

A survival guide for exiles

ko ko thett

- For the sake of your health get out of bed first thing in the morning before tuning into news and gossips from your homeland.
- Don't collect anything you cannot carry with you—be prepared for a life on the move.
- Don't expect your hosts to have ever heard of your country's name. Don't expect them to be responsible for your wellbeing. Expect them to give you a family name!
- Just as a second for gods is a life for humans, your one year in exile may translate into a lifetime in your homeland.
- Don't burden yourself with the weight of the world. For some people exile means business. War and pandemic mean business.
- Do not associate with exiles who will add more woes to yours, be them compatriots or foreigners.
- Your nation-state you have clung to may go up in smoke overnight. The nation within you no one can destroy.
- Don't be a trauma clown; analysed and anonymised by anthropologists, turned into a feature by film makers or your suffering co-written and edited by privileged White writers whose lives have nothing in common with yours—tell your story in your own chosen form.*
- Revolution will not be less perfect without you.
- Don't look too far. Even the earth has her own fever, her own dukkah.
- Don't look back—when you left it was spring. Today it might as well be a cold dark bitter winter.

* For trauma clown by Vivek Shraya and how to beat it, see <https://nowtoronto.com/culture/how-did-the-suffering-of-marginalized-artists-become-so-marketable>

“A survival guide for exiles” was first published in periodicities: a journal of poetry and poetics, April 4, 2022.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ko ko thett is a Burma-born poet, editor, and translator. His poems have been widely translated, and his translation work has been recognized with an English PEN Translates Award. He was poetry editor for *Mekong Review* from 2017 to 2022. ko ko thett’s most recent poetry collection is *Bamboophobia* (2022).

© 2022 by ko ko thett

Published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) license

https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_02008