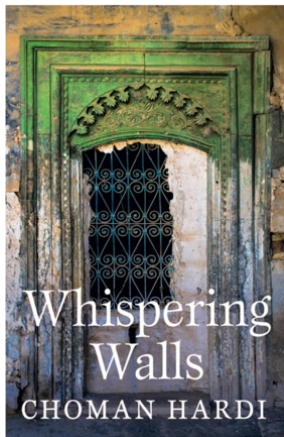


WHISPERING WALLS: A timely novel with powerful political resonance, documenting a Kurdish family's quest for closure during the invasion of Iraq

Press Release, 4 April 2023



Against a background of war, three troubled siblings – two in London and one in Slemani, Iraq – struggle to solve the mystery of their siblings' deaths.

British-Kurdish writer, Choman Hardi, draws on real-life and historical events for her debut novel documenting a Kurdish family's struggles during the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

'A rare and fascinating glimpse of the dangerous past, as seen through the eyes of Lana, a young poet, and her two brothers juggling a life in London and a Kurdish dream.' – **Romesh Gunsekera**, author of *Reef*

Hardi's debut novel, *WHISPERING WALLS*, launches on the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. In March 2003, US and international allies invaded Iraq and ousted Saddam Hussein's regime. Though many exiled Kurds and Iraqis wished an end to the regime, they worried too about their families back in Iraq.

Across 304 riveting pages, *WHISPERING WALLS* movingly tells the story of Lana and her brothers as they deal with the fall of the Iraqi regime, their current lives, and their past tragedies: the enigma of their teenage sister's suicide, and their brother's murder.

Poet and novelist **Catherine Davidson** said: 'The book is written with the same sharp observation, fresh language and moral imagination of Hardi's award-winning poetry. It asks a question we all must consider: how can we grapple with the tragedies of the past as we try to fashion a better future? Not only is Choman Hardi a brilliant poet, she is also a great novelist. I want everyone I know to read her book!'

Speaking about her inspiration for the novel, Choman Hardi described how she was 'fascinated by the issue of not learning from the past, of repeating the same mistakes, of doing the same thing and expecting a different result.'

'I imagined a psychological wall that's created by trauma between us and the past. It creates a memory gap that prevents us from learning and growing. That's why we tend to repeat certain histories.'

Hardi thinks that the same still happens with her Kurdish nation, which at each historical moment repeats mistakes made in the past. The Iraq war was a moment, she says, that the Kurds wished history would change the course for them.

WHISPERING WALLS brilliantly touches on this issue through the story of a family coping with social issues, secrets, and mysteries in their past, while still entangled within historical events endured by their nation over decades.

'This is not a typical Middle-Eastern family. It's a family that has paid the price for being conservative in the past,' Hardi explained. 'The elder brother, Hiwa, is stuck in that traumatic past in his London flat, while his brother in Slemani achieves closure much easier. Suffering from guilt towards his dead sister, Hiwa wants a different life and future for his daughter.'

Through a love story in London between the youngest member of the family, Lana, and her Iraqi Arab boyfriend, Hardi tries to picture the conflict and controversies of the two main ethnic groups who wish to build a 'new, better Iraq after the war'.

'Would such a relationship be fruitful? Will they have a child together?' Hardi had asked herself, while writing this book. 'I had my doubts about that,' she said. 'Sometimes I felt that we, in the diaspora, were more involved and hurt by what was happening in Kurdistan than the people actually there.'

The relationship between diaspora and the homeland is a complex one that is tangible throughout the book.

Hardi draws also on other communities coping with inter-generational trauma, through characters like Sarah, who still struggles with memories of the holocaust and the silences that dominated life with her Jewish family.

Writer and Artist **Shaun Levin** said about the book: 'More than anything, *Whispering Walls* is a novel about siblings, and how, even though we grow up in the same family, our lives unfold in distinct narratives. Choman Hardi, with compassion and unflinching honesty, tells the story of five siblings in a choral narrative that succeeds in being both deeply intimate and a chronicle of the land and people who have shaped them. A compelling reminder that behind complex national stories are the complex dramas taking place on the level of the family.'

Notes to editors:

WHISPERING WALLS is available from 20 April to order via Gardners (ISBN: 9781739982454) and all bookshops and online retailers, or directly from Afsana Press (www.afsanapress.uk). The official launch and release of the book will be in September 2023.

For more information or to order an advanced reader copy, please contact:

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About the author

Choman Hardi is the author of critically acclaimed books in the fields of poetry, academia, and translation. Since 2010, poems from her first English collection, *Life for Us* (Bloodaxe, 2004) have been studied by secondary school students as part of their English GCSE curriculum in the UK.

Hardi's second collection, *Considering the Women* (Bloodaxe, 2015), was given a recommendation by the Poetry Book Society and shortlisted for the prestigious Forward Prize for Best Collection. It was also translated into French in 2020. Her book *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq* (Routledge, 2011) was named a UK Core Title by the Yankee Book Peddler. Her translation of Sherko Bekas's *Butterfly Valley* (ARC Publishing) won a PEN Translates Award.

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