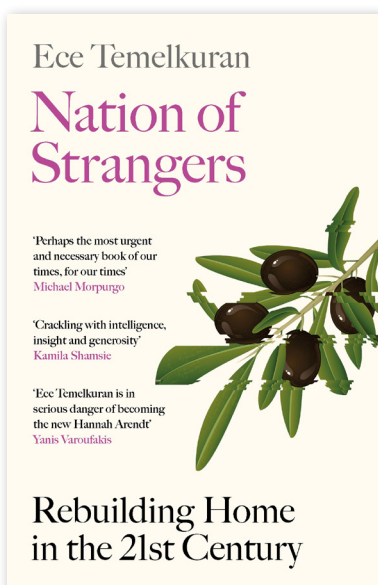


# Nation of Strangers

## *Rebuilding Home in the 21st Century*

### Ece Temelkuran



#### PLOT SUMMARY

Dear stranger...  
 Are you at home?  
 Do you feel at home?  
 For how much longer?

Across the world, the number of refugees and exiles, the dispossessed and displaced, the politically homeless and the economically excluded, is growing. In the decade since she left her own home, Ece Temelkuran has been a political Cassandra, warning those convinced it couldn't happen in their country that fascism is coming.

Now, as oppression spreads and temperatures rise – as we face competing crises and learn, again and again, that no institution is so concrete that it can't turn to dust, and no home is too strong to be destroyed – she has written *Nation of Strangers*: a series of letters from one stranger to another.

Politically attuned and deeply personal, this extraordinary, heartening correspondence is a gift to treasure in uncertain times. As poetic as it is precise, it is a book for anyone who feels alienated by an ever more monstrous world. It shows how, as we all become strangers, our home will depend on the strength we find in each other.

#### WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Temelkuran's warm, poignant and passionate book is written as a series of letters, always beginning *Dear stranger*. She sees the world-wide community of unhomed people as a silent majority – a sprawling nation of strangers to whom she writes her thoughts and feelings in the hope of facilitating connection. Connection, she observes, is the way we fight the increasing isolation and bleak cruelty of the world.

In adopting the letter form, Temelkuran transforms a complicated, political subject into something personal and accessible. Letters are intimate; they allow us to share our feelings, our fears, our most

“Could not be more timely... explores the hidden complexities that are rarely looked at within the immigrant experience.”

NICOLA WILLIAMS  
2026 JUDGE



Shortlist  
2026

secret thoughts. Letters allow us to tell the recipient about the small details in our lives as well as the bigger issues at hand. Temelkuran writes about drinking Turkish coffee and communing with the fox in her garden. She also writes about Trump's election as president and new legislation to 'clean' homeless people from America's streets, a changing Germany, the rise of fascism around the world.

The letter form also lends Temelkuran's writing a sense of immediacy and even urgency. Being unhomed is a living experience, and Temelkuran's letters bring us into the centre of it with unusual intimacy, precision and compassion.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

Perhaps more than anything, reading Temelkuran's moving memoir of her life as immigrant and unhomed person reminds the reader of the terrifying truth that this could happen to anyone.

Countering popular but false narratives about refugees and immigrants trying to 'live off the state' in a strange country, Temelkuran shows how difficult daily life is for the unhomed. We see this in her trip to the women's shelter and the experience of waiting in line for hours at the embassy. Nobody Temelkuran meets has it easy, and no one is lazing around living the life of luxury that those who are obsessed with the perils of immigration would have us believe.

Indeed, Temelkuran makes the point that being unhomed is not an independent personal choice made without context:

'We are all approaching merciless times that will eventually classify many of us as either heroes or cowards... And that is when many more will know: the cruelty of our times does not only unhome us but also leads us to brutalise ourselves by making us feel less than we are. And when that emotion takes over, we eventually become less than we are.'

How do you think about immigrants and refugees? Is seeking refuge something you have experienced? Do you think this could ever happen to you? If you have never considered it being a possibility, what does it feel like to consider?

### QUESTIONS

Temelkuran says, 'The ruling power, when it has fascist tendencies, always chooses a female poster child for its problems.' How have you seen this play out in the modern day? Can you think of any examples? Why would fascism demonise women?

What is home? What are the qualities of home – safety, security, warmth, family, community? Has your notion of what home is changed after reading Temelkuran's book? In what way?

If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

Temelkuran tells us that the historian and philosopher Hannah Arendt ‘once taught us that learning from history is a myth.’ Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

### NEXT STEPS

Temelkuran often uses the analogy of food to describe her experience of being unhomed. For instance:

‘In the end, our makeshift home tastes like the dishes we cook with the substitute ingredients we can find in a foreign land – reminiscent, sure, but always slightly off-kilter.’

What food feels like home to you? What is your comfort food? Were there dishes that you grew up with that make you feel at home? Think about the smells, tastes, textures and the colours of the food. What memories do those dishes evoke? How do they evoke home for you?

At the end of the book, Temelkuran reminds readers not to be hypnotised by the ‘daily bombardment of outlandish acts’ of fascist governments and movements, and so be frozen in fear and panic. What might you do to ‘look to the light’, as she suggests, and foster a sense of community, communication and hope? It could be anything from talking to a neighbour, helping out at a homeless shelter, contributing to charities for displaced people, holding a book club to discuss Temelkuran’s book – what else can you think of? ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ece Temelkuran** is an award-winning Turkish writer, political thinker and public speaker whose work has been published worldwide. Her first book in English, *How to Lose a Country*, received international praise. Her second, *Together*, offers ‘a way out from the political and moral insanity’ that is ushered by the global rise of fascism. Ece has lived in Beirut, Tunis, Oxford, Paris and Zagreb. She is currently based in Berlin and is on the advisory board of Progressive International and DemocracyNext.



# If you enjoyed this book...

## RECOMMENDED READS

In *Together: A Manifesto Against a Heartless World*, Ece Temelkuran provides an inspiring manifesto for change by revealing fresh possibilities for the better world we might want to live in and gives us a new vocabulary for the political action that the twenty-first century demands. In *Autocracy, Inc: The Dictators That Want to Rule The World*, Anne Applebaum highlights how networks of autocratic groups and governments work together in the twenty-first century to dismantle democracy, and how we can resist them.

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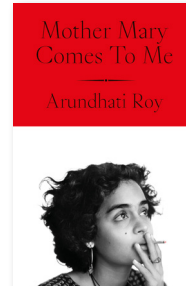
**The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan**  
by Lyse Doucet



**Hotel Exile: Paris in the Shadow of War**  
by Jane Rogoyska



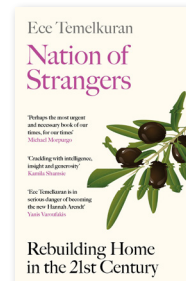
**Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health**  
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**Mother Mary Comes to Me**  
by Arundhati Roy



**Artists, Siblings, Visionaries: The Lives and Loves of Gwen and Augustus John**  
by Judith Mackrell



**Nation of Strangers: Rebuilding Home in the 21st Century**  
by Ece Temelkuran

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