


MAY/JUNE 2022

DISCUSSION GUIDE

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 
BOOK CLUB
DISCUSSION
GUIDE



HOME OF THE FLOATING LILY
BY SILMY ABDULLAH



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WELCOME AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS

We're pleased to announce our May/June selection for 2022, *Home of the Floating Lily* by Silmy Abdullah! Caught between cultures, immigrant families from a Bengali neighbourhood in Toronto strive to navigate their home, relationships, and happiness.

Set in both Canada and Bangladesh, the eight stories in *Home of the Floating Lily* follow the lives of everyday people as they navigate the complexities of migration, displacement, love, friendship, and familial conflict. A young woman moves to Toronto after getting married but soon discovers her husband is not who she believes him to be. A mother reconciles her heartbreak when her sons defy her expectations and choose their own paths in life. A lonely international student returns to Bangladesh and forms an unexpected bond with her domestic helper. A working-class woman, caught between her love for Bangladesh and her determination to raise her daughter in Canada, makes a life-altering decision after a dark secret from the past is revealed. In each of the stories, characters embark on difficult journeys in search of love, dignity, and a sense of belonging.

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than ten million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.

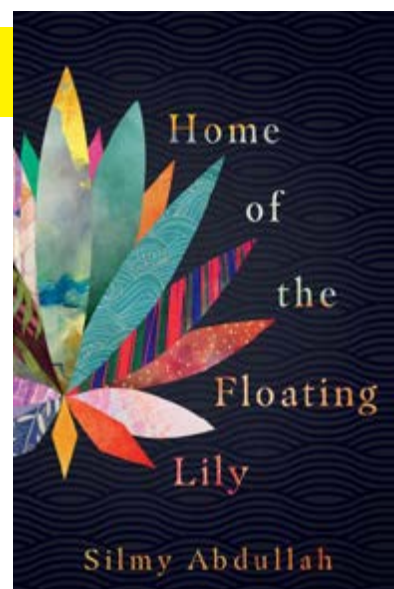
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May/June 2022: *Home of the Floating Lily*

ABOUT THIS MONTH'S AUTHOR, **SILMY ABDULLAH**



SILMY ABDULLAH is a Bangladeshi-Canadian author and lawyer. Her legal practice focuses on the intersection of immigration, poverty, and gender-based violence. Silmy writes both fiction and non-fiction, and *Home of the Floating Lily* is her debut collection. She lives in Toronto.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB

1. Of all the stories within *Home of the Floating Lily*, which did you like the most? Which character and/or storyline did you relate to the most? Why?
2. It could be said that each story uses the concept of 'family' and 'home' as a common thread that joins the characters and highlights the complexity of each relationship. But, as we see in *The Good Family* or *Across the Ocean* for example, sometimes 'family' and 'home' can manifest in unexpected ways and take on additional meanings. Discuss with your group the ways this happened to characters within the book and what happened as a result.
 - a. What do you consider 'home' or 'family'? Is it a location? A person? A feeling? A fragrance? Explain.
3. Within the *Familiar Journey*, we learn that not everything is as it seems and perhaps the question of faith is what binds the two unsuspecting characters of the story. Why do you feel this story was titled this way? What is it looking to represent?
 - a. On page 109, AnOnie states, "She needed to tell them she was coming back." What do you think the author meant by this?
4. *Home of the Floating Lily* takes up the impacts of displacement and the complexities of identity for those who are going through migration or settlement. Within these narratives, we read about grief, loss, loneliness, and alienation from the perspective of women and the specific expectations that come with their gender roles. These expectations add another layer of complexity for each character, along with the pressures that arise from being in a new country and culture. How do you see these societal and cultural pressures represented within each story? How do such pressures affect and/or guide each character in their decision making?
5. Who would you recommend *Home of the Floating Lily* to and why?

BACKGROUND

Amnesty International has partnered with Human Rights Watch to document human rights violations in immigration detention between April 2017 and March 2020, in Canada.



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#WELCOMETOCANADA

Canada incarcerates thousands of people on immigration-related grounds every year, including people who are fleeing persecution, those seeking employment and a better life, and people who have lived in Canada since childhood.

Based on research between February 2020 and March 2021, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have launched a #WelcomeToCanada campaign on immigration detention in Canada. Within this campaign, we are calling on Canada to stop incarcerating immigration detainees in provincial jails.

From the research, a report was created, titled, 'I Didn't Feel Like a Human in There', which documents serious international human rights violations that immigration detainees, particularly persons with psychosocial disabilities and people from communities of colour, particularly those who are Black, face in Canada.

Canada is among the only country in the global north without a legal limit on the length of time people can be in immigration detention, and because of this, almost 9,000 people were in Canadian immigration detention between April 2019 and March 2020. This included 138 infants and children.

These detainees are held for non-criminal purposes but endure some of the most restrictive conditions of confinement in the country, including maximum security jails, solitary confinement, and constant surveillance. In provincial jails, many are confined in dangerous environments where they may be subjected to violence.

“It's been ten years since I was put in immigration detention... Hearing the sound of keys jangling takes me right back to the jail, with guards on their rounds... When I see a border officer, I have panic attacks.”

– SARA, a woman fleeing persecution in Mexico held in a BC jail in 2012

It is imperative that all Canadians call on their leaders in government to cancel the immigration detention contracts between the provincial and federal governments and stop using provincial jails to lock up people seeking safety or a better life in Canada.

Learn more about the #WelcomeToCanada campaign on the landing page of the website:

Link <https://www.hrw.org/welcometocanada>

TAKE ACTION



#WELCOMETOCANADA: CALL ON QUEBEC AND NOVA SCOTIA TO CANCEL THEIR CONTRACT WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

There are viable alternatives to immigration detention and instead of returning to business-as-usual after the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada has a real opportunity to overhaul its immigration and refugee protection system in a way that prioritizes human rights and mental health.

And we've found some success! After garnering more than 5,000 letters to the Government of British Columbia to listen, they have confirmed that they will review its immigration detention contract with the federal government.

But the work is not done yet. We have now moved to Quebec and Nova Scotia, which like most provinces, have a contract with the federal government that allows for immigration detainees to be held in provincial jails.

CALL and TWEET to the governments of Quebec and Nova Scotia to cancel this contract immediately!

Link <https://www.hrw.org/welcometocanada>

If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at: Bookclub@amnesty.ca

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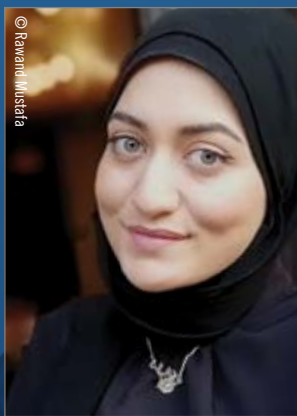
POETRY

Refugee

By Rawand Mustafa

*lost for words lump in my throat on the tip of my tongue
unable to think of anything to say through intense confusion shock a feeling of
tightness pressure in the throat due to emotion failing to retrieve a word from
memory but retrieval is imminent*

*there's no place like home is where the heart is anything but at odds are a smooth sea
never made a skilled sailor throw the baby out with the bathwater from the bottom
of my heavy heart a drowning man will clutch at straw do you understand
to have an affinity for one's home over every other place with which one has the
strongest emotional
connection is the place that one regards as home by no means conflicts with the
chances or balance of probability in favour of easy situations can never improve you
discarding something valuable along with other things that are inessential or
undesirable very sincerely weighed down with grief someone who is in a very difficult
situation and who will take any available opportunity to improve it do you
understand*



© Rawand Mustafa

About the writer

Rawand Mustafa is a Palestinian Syrian student living in Canada. She recently graduated from the University of Windsor's English and Creative Writing program. Rawand draws inspiration for her writing from her experiences as a first-generation immigrant oscillating between Eastern and Western cultures, and she is particularly impassioned by the struggles and resilience of Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

Rawand's poem "Refugee" speaks to the frustration of non-English speakers communicating in English, particularly focusing on the frustration of refugees who, on top of carrying the trauma of war, persecution, natural disaster, or alienation, struggle to express that trauma in a foreign language. The use of idioms is commonly considered a hallmark of language proficiency and their manipulation in this piece depicts the struggle to communicate through

the figurative lens of western perception. The crossed-out expressions are representative of another barrier that is overcome by the refugee speaker in their struggle for self-advocacy and self-actualization.

"Refugee" was first published in *The Matchstick*, Amnesty Canada's arts and human rights magazine. *The Matchstick* can be read at thematchstick.org