

Primary Source: “Home,” by Warsan Shire



Introduction

Warsan Shire is a Somali British writer, poet, and teacher born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1988. Shire and her family migrated to the United Kingdom when she was one, and was raised in London. She studied Creative Writing and in 2013-2014, she was the Young Poet Laureate for London. In 2014, she became the first ever winner of the Brunel University African Poetry Prize, and in 2018 Shire was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

In 2009, Shire visited the abandoned Somali Embassy in Rome, which a group of young refugees had made their home. Members of the group had fled from Somalia, Eritrea, Congo, and Sudan. The night before, one of the young Somalis had jumped to his death from the roof of the embassy. The experience inspired Shire to first write the poem “Conversations about home (at a deportation centre)” which became the basis for her later poem “Home,” printed below.

Though there are a few versions of “Home,” the poem reflects the choices refugees must often make and Shire's own disgust with the dehumanization of them. The first stanza became a rally call for refugees and those advocating for them during the European refugee crisis of 2015.

PRIMARY SOURCE

INTRODUCTION

SHIRE, “HOME”



**Refugees cross the
Mediterranean sea from Turkey,
2016**

Warsan Shire, “Home”



**Refugees at the Vienna West
Railway Station during the
European refugee crisis, 2015.**

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seeker
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty
voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

Want to explore more?

"Home" is based on a poem written by Warsan Shire in 2009, titled "Conversations about home (at a deportation centre)" and inspired by a visit with young refugees in Rome.

[Watch Warsan Shire read "Conversations about home \(at a deportation centre\)"](#)

**Note: Contains references to physical and sexual violence.*



Warsan Shire, 2015

Image Citations:

Page 1:

Still of Warsan Shire from "Warsan Shire reads her poetry," UWG English, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gmsEsu1DaQ>

Page 2:

Refugees crossing the Mediterranean sea, from the Turkish coast to the Greek island of Lesbos, January 29, 2016, CC BY-SA 4.0, Mstyslav Chernov/Unifram, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Refugees_on_a_boat_crossing_the_Mediterranean_sea_heading_from_Turkish_coast_to_the_northeastern_Greek_island_of_Lesbos,_29_January_2016.jpg

Refugees at Vienna West Railway Station, September 5, 2015, CC BY-SA 4.0, C. Stadler/Bwag, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wien_-_Westbahnhof,_Migranten_am_5_Sep_2015.jpg

Page 3:

Still of Warsan Shire from "Warsan Shire - Conversations about home at the deportation centre," recorded for Breaking Ground: Black British Writers Tour, 2015, Speaking Volumes Literature, <https://vimeo.com/164022700>