

## ZARA SULEMAN

### Dis-oriented

They arrive  
hungry, homeless  
bags, so many bags  
their lives in small leather cases  
packages in brown paper, newspapers  
wrapped with rope,  
inside photo albums, coins, memories,  
clothes, tears and hope

They arrive  
at midnight, in the afternoon  
just before dinner  
regardless of the time they are  
confused, jetlagged  
exhausted

They arrive  
processed  
passports photocopied, visas approved  
immigration papers stamped  
head tax cashed  
citizenship pending

They arrive  
lifeless, the walking dead  
eyes that tell you  
only between the blinks  
the atrocities survived  
surviving

They arrive  
thankful and fearful  
cautious all of the time  
most will not trust in you  
or humanity again

They arrive  
housed in small hotel rooms  
appliances explained, they are shown  
the beds, the bathroom, the kitchen  
they are told not to be scared when  
the fire alarm rings  
they are terrified when it happens  
they hide, curled into themselves  
under the table

They arrive  
to be oriented  
bus routes, shopping malls, doctors,  
Canadian Laws  
cultural immersion, racial submersion  
rec centre passes

They arrive  
settlement counsellors, family counsellors  
cultural workers, multicultural teams  
carrying band-aids for open wounds  
western therapy for global conflict  
waiting lists, nowhere to refer  
your stories

They arrive  
remembering  
if they forget it will be easier  
to integrate, to orient, to assimilate  
to be grateful to be here  
clothed, fed, sheltered and  
alone  
incredibly, desperately, alone  
the familiar should be forgotten  
be open to strangeness

They arrive  
holding on to few possessions  
many stories, nightmares  
strength, survival and  
broken spirits  
looking across rooms, waiting rooms  
so much waiting to do  
they can identify each other  
the damage is evident  
the scars mark their  
re-settlement, their  
dis-orientation has begun  
Welcome/Bienvenue

*Zara Suleman is a South Asian immigrant, writer, activist and front-line worker. Currently Zara works at an immigrant and refugee serving agency in Vancouver, B.C.*