you, or lose you, or even change you.

When I think of a place that lost me, my motherland, Russia, comes to mind. It is, however, the same place that still holds me as well. Famous for holding people against their will, it grips me by my roots, my



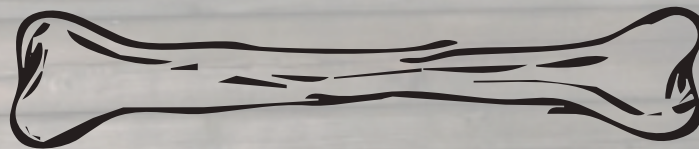
family ties, my friendships, and memories. What I am describing are people and stories, but are there any actual places that still hold me? My former apartment? My childhood home? As French historian Pierre Nora argues, memory attaches itself to physical spaces only when the living connection begins to fade (Nora 1989). Following Nora’s logic, I feel like I am trying to attach symbolic meaning to certain places as a way to preserve memories that are no longer sustained by

everyday life. Perhaps what I strive to remember as “home” is already a form of nostalgia. If so, then what is it exactly that still holds me?

Someone once told me that they could never leave Russia because the graves of their parents were there. I did not understand it, at all. Why should I be tied to someone’s graves? “But who is going to take care of them?” asked that same person. I thought that it was extremely unfair - why

should I care about the dead until I, myself, die? Why is it so inherent in my culture code to wait and suffer, suffer and wait? As writer Svetlana Alexievich notes, life in post-soviet countries is shaped by a shared experience of endurance – an idea of necessary suffering passed down from generation to generation (Alexievich 2016). In Russian, there is a word related to this: ‘terpet’ - to wait, to endure, to suffer. My country still holds me with this command: ‘terpi’ - wait, endure, suffer. But if I am still being held, can I truly say

that my homeland has lost me? Maybe the physical space that is my country has lost the physical being that is my body, but the idea of it still holds my soul, tied to the roots growing through my ancestors’ graves. The state which reminds me of professor Svetlana Boym’s thoughts about exile not breaking our idea of home, but changing it into something like a ghost, something we imagine and long for but can no longer truly have (Boym 2001). And maybe I do not even want to have it anymore, but the haunting persists.




No matter where I physically am, Russia is still somehow ever-present. It is a place that holds me, it is a place that lost me, but is it also a place that changed me? No. Being outside did. Growing up as a queer person in a country where queerness is not just invisible, but punished, made me learn the word ‘terpi’ not only as a citizen, but as a body that did not belong. Only after I had left my homeland did I realize that survival was not the same as living.

That queerness, when not criminalized, could be something joyful, something expansive. Thus, every “outside” place changed me, shaped me, glued all the pieces of me into one – until I became a collage of everywhere I have lived, loved, and breathed. I am, as critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha puts it, “in-between” - a product of the third space, formed not despite displacement, but through it (Bhabha 1994). And I feel almost whole, almost complete, almost home. But my soul...



Vera Boitcova during a performance in 2016. Unknown village, Russia. Anonymous photographer.

There is a folk Russian fairytale about Koschei the Deathless. Undead king. He put his death into a needle, and the needle into a duck, and the duck into a rabbit, and the rabbit into a wooden chest, and he buried this chest under a large oak tree. Whoever gets to the needle and breaks it, will find Koschei's death, and, thus, will defeat death itself.

The story resonates. My needle in a duck in a rabbit in a chest is still under some Russian oak tree, probably, in the graveyard of my ancestors. And I can be almost whole, almost complete, almost home. But my soul... But my death... Is still there. 



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ЄВРОВАКНО

yevrovikno

Text – L. De Magistris

Photo – Sierra Salazar, Illustration – Lucina Rudloff

Names and places have been changed to protect everyone’s identity.

***B**efore I lived in Ukraine, I did not see the differences, I didn’t realize it. But after living for some time in Finland and going back, I noticed that.*

These are Oksana’s words. She is a deaf Ukrainian asylum seeker living under temporary protection in Finland since 2022. These words came out of a research interview about deaf refugees’ perceptions and feelings of “home” after forced displacement. We were having a conversation about what it means to “feel at home”—literally and figuratively—while she was also showing me around her apartment in Helsinki.

There are many things Oksana dislikes about living in Finland. At the root of everything is the fact that she had never intended to live here, to leave Ukraine: she was helping her relatives escape the Russian invasion, and suddenly crossing the borders back to Ukraine became impossible for her, she was stuck in Finland. Along with other deaf Ukrainians, she was luckily able to receive help from the Finnish deaf community in the form of, among other things, accommodation arrangements that saved many of them from being sent to random reception centers anywhere in the country.¹ After moving through a

few subsidized apartments, Oksana has now been living in the same one for a year, and it will possibly be the last one for a while. If there is one thing she likes about living in Finland, it’s her glazed balcony in this apartment.

[As a migrant myself here in Finland, glazed balconies were a totally new entity for me. I wasn’t used to the idea of a balcony being closed off with walls all the way to the roof, albeit made of glass. Balconies here are almost an extension of the house, as if they were additional rooms. For me, the balcony is where you go when you want some fresh air, when you want to feel like you’re outside, with the luxury of not having to actually leave the house. And to be honest, balconies are truly a luxury: since I moved out of my parents’ home in Italy years ago, I’ve never had a balcony anymore, glazed or not. But I digress.]

Oksana was really adamant about showing me and the interpreter her balcony, how she had furnished and decorated it, where these decorations came from, how much she enjoys the view and the sunlight, how she spends her time here: “I was just reading here, and sitting, and watching around... it’s very nice to see when the sun is going down”. I asked Oksana if

¹ Nina Sivunen’s (2023) PhD dissertation “Deaf asylum seekers’ experiences, multimodal interaction and transformation of language beliefs in the Finnish asylum process” for an excellent study on deaf refugees’s experiences of being scattered throughout the country during the 2015 so-called “refugee crisis”.

What does it mean to forcibly leave and to live home, to embody displacement, to feel (at) home?

balconies look like this in Ukraine, since I personally saw them for the first time in Finland. I got the answer I was expecting: “No, we don’t have them”, referring to the glazed glass panes that enclose her balcony. And then Oksana continued with her aesthetic inspection, her visual epiphany of balconies and windows and their differences between Ukraine and Finland: “I like this [glazed balcony], it’s very nice. When I came back to Ukraine, I realized that, in the same houses, balconies and windows are different, it’s like, not the same. In Finland, all the houses are the same. Have you seen any pictures from the war in Ukraine?”

The balconies are different, and it’s not so nice. Every person does it in their own way”. I don’t know how much thought Oksana had put into this prior to our conversation, or if the interview on the balcony was the prompt for this game of “spot the difference” between homes in her countries of origin and arrival. Regardless, what was clear is that Oksana’s experience of displacement matches what Sara Ahmed (1999) calls “a spatial reconfiguration of an embodied self: a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied. Hence the experience of moving often to a new home is most felt through

the surprises in sensation". The embodiment of movement and of the perception of home emerge through the sensorial differences between the homes before and after, and how both homes influence each other simultaneously. Ahmed writes: "When we came to Australia, what I first remember is all the dust, and how it made me sneeze and my eyes itch. When I returned to England, I felt the cold pinching my skin". Just like Ahmed could feel the cleanliness and coldness of the air in her homeland only after leaving it, so did Oksana realize what "home" looks like in Ukraine only after being displaced to Finland. But Oksana's perceptions of home did not stop at the visual level: "In *yevrovikno* (євровікно), the European standard of windows," Oksana shows me on her phone, "the isolation is very good, there are no spaces between the glass panes. They're supposed to be warm, but still they're not so warm. In Finland it's warmer, and it's nice that there is some space between the glass and you can see outside. And it's very easy to wash them. In these Ukrainian ones it's quite difficult. It's a difficult construction, there are many places where dust can go inside".²

Oksana's sensorial perception of home manifests itself not only as the visual differences between homes in Ukraine and Finland, but also on how the space is invaded by the cold, the dust, like in Ahmed's recollection of home after the experience of migration. Displacement is embodied, felt in the flesh, how the body reacts to the cold, how the dust settles in the home/body. Home is perceived through the eyes, through our human capacity to scan and be aware of and live the space that surrounds us.

Oksana is aware of these home perceptions and how they affect her life after displacement, and she processes these feelings during our conversation: In Ukraine doors are different, people make them as they please, while in Finland they're the same for everyone. In Ukraine the post boxes are different, in Finland they're the same. In Ukraine doorbells are different, in Finland they're the same. "Do you prefer it in Finland, where everything is similar?" I ask Oksana. "Yes, it's nice. It's easier". I hone in on this last component of home, the doorbell, to ask her more, given that she installed a flashing one to be alerted when someone is at her door. When I came in, Oksana's door was the only different one in the building because of this addition.

ME: Because everything here is the same, do people realize that they have to use the light doorbell? Or do people use the sound one?

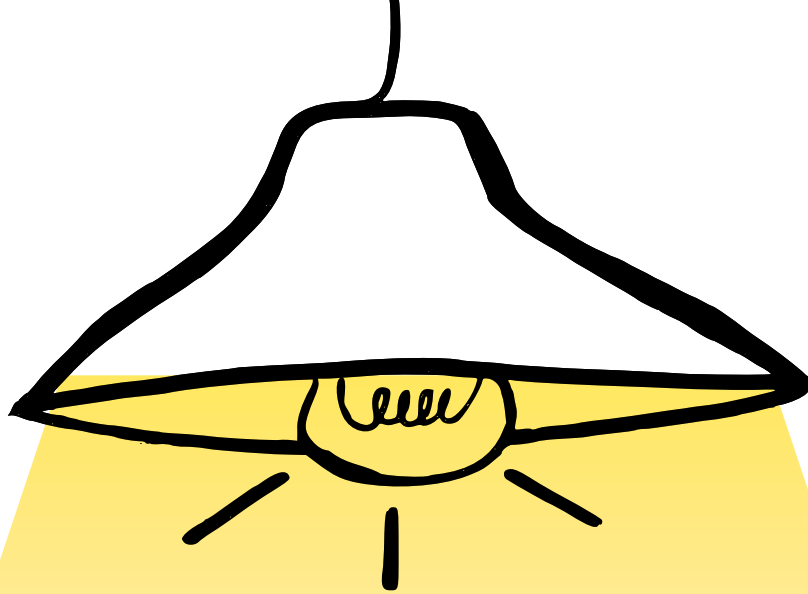
OKSANA: I don't know.

ME: Is it normal for people to see two doorbells, or-

OKSANA: I don't know this. In Ukraine it's different, there's only one doorbell. It's connected with a microchip you put inside the ceiling lamps. When someone is calling at the door, the lamp starts to blink. But in Finland they don't put it inside any lamps, they get a different one. It's more comfortable".


I don't know what I was trying to find out by asking about the doorbells that Oksana has in her Finnish apartment. Maybe I was trying to understand if her preference of Finnish housing

² I'm not an expert in window construction or design, though I know Oksana was pointing out the differences between the windows in Ukraine with visible, bulky frames (like those I'm familiar with in Italy) and the Finnish slick-looking glass panes in the balconies, rather than with the double-paned windows that look directly outside. Oksana's apartment has both, but her framed windows open on the balcony.



When someone is calling at the door, the lamp starts to blink. But in Finland they don't put it inside any lamps, they get a different one. It's more comfortable”.

was due to a repetition of patterns and symmetries processed as more appealing, calming even, and the possible discomfort caused by her different doorbells. Maybe, as a hearing person, I was exoticizing the home devices that assist deaf people. Maybe I didn't know what else to ask, and I tried to keep the conversation on home materiality going. In any case, I accomplished the opposite, I confused the interpreter and possibly embarrassed Oksana by putting the spotlight on her and her different doorbell, after she explicitly told me how she prefers all homes to look the same. Anyways, the interview got back on track soon after.

As Ahmed³ puts it, “homes do not stay the same as the space which is simply the familiar. There is movement and dislocation within the very forming of homes as complex and contingent spaces of inhabitation”. What does it mean to forcibly leave and to live home, to embody displacement, to feel (at) home? There is no right answer, no real solution the question of home, which definitely does not end within the confined materiality of its walls. But at least we can rest and watch the sunset from the comfort of our glazed balcony. 

³Ahmed, Sara. (1999). Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2(3), 329–347

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