

Editorial

Colin Grant

It takes enormous courage and faith in your destiny to up sticks and travel thousands of miles to begin a new life in a foreign land. I am the child of such pioneering migrants: in 1959, my parents set out from Jamaica to Britain. They rarely spoke of the emotional cost of the rupture with their pasts and what might have been lost. But what do pioneers leave behind when they migrate to a new country, and what do they carry with them physically and emotionally wherever they land?

This is the premise of *What We Leave We Carry* – an oral history of migration to Britain over the last six decades, composed of transcribed extracts from a *WritersMosaic* podcast of the same name, which is to be published in June 2026. I commissioned several *WritersMosaic* writers who, like me, travelled Britain and listened to stories of migration – foundational tales of arrival, of love and of loss.

Everyone we spoke with recalled the heightened emotions of their departure, leaving behind relatives and friends whom they might never see again. Something that helped the soon-to-be migrants on their journeys and for the first daunting moments of their arrival – in what seemed for many like a perennial fog – were parting words of comfort, gifts and treasured objects. These talismans of migration provided succour and stirred remembrance, even today.

One of my favourite stories in *What We Leave We Carry* is told by Mira Erdevički from Slovenia. She carried a present from her grandmother, who raised her – a little wooden stamp used to mark a *Slavski kolač*: a traditional bread. Mira's grandmother had taken vicarious pleasure in her granddaughter's adventures, and still, every year, on St. John's Day, Mira brings out the wooden stamp and presses it into the dough of her homemade bread, commemorating her beloved grandmother.

There are many such tales among the nine writers in this collection too. All are migrants or the descendants of migrants and they share the secrets of those objects of migration and their talismanic properties.

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Colin Grant's books include *Bageye at the Wheel*, short-listed for the Pen Ackerley Prize, and *Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush Generation*, a BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week.

His latest book is *I'm Black So You Don't Have to Be*. His oral history of migration to Britain, *What We Leave We Carry*, will be published in June 2026. Grant is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and director of *WritersMosaic*, an online magazine and division of the Royal Literary Fund. He also writes for a number of newspapers including the *TLS*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The New York Review of Books*.

A recording of this piece can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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