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Sukoon

Arab-Themed Art & Literature

Volume 6 | Issue 1 | Winter 2020



لَنْ نَضَعَ لَوْنَهُمُ الطَّائِفَةَ

Sukoon is:

an independent, online literary journal. It is Arab-themed and in English. *Sukoon* publishes poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, books reviews, plays, interviews, and occasional translations by writers and artists from the Arab region, and/or by writers and artists who are not of Arab descent, but have an Arab story or art piece they would like to share.

Through literature and art, *Sukoon* aims to reflect the diversity and richness of the Arab world, where Arabic is spoken - a semitic language with over 30 different varieties of colloquial Arabic.

Sukoon is an Arabic word meaning "stillness." What we mean is the stillness discovered within when the artist is in the midst of the creative storm.

Sukoon is also a phonetic symbol used in the Arabic script.



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Sukoon would like to thank Dubai-based calligrapher and artist, **Majid Alyousef**, for Sukoon's unique logo design.
www.majidalyousef.com

Editor's note:

Hello. After a year of absence that was not intentional, hello.

I don't know about you, but 2019 was an exceptionally difficult minute, through and through, for this immigrant/expat Sukoon Editor. I shifted through two countries and three cities and five different homes in the span of twelve months. My life turned upside down suddenly, swiftly, almost comically.

But enough about me. I am in grave gratitude still.

Metro Detroit becomes my new home. Lebanese-America becomes my space during a time that Lebanon takes to the streets for weeks and weeks and weeks and I watch it all unravel and become ever more complicated on a small cruel screen. And the rest of the Levant suffers and speaks and I am back in Amerka and Amerka is not well and the world is not well. The world is not well. The world is not well.

So.

We protest.

We give voice. We find ours. We share. We complete each other's sentences and artwork and poems. We love. We make art. We are glad to be alive. We are robbed of life. We meet each other in secret, in public, in good time. We fail. We fail again. We give power to the wrong power.

Yet, we get up and we try again.

I am glad to be back in these pages in 2020. So much beauty and courage, I am baffled and humbled every time. Artwork that speaks to and of intersectionality, of alternative ways of being; stories and poems about our mixed mixed-ness, our resistance against singular mindsets and labels and molds.

I couldn't have put this edition together without the wonderful support of Sukoon's growing team; interviewers and reviewers, Zeena Fuleihan, Helen Wing, Lena Mahmoud, and Layla Goushey who volunteer their time, time and time again.

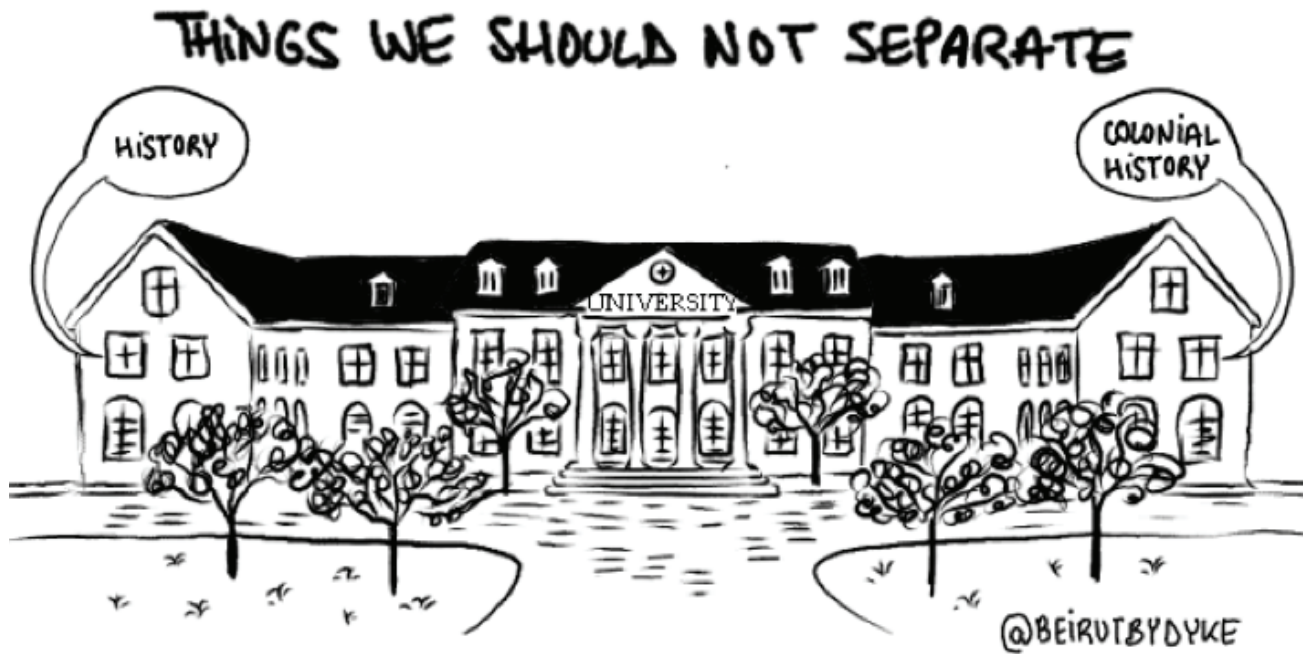
And I am also excited to be sharing a new segment of Sukoon; Sukoon bil 3arabi edited by Hajer Al Mosleh, a friend, a powerhouse, a woman of infinite stories and strength and sense of community. Hajer's idea was to create a home for the homeless contemporary Arab stories out there everywhere and to have them remain and remembered in their original Arabic. Thank you, Hajer.

And thank you, reader and contributor, for trusting your work with Sukoon.

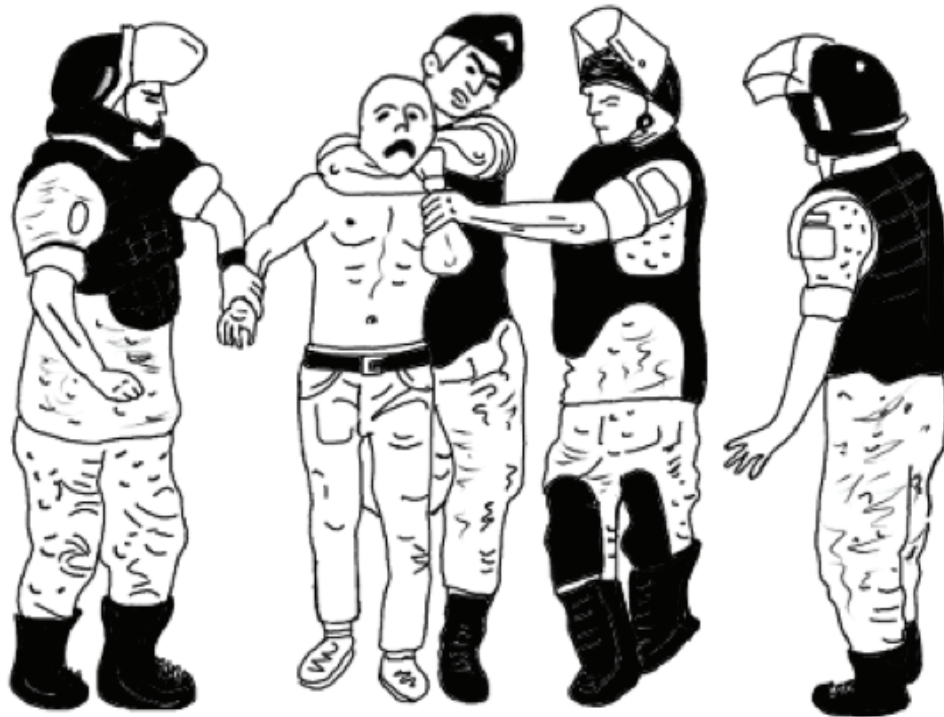
I hope you find yourself/ves within these pages.

Oh, and Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine.

REWA ZEINATI



INDOCRINATION-COLONIZATION
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE



« بَسْ تَتَبَرَّأْ بِوَالٍ عَنْ تَدْهَوْرِ الْأُحْوَالِ »

THAWRA OPPRESSION - QUOTE BY MASHROO3 LAILA
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE

BADNA KEL SHI. BADNA PROPER HEALTH CARE. FREEDOM OF SPEECH. TO GO READ A BOOK IN A PUBLIC PARK. WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO WALK HOME ALONE AT NIGHT. WE WANT TO BE FREE FROM DEBT. WE WANT LESS TRAFFIC, BETTER TRANSPORTATION. WE WANT TO GIVE OUR CHILDREN THE NATIONALITY. BADNA KAHRABA W MAYY. **BADNA AKEL 3AL TAWLEH.** MA BADNA RELIGIOUS FIGURES TELLING US HOW TO LIVE. BADNA N7EB. WE WANT TO CONSENSUALLY FUCK WHOM WE WANT. WE DON'T WANT TO BE BROKE. WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO WANT TO STAY HERE. WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO WANT TO STAY HERE. WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO WANT TO STAY HERE.

EVERYTHING
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

MASKOON

We clung to our dreams like ants to sugar.
In them we walked, we meandered uncertain,
we strained to remember

colors of the sea. Then in dream after dream
the homes of our mothers
and fathers crumbled.

They gave them away.
Like clowns, we writhed
and we screamed. Now we can never go back.

When we rise, we assemble the bones
we've collected. We toss orange after orange into the water,
watch them float.

We are a queenless colony, feeding on itself.
We recall the crowns
of sand dunes:

one side sewn exactly, pink lines inclined like lashes,
the other gouged out by our feet.
When we were in the desert,

it was difficult to find the end of things.
We dreamed we danced and bled,
and climbed skies for the goats we loved.

Here, someone
asks: is it like this every night?
But the night does not answer.

SARA ELKAMEL



DEPRESSION-MEDITATION BY BEIRUT BY DYKE

LAYLET EL QADR DEDUCTIBLE

27, 27 and 83 and my not brother is in berlin and my baba doesn't want to talk about that because he sees hassad in my eyes and tells me this is your brother this is your brother THIS is your brother but what he's trying to say is I wish I only had one son and that he would protect the world from you instead of holding you up like robbers in a room the police will never find because they will never look for you on the cusp of ard el liwa no respectable bodies butchered by boys are to be found there and if you're having a family dispute your dirty whore mother probably deserves it living unmarried with a man who isn't her husband and who doesn't even know where he is half the time climbing on 80 and more involved with ice cream than sex but yes the gentleman is always right the gentle can't make up his hysterical red mind if he wants to kill himself or our mother but someone must pay the price of a beating so once we escape he rips the body of her clothes apart desecrates only the things she touches and nothing else.

I hide all the Japanese steel.

Like tumbling straws between my hands you wouldn't feel slice through you.

So soft and sudden.

NOUR KAMEL

EXPONENTIAL BODY EQUATION (WITHOUT BABIES)

It should appear at some point but no x marks the spot on the dwindling core of my dangling dismal body, come, so much, to the power of ikhs ikhs and ah oh shucks. A7a I've been here before getting lost in my own privates cause I don't show them off too much or ever, never ever forever ever an outcast chance said it's just dancing its harmless as fuck, she said it's just like a hug with some strange. I'll collect and keep shoving inside my womb inside my memory expand in expand in expand until sick like a turkey dinner all the fillings made feelings of me and gravy soaked fools of any innards fried up nice and crisp battered and dipped lasciviously in mayet torshi to keep the rot away like embalming for open caskets are important to say goodbye but so is the rot and I don't want to remember my mother's face where I am from like that, not now or ever, she still in her living flesh but I contort it more than mine in my mind trying to prepare trying to muster mustard to fortify to safeguard to still my livers and stiffen upper lip hairs that keep coming, and going, coming and coming and growing. I don't want anything to grow inside my body.

NOUR KAMEL



BY ROWAIDA OMAR

LIES TOLD HONESTLY IN THREE PROPOSITIONS

1.

I wrote a poem on the subway

We drove across the Sonoran desert at 10 pm

And it felt like

Two in the morning

The I-10 at night is pitch black

But you can see the stars

Like you've never seen them before

In your little hometown

Polluted by lights

And a thick layer of smog

From nitrogen

And all the cigarettes

Everyone smoked

On the F train

Passing West 4th St

Sitting next to a man I don't know

His skin is darker than mine

I don't want to be scared

But I am

K told me about the reservations

And how casinos are important

For native people

It felt odd

To not know any of these things

And then to know them

2.

Our histories are merging

As mine is forming

I never write poems on the train

I'd been always preoccupied

With my destination

And what station's next

And the passed out man

And the sad woman crying

We have some favorite spots in the city

This is how it becomes a home

When you stop needing directions

To a destination unknown

I woke up this morning

Sulking sulking

Sulking

"Stress paralysis is real"

I tell S

A guy in Koreatown is really pissed on the phone

Because a dumplings spot he used to frequent

10 years ago is gone

3.

We have no sense of history

Yet are so embedded in it

It follows us everywhere

Drove down Embassy Row

In Washington DC

One man standing under the rain with an umbrella

"I am the Sudan revolution"

The I

Stands in between

History

And the reclaiming of it

"The great force of history

Comes from the fact fact we carry

It within us, are unconsciously

Controlled by it... history is literally

Present in all that we do"

Wrote James Baldwin

I have no sense of history

In the passenger seat

In the car

Driving across the Sonoran Desert

Across Embassy Row in Washington DC

I can't reclaim it.

SAHAR KHRAIBANI

EGYPTIAN PROVERB PT 2.

she finds me awashed, lost / in the shallow of the prairie
boasts slick wet promises / seduces even, my marrow
strokes my spine / a signal story:

of fires amidst the desert of Dakhla
white moths flocked to the flames
each wave drawn into the bright
pinions turned to ash of impulse
these one-night butterflies called Leila

to fly into the flames/ to know the saccharine lick
for even the moment / though brief of beauty
there existed enough light / to yield hot surrender.

A. MUSTAFA

A PRAYER AT 13,000 FEET

I skydive towards Palm Jumeirah
and see the palm etched into the green-blue
water, where I took the monorail
the day before from Dubai to the Atlantis
hotel. Everything is small except
for the scream of wind pouring into my
padded goggles. When I look up
all I see is sky, completing
its fast, drinking the waters below.
I drink too. And we pray.
The careless abiding of clouds,
the majestic youth of a blossoming sun,
the tallest speck I know is Burj Khalifa, and myself.
We all listen for poetry in translation.

PREETI SHAH

NO ONE'S INNOCENT

Jack's a prisoner in his box.
The doll's house has lost all sense
of calm, its furniture haphazardly arranged,
its dolls prone on table tops, on stoves.
One is waterboarding in the bath.

The unicorn has had its name snapped off.
The fire engine's ladder's stuck. Black plastic
firearms are stacked against the wall.
A Lego airport is missing most its bricks.
No replacements can be found. Its planes

are of different sizes. The one that opens
is packed with animals. A yellow giraffe
which has had its back legs chewed to twists
remains silent. Doll's limbs rattle
the Cinderella box. Teddy has managed

to hold on to one black eye. The crayons
are in bits. A Cindy doll has had her hair
cut short. You could call this place a playroom,
you could call it Gaza, a prison cell.
Who pays attention? Call it Hell.

FRANK DULLAGHAN



LEBANON FRAME 1 - PHOTOGRAPHY AND CAPTION BY HIND SHOUFANI

Take all the lights of the city, ammo. Take my anxious heart, let its arrhythmia carry you forward to the revolution, on that cane you brought.

That strength you brought in wood and skin and memories and shuffling feet and the helping hand of a woman bathed in love.

You walked slowly to the protest, and bounded through my shellshocked chest. May you never stumble, carrying the open windows of this entire city on your shoulders.

Like lanterns we released carrying messages to the sky, you illuminate the streets with prayer. Not confined to a building, or a book, your faith flies in the face of our youth.

Covers the sky with magic spells, warding off our cynicism. We gift you our thankfulness, and these circles of light caught in your shadow.



LEBANON FRAME 2 - PHOTOGRAPHY AND CAPTION BY HIND SHOUFANI

Did the powers that be know we would be singing to their downfall and hurried to fix the always-broken lights illuminating the shame of their name?

Oh Electricite Du Liban, how many nights of tumbled passion ruined by cold showers. How many books unread by candlelight.

How many strands of curls damp in the dark stormy Beirut dawn.

Give us light, give us warmth, fresh food. A path up the stairs, a safe passage in the alleyways of our night.

Until then, we protest, sing, dance, bang the drums of civil disobedience under your all-seeing window eyes, pretending to be asleep.



LEBANON FRAME 3 - PHOTOGRAPHY AND CAPTION
BY HIND SHOUFANI

Thumbs up, you invisible photographer of our celebration of a nation. Thumbs up, you revolution of our braided daughter. Thumbs up, you purple royal hue spilling into our evening dreams. Thumbs up, you son smiling at the faces adorning walls you never thought were yours. Thumbs up, you love cascading from the stairs of strong thighs above. Thumbs up, you streetlit metal barriers we crossed. Thumbs up, you lover out on a stroll, chanting freedom along the way.



LEBANON FRAME 4 - PHOTOGRAPHY AND CAPTION BY HIND SHOUFANI

We took our light to the top of the stones we abandoned, the curved walls they banned us from.

How many stories in light and shadow played inside this dome of cinematic forgetfulness?

We reclaim the sublime sounds, the smiles of actresses on concrete, the faces of viewers, rapt with desire.

We dangle our legs over your laws. Our bodies spill color, paint the sides of your rule book with festive poems. The rainbow seeps into the trees you dare not cut, whispering our name, arms outstretched.

HADATH, BEIRUT 1976

click, clack
saved my uncle,
grandfather,
and father
one long night
in Hadath

men with guns
came to the gate
leaning on the aching
metal frame
as if to say
we know this place

the house,
three floors high,
with its storied stairs
and weeping walls
carried the wind
through
holes bored out
in shelling, like
rainfall
pitter, patter
against
my father's bedroom—

a room turned into
panoramic view of
life turned into
walkable nightmares

where women danced alongside
barricades
with bread and milk
in hand
avoiding detonation
with a waltz

the men with guns
knew this place

it stood in the middle
of the battle over
what would become
and how

the children of our children
would remember what was

yes, it stood in the middle;
this house was perfect ground
for violence,
but its walls were painted
with love –
a name synonymous with

خاطر

my uncle heard voices
conspiring in the courtyard;
he went out to feel
in the darkness
what he already knew
in his bones—
they wanted the house

my grandfather too emerged
as the argument
ran through the hot, night
like a play
where the script
unravels in
endless directions, leaving
all the stagehands unsure
who will choreograph
the violent crescendo

except this is no scene
or role-play
because the guns are real;
and the spit hanging on
mustaches—made to fashion
fifteen year old boys
into fifty year old men
—reminds my grandfather
and uncle that they want
the house

my father has snuck up
onto the second floor
where a balcony frames
the stairs

he listens to his brother
and father alternate
between screaming for air
and debating for space

he has grabbed his own
gun, from his father's place
he fiddles with the cold material
of the loaded bullet,
looking out into
a hushed neighborhood
with ten men
yelling about homes
become garrisons

someone in the group
lurches forward,
disrupting the inertia
and finding the momentum
to push
them aside

my father foretells
what will happen
when men come to your door,
veiled in the night;
he can see
his brother and father
falling down
in a courtyard that
before
kept his childhood safe

no one would witness them,
at least not until morning
when new casualties—
seen in full view—
would displace the grief
felt in this abyss; because,
what can be seen
matters

he feels the gun
as if he is standing in the courtyard

it is silent

suddenly, his hand slips
click, clack
they all look up,
hearing my father
pull back the hammer

they know they are not alone;
someone is in the shadows

MICAH KHATER



BY ROWAIDA OMAR

KARAM

The first time my family had a taste of “not like our mother’s” / two boys were born blonde/ a Mexican sun enamored with their little heads called to them/ *mis bebés*/ *mi cielo*/ fair Persian secrets only knew how to blush/ a temperament that defined borders and the octaves in which we choose to speak to them/ a mother/ a cactus/ offering little shade/ bears little fruit/ the sun bit dust in a language they can scarcely hold onto/ *omri* was reserved to the mouths of those who had no intention of staying here past the night prayers/ brooding brown scowls adorning palm trees/ judge/ tower over them at all the gatherings/ wild things are only acceptable if we see our own youth in their eyes/ hungry arms ache from trying to shake down the sugary flesh/ young boys made to abort their mother tongue/ survive/ this is the curse of not looking like your father/ my mother says, my stepfather sees himself in me/ so I starve/ because to be the child of an arab man is to breathe life at the ending of their arms reach/ stand on one leg at the flick of a wrist/ the first time my family was struck with what all the deserts already knew/ it was a knife at a boy’s throat that said to carry a middle name is to swallow the seeds of what wishes you never existed/ my family’s name translates to generous

in every language
but love.

mis bebés; my babies mi cielo; my sky omri; my soul karam; generous

CARINA MILENA MACEIRA



CONVERSATION WITH WITH TETA
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE

LIGHTHOUSE

i could picture you, habibi
those birthmarks
scattered across
your chest
they leave me misplaced between
letters, words and s p a c i n g
as they stopped to be
traced by my fingers
the drumming of your heart,
I feel on my neck -
float on me like oil on water
you tell me - enty noor einy
after your fingers
fumble for the light switch
but everything looks
different at night,
and the fire is dying
don't forget to feed it
you always seem
to have a way of
getting me naked
without peeling off my shirt
each question, you pry
each question, I answer
a different article of clothing
but I've never been
comfortable in this skin
the thoughts I've buried
underneath the cobble
you now tread on

YARIM MAHRIM



BY ROWAIDA OMAR

AL-BIRWA BULLDOZED MAMOUD DARWISH'S VILLAGE

Village the color of dust
olive orchards, wind lifting
elliptical silver leaves. Lazy hawk coasts
the updrafts he has known for a million years.
Rocks in sandy fields nick the plow
thousands of planting seasons.

Every morning small children wait in line
same flatbread comes off the bakery belt.
Every evening
same stone sheep fold at dusk
same sheep bell
same coming home
hijab and keffiah
falafel seller, midwife
imam and the call to prayer.
It was like this forever.

Little houses, olive trees
bulldozed. Stone sheep fold folded by the blade;
mosque and its chant only a memory;
falafels scattered; midwife died on the road;
refugee children wait for bread
from the bakery of memory. Only hawk left.
Too high to smash.

ANN STRUTHERS

IGNORANCE IN GOOD HEALTH (AN ABECEDARIAN) 9TH CENTURY BABYLON OR THE WORLD CHANGES AND STAYS THE SAME

al-Jahiz (9th century Babylon) translates Galen of Pergamon, quotes:

"Barbary macaques and pigs have important correspondences with human anatomy. Dissection proves it—blood circulates, empowered by the heart in veins, arteries. Function of trachea, larynx generates the voice." Doctors of divination hated him. He championed observation, reason, inveighed against mysticism, caused dangerous jealousy. Galen wrote more than 500 treatises, kept twenty scribes busy. Only one third of his writings left. Al-Jahiz admired its clarity, emphasis on examination, meaning derived from observation, common sense. Not at the House of Knowledge. His compatriots' writings obfuscated in great pages of arcane scholarly poop. Their style wasn't worth a wharf rat's vomit. Quality of their thought: as disappointed as their wives in bed. Rationality restraint not always admired, so al-Jahiz, must be careful. Some of his enemies might get his patron's ear, the patron sheik might get religion; the tables could spin, upset, unseat, undo the known world; verity today could vanish in a whiff of dust from a jinn's flying carpet. Xplosions of ignorance and bad compositions could yaw across the lanes of intellectual life. Zeal for knowledge fragile; ignorance always in good health.

ANN STRUTHERS



West Bank Cross (Taken during the protests following President Trump's decision to name Jerusalem the capital of Israel)
BY AIYAH SIBAY

RED//JILD//PRAYER (DIODE, 2018) POETRY BY HAZEM FAHMY REVIEWED BY HELEN WING

Hazem Fahmy's passionate debut collection, *Red//Jild//Prayer* (Diode, 2018), maps a corporeal journey from rage to ecstasy, from fear to pride, 'unabashed, unafraid', from the profound alienation of the 'silly, brown boy' who defines himself 'by that which makes me hate myself' to the courageous emblazoned joy of intimacy and hope, of 'Scream:/ we are here,/ habiby./ Tomorrow can't tame this love.'

Fahmy's progress towards an ethnic and gender identity located in the sublime taps into a long tradition of homosexual poetry which seeks gender authenticity beyond the material: think Cernuda, think Lorca. Fahmy's torment is layered and complex for he seeks to repossess the image of his body from the forces of ideological tyranny so that he can paradoxically sacralise his body as holy and indomitable through the power of love.

When the body is constantly shamed for being brown, for being Muslim, for being gay, the poet appeals to God and asks, 'where else will these eyes go[?]' Fahmy's poetry portrays the identity struggle of a young man growing up amidst the Egyptian revolution and counter-revolution, global religious polarization, the devastation of exile, the confusing proliferation of non-transcendent, neo-baroque cultural images of the postmodern and the exploration of non-binary sexuality in a violent, unforgiving world. Fahmy's mastery ushers in brutal truths, a soothsaying of the excoriating violence inherent in the racism and ignorance of the West.

The collection opens with a prayer 'Red as in rage' and we are alerted to the life and death battle of biblical proportions that may ensue as the following poem 'the word' subverts St. John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the word / and it spat on me'. Language, first the foreign tongue English but then the ability to speak, to inhere meaning, in any language, has been preternaturally stripped from the poet. 'I opened my mouth only / to find that my throat, too / was stolen.'

It is red rage that guides the poet, who is 'swinging [his] legs like a hammer' as he observes the West's 'close-up on the dead Arab' and questions why he is alive if the only images of himself he sees are of his death. 'Caesar', a poem named after the prototypical dictator, rails against the easy belittling of the Egyptian tragedy. Fahmy parodies the contempt of the West for Egypt by domesticating its easy slogans of ignorance. Democracy, he cries 'is not as simple as a break up song', not 'a bag of seeds you buy at Home Depot'. He blames a postmodern commodity fetishism for the deliberate oblivion of the West for they 'forget that we have been planting our own crops for over seven thousand years.' He parodies himself in the oppressor's dialect and delivers savage clarity in 'Daily I watch America marvel / at how fast a brown body can burn.' The curse of cultural improvisation in the hands of the poet becomes part of a necessary process whereby he restitutes a sense of self in the image-bound contemporary, using Jazz and colloquial idiom in a linguistic reduction ad absurdum which, for him, mirrors the perpetual rape of his consciousness as a young Arab man in an alien environment. It is no accident that his love song to Egypt comes solely in Arabic as 'my people are still a body' and in the West, clearly and repeatedly, only a body.

'A Queen bleeds in Ramadan (after Orlando)' depicts the poet caught in the profoundly personal and semantic trap of double oppression, where he is both prey and predator in a massacre that is both imputed to his kind and yet which kills his kind. The paucity of discourse redoubles his anguish as it crudely simplifies both racial and gender hate. Again as he interrogates easy hegemonic assumptions his pain is not just physical but spiritual. 'Oh God, / we look to you and are told you hate us'. The poet's search for identity is a search for the sublime, which, paradoxically, can only manifest through the physical. In 'On Adding Sand', he uses the geography of the page – America on the left, Egypt on the right – to sketch the depth of cultural difference. He deftly weaves a pseudo-coherence between the racist slur described in the poem and a plea for the sanctity of sand: 'It is typical of us mortals / to mock this Earth. To spit / on its Holy.' For Fahmy the taste of sand woke poetry in him, and from the desert his body rises as a physical temple as he asserts his refusal to be brought low by the glib mockery of the West. Later, in 'Muse/me', the poet articulates a place to breathe between Self and Other, a self-image, as he says, 'I tell myself / there is no bad cinematography / in the real world. Only bad editing / Like stitching two images with no rhythm. Like a call to prayer / and an explosion.'

Jild, skin, is sandwiched between Red, the rage at one's identity appropriation by an alien racist culture, and Prayer, a song to redemption through love. The skin, the body, is the vessel the poet needs to relocate in his search for a sublime, knowing intimacy. This body, as delicate and flammable as film reel, has to be rescued from the ravages of fragmentation to choreograph a sense of belonging, love and voice. For the poet his voice is physically torn from the third eye, 'my forehead cuts open / with a coarse / gurgling / sound'. His vocal binding, like his skin, is material and constantly under threat from the lexical violence of political sloganeering and the yearning for communication and community. In 'Jild', the history of fear, for and of the body, is the central focus for the poet as he struggles to place his gay identity and his Arab identity not just in the US but also within the violence of his Egyptian contemporary and his faith. 'I've lost interest in Independence Day(s) / I've grown tired of blood piercing the night / sky.' Again here Fahmy samples the confectionery of the postmodern predilection for nullified, meaning-drained images to excoriate the culture(s) from which he feels disbarred. The lexicon of fear: 'a bogart', an 'Ode to Essos', an image negative, foot-printed evidence of absence, all these terms sketch his pain and his search for a poetic voice in a world that rejects the sublime. Thus the sarcasm of his, 'What an epic feeling it is / to be unmade by a white man, / and his deceitful pen.' The pivotal contradiction of the skin, the conceit of the binding of identity in skin and his binding in the book, maps his need to repossess and reinvest identity. This effort is fuelled by the twin urges of rage and compassion seared into his chilling image, 'The next time a white man wears / my skin, I'll cut it off, drain the blood, and drape it over / the first shivering brown child I come across.'

Eventually in Prayer 'a night of terror / becomes a morning / of joy as Fahmy discovers the intimacy of love, 'a symphony of skin.' That skin, once dead and damned, becomes sublime and eternal in love, 'like the wine that awaits you in heaven' as the poet takes ownership of his belonging in love and in gay identity. 'Dawn a red dress / in my closet, / always there / for me.' The movement from 'I' to 'we' for belonging, and from 'you' to 'they', a distancing signaling the poet no longer feels as personal attack the all-encompassing censure, punctuates his new found joy, 'Louder than bombs, / we cry out [...] to see a flag wrapped around a breathing body, for a change.' At last the parading of contempt and pain has become a life-affirming parade of joy.





BY ROWAIDA OMAR



IN THE VILLAGE OF DUMA, FOLLOWING A VIOLENT ATTACK CARRIED OUT BY NEIGHBORING SETTLERS
BY AIYAH SIBAY

THESE THREADS OF MEMORIES AND SOUNDS
By Micah Khater

I stand next to the yellow-stoned sepulcher that is meant to conceal the stench and shock of bodies long gone. The dusty road follows the mountain around, veering toward a small church, whose bells chime into the otherwise quiet air. As I walk toward the wooden benches and stark colors of painted saints who adorn the stone walls, I see roses crawling up the side. Their rhythmic dance in the sun-stroked wind sets me off course. I watch the pinks and yellows of their blossoms as their stems try to move out and beyond the soil, like young seeds floating in the wind. But their roots have betrayed them; they cannot move.

I turn away and walk through the doors whose wood seems to swell each time a hand presses on its smoothed ridges. As we stand in the hollow chapel, a cool breeze moves up and down the aisle, somehow reminding me that I have come over five thousand miles to eulogize the dead. My dead. It is in Lehfed, the mountain village town where my grandfather bought land long before me; where he, my grandmother, and uncle remain eternally laid behind the achingly beautiful walls of that sepulcher. As I stand in homily, I remark that this will be the second—or is it third—time that I have been near my grandmother’s body. Like the roses outside, her roots have been laid down long ago: pressed into the soil with tears and confusion from those left behind, begging her not to move. So now, we must come to her.

The eulogies of a diaspora bear fruit in the homeland. I carry with my half-Arab, half-white body songs of Lebanon. So that when I stepped foot in Lehfed, after so many years away, I feel the elegiac rhythms in my path. I hear the call of lungs wet with life and earth in late April 1927 as I move through the streets of my grandmother's birthplace, Brummana, nearly ninety years later. Her parents had called her Hind, ensuring that when others spoke her name, they would not intonate French sounds like a colonial ventriloquist. She would have an Arabic name and she would bear the genealogy of her father, just like her mother had once done.

My grandmother, Hind Naim Aswad, curled her hair so that it fell away from her face. She painted her lips and shaped her eyebrows. And when she posed for one of her first photographs, she wore a blouse with buttons that glistened as she walked. Moving her shoulders square with the camera, Hind looked ahead only to be instructed to turn to the left. With her lips pressed together she let the corners of her mouth turn up just enough to make her eyes come alive. Frozen in time, the light catches Hind smiling.

After the birth of five children—two of whom had given up the ghost so early that they would later be remembered as twins that came and departed together—Hind felt her womb contract. The painful scars of childbirth made her legs ache and she found herself sitting more throughout the day, trying to rub away the blue tributaries that had risen to the surface with each pregnancy. Unable to loosen the choked blood, she called on a doctor to treat the wounds below the skin.

The physician insisted, so the story goes, that the only way to heal the veins was through another pregnancy. A sixth child, he said, might increase the flow and lessen the pain running along my grandmother's days. Perhaps it was her ascriptions to motherhood—to her life's labors—that made her willing to trust him. But inside, she must have equivocated because her womb had contracted and she ached with the memory of lowering another child into the ground. Even so, she felt the pain linger, growing into her bones like an unwelcome companion. So she heeded the doctor's advice. In the month before her birthday, she found her bleeding had stopped and she knew that the season had changed.

Unbeknownst to her, Hind would celebrate her thirty-third birthday on the same day that her daughter-in-law arrived in the world. Separated by the salt of the Mediterranean and the crescent of the Atlantic, the two women would never meet. But they would share the day of birth, linking their souls in a way that echoed divine providence. And as her sixth child grew big inside of her, Hind felt the earth move as another generation entered the world.

I belong to my mother in a way that all children belong to the ones who gave them life. But I, too, belonged to something else. She—the child of white Americans—looked and inhabited the world in a way that my father and his mother, Hind, did not. Made up whole of these two parts, I found myself looking and not looking like my mother. Sounding and not sounding like her family. Being and not being American. These threads of memories and sounds snaked across my body, demarcating disparate geographies and genealogies.

When my mother took her first steps in the Old City of Jerusalem as a student, I wonder whether she saw women who looked like the daughter she had not yet had. I wonder if she stopped to feel the slopes of what Westerners considered an "older" world, knowing that her own children would be made up of both the "old" and the new. In this way, my geographies—given to me by both her and my father—fractured not just in space but also in time. Perhaps she knew that this place would come to mean home to her children, even if mostly in their nighttime longings.

Alif, Ba, Ta, Tha, Jeem, Ha...my white mother would read aloud the letters of the Arabic alphabet to her half-Arab children, teaching us how to speak with an evenness of our heritage. As the hard Cairo "g" rolled off her tongue, my father would answer with the soft "g" of Beirut and Brummana and suddenly they would move together through the streets of Egypt and the hills of Lebanon. I closed my eyes, hoping to go along with them to places I knew so well, even if only in my dreams.

"You look just like your grandmother Hind," my parents would tell me when I complained about my milk-white skin and the thickness of my eyebrows. I loved those moments and would steal away a smile, thinking about Hind's smooth features and full lips. Sometimes my father would look at me as if he was memorizing my face, just in case it changed and his mother no longer appeared across the contour of my brow or in the fullness of my cheeks. I would dream of my grandmother and wonder whether our physical similarity branched into our souls. Hind was the vision of my past and my future. Her breath had been captured in flashes and film, but she lived on in my bones.

To sing of a world both strange and familiar beckons the imagination. As a young girl, I drew up a facsimile of Lebanon in my mind, taken from memories and dreams, real and fictitious. And each time I returned, my static renditions of homeland evolved. Sprawling forth in many directions, Lebanon became more complex, but always remained symbolic. I clung to those images at different hours of the day—when I brushed my dark hair or pronounced my anglicized name. And at certain moments in my life, I grasped onto the dreams of days past with greater urgency—when images of Arab faces flashed next to the dust-filled smoke that interred thousands under rubble, rock, and American Pride. When those nightmares effaced my dreams, I tried to sort out what made me American and what made me Lebanese.

I dreamt of Hind and Lebanon because I could not fit all of myself into American. I spilled over, past the green pines of North Carolina and the sun-filled days of Colorado. I felt my mind vacillate whenever I spoke of identity, trying to figure out which box would suit me. Was I Caucasian or multiracial? Whenever I selected "White," my racialization obscured my ethnicity. I did not want to be just American, as if that categorization in and of itself erased my grandmother and all of the memories that I had of her. I wanted to be as I was; as I am.

Before September 11, 2001, half of me faded against the backdrop of my skin. Teachers and friends could not imagine a white Arab. So, they forgot about part of me: the little girl who claimed to be Lebanese but whose skin mirrored the light. I did not like being white, because that category suffocated me with meaning I did not mean and stories I did not tell. But others imposed that whiteness on me unendingly, forgetting my other half: they excised part of me, leaving it under refuse as if it had never existed at all.

By the time the towers came down and the smoke had cleared, I had undergone baptism by fire. Suddenly, erasure contorted into a perverse recognition. I became Arab, but remained American, moving through space with a dexterity and alacrity that belied the long braided ropes that tethered me to the ground. This new identity supplanted the old, but put me in a new category: one with no name. I was suspended in space, white and other at the same time—both a bearer to and victim of white supremacists' violent heritage. I checked both boxes. I listened to teachers pronounce my name with new meaning and I felt others' breath on my neck as they whispered in my ear, "Are you a terrorist?"

No, no. That was not me. They had taken my beautiful secret and made it ugly with their words and their spit. They had resurrected a ghoulish version of my other half and in so doing, ravaged my dreams of Hind.

Seated on two chairs, my grandparents stare back at me from a photo taped together and yellowing. It's 1951. My uncle and aunt look away from the camera, coyly evading the gaze of an eternal audience. Everyone wears sandals, except my grandfather whose gendarme uniform requires a dress shoe with a slight heel. Hind's cross hangs between the "v" of her collar, but the clasp of the necklace has fallen to the front. The misplaced clasp guides the eye toward her high-waisted belt where the fabric of her dress pulls, revealing that she is once again pregnant.

Most of the stories of my grandmother tell her life through marriage, pregnancy, and child-rearing. I dream because I cannot see photographs of her life beyond these moments. I descend into unknowable pasts because I am the embodiment of the unseeable futures of which she dreamt.

Yes, she dreamt. She dreamt as she stood for her wedding portrait on a rug whose perfect geometry mirrored the superficially clean lines of domesticity. An architect of futurity, she envisioned her children moving across the swells and breaks of the sea. Hers was a world unfolding and she challenged the mountains, even the ones that would become her resting place, to contain her dreams.

But her dreams were costly. They took her children like rip currents, only returning them after long periods of absence. If only she could move them away from the sounds of evaporating lives—disintegrating worlds—then the children might not fall under the bombs. This fractured reality crashed into her with unending hurt. She would have to throw her children far: far enough away so that they would not try to smuggle their way back in the night.

The war, as we call it, absorbs all of the light of memories from the 1970s—the height of my father’s adolescence. It is opaque and runs through our family like a hot knife, leaving wounds between us all. Even those of us who did not experience the war understand that its trauma lives on in our embryos and sperm. It is worn on the skin like feathers lay in glue, attached along our spine as a frequent reminder that displacement is the way that our father survived.

My father had been at Hind’s side for as long as she could remember. But how could she let this child, the embodiment of her labors of love, carry her bleeding in the streets after she was hit by shelling one afternoon? He ran with her as far as he could go, cradling the most precious love he had yet known. Feeling the pull between her own pain and her son’s fear, my grandmother must have felt consumed by a feeling that had no name, no calling, no place. It led her to say, knowing he might be gone forever: “I don’t want him to die here.”

She wore the violence of war around her neck, like a bad omen, reminding her of a dream that had begun to slip into a nightmare. She worried that maybe she had not prepared him for the loneliness that grips in an unknown land. She knew it was time. Yet, this ocean seemed so much more vast and hollow, like it would swallow her whole.

When she sent her last child to the land of dreams, she sent a piece of herself. The sweet memories, like a fragrant breeze, hurried alongside my father, bringing Lebanon with him. Whenever he told me this story, his words would sing of a land both strange and familiar. And when he reached the crescendo, I would feel that Hind had done more than simply send her child away. She had moved worlds.

I sit in the sun baked terrace, listening for sounds that might heal the grief worn from the time of my birth. My mother and father surround me, reminding me of the places I have been and those I have yet to go. My father’s hand grazes my back, telling me that the painful loss of the mother that sent him to safety has never left him. I see it when he looks at me. I see it when he moves in her image and I in his. My mother, the one who has given me breath, takes in her children’s world. Her world.

The place of resting is also one of haunting. I touch the stones that surround my grandmother’s body, which is to have something between my fingers that feels like the loss of time. This is my diasporic eulogy:

Here, I furtively graft dreams of Hind onto my skin. Her dark hair fades into the night sky as she dances across the dusty road, carrying me with her. She twists and turns under the moon with a spry tongue and beautiful hums.

Others try to cloud my visions with smoke that creeps along the proverbial line of borders. With words sharp and raw, they cut across the ephemera of my grandmother. But she always returns. And when they put me in the part of the sky that has no name, I cry out and she answers.

When I passed through the veil, I saw the blue of the ocean and the red of the earth. I saw you and me. And Hind touched my face with a paintbrush, so that I might always remember that she had moved heaven and earth so that I might be. When others tried to drown me under the rubble and rust of broken dreams, I knew that they could not take that away from me. Like the rings of an oak tree, my face would tell stories of a land near and far and when my mouth froze, the contour of my brow and the fullness of my cheeks would echo a world that had passed before our eyes.



BY ROWAIDA OMAR

THE POWER OF CULTURE AND NARRATIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN MUADDI DARRAJ

BY LENA MAHMOUD

In the following interview, Lena Mahmoud interviews Susan Muaddi Darraj, renowned Palestinian American fiction writer, about the impact of social media in cultural movements, the importance of contributing to an active literary community, and the rewards and challenges she has experienced writing her new children's book series *Farah Rocks*.

LM: In 2019 you started the #TweetYourThobe to honor Rashida Tlaib's swearing-in. Its popularity inspired the International Day of Tatreez and Palestinian Culture. Did you think that the #TweetYourThobe would have such a far reach? What are your hopes for the International Day of Tatreez and Palestinian Culture?

SMD: I wasn't completely surprised that #TweetYourThobe went viral, because we had support building "underground" in a private Facebook group for a couple of weeks. (It was private because when I first floated the idea on Twitter to wear thobes on the day of the swearing in, I got some intense hate mail). The idea grew and grew, with people inviting their friends. I knew that Palestinians and our friends would enjoy posting pictures of themselves in thobes and other forms of tatreez (embroidery) – and I was excited by everyone's enthusiasm. I initially invited only 300, but by January 3rd, we had 8,000 members.

I think what did surprise me was the media reaction – it was overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic. By mid-morning on January 3rd, my friends at the Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU) were funneling media inquiries my way. By noon that day, NPR and The New York Times called me within minutes of each other, and that was when I understood the impact #TweetYourThobe was making. And then CNN and others – and each major story spurred further interest in the topic. By January 4th, the second day (our campaign lasted 3 days), there were newspapers in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East covering it.

I was most affected by how meaningful the event was for Palestinian Americans. Finally, a chance to take charge of the narrative in the news headlines! It was refreshing. That's why we are starting the International Day of Tatreez and Palestinian Culture – I'm partnering with the newly established Museum of the Palestinian People in Washington DC to do online and local, face-to-face celebrations of Palestinian culture every April 30th. We're using the hashtags #TweetYourThobe, #TweetYourTatreez, and #TweetYourCulture.

LM: Your first two fiction books were literary short story collections, but your most recent release, *Farah Rocks*, is the first book of a middle grade chapter book series. Was the transition from literary short fiction to middle grade fiction a difficult one? What inspired *Farah Rocks*? How many books do you have in mind for the series?

SMD: Well, I have a four-book contract with Capstone Books, and there's a possibility of writing more if the book does well. I was inspired to write it by my daughter – she's an avid reader and she asked me one day why there weren't books with Arab or Palestinian girls in them. I realized I had wondered the same exact thing at her age. I loved books like *Pippi Longstocking* and *Anne of Green Gables*, later I got into *Nancy Drew* and even the *Sweet Valley High* books. But I never saw even minor characters who reflected my own life. That's two generations of Arab American girls asking the same question, right? Where am I? How come nobody sees me? How come I don't see myself in the books I love?

So I was like, "That's enough of that." I approached my agent with the idea. He doesn't really represent children's fiction, but he liked the idea and supported it. He told me to write the first two books in the series, and when I did – it took me about six months – he went out to publishers with them. And he negotiated a four-book deal, which is great, because it will be a substantial series.

Farah is a fifth grader who is very smart, brave, and funny. She has a fun little brother named Samir, a mother who is very patient, and a father who is hilarious and likes to make breakfast foods for dinner. They are a working-class family, and so they struggle with money. In the first book, Farah has to confront a new girl at school who turns out to be a terrible bully.

Writing for this age group – 2nd to 5th graders – has been a challenge in some ways. I read books for this age group all the time, because I have three children of my own and they are all, thank goodness, voracious readers. But making the switch has been a humbling experience. I have a treasure of an editor in Eliza Leahy at Capstone – she has really taught me how to avoid being too nuanced, too subtle, how to keep the plot moving, and how to make sure the reader is always tapped into Farah’s feelings and thoughts.

LM: In addition to your books, you have been very active in the literary community, including hosting workshops for both RAWI and Barrelhouse. How do you think those two roles complement one another?

SMD: The writing community is a small one, and the Arab American writing community even smaller. I believe in being a good “literary citizen,” in helping to support and promote other writers. I’ve been a literary journal editor – I edited the Baltimore Review for seven years – and I’ve been active with Barrelhouse Magazine for several years as well. I’ve also helped organize a successful creative writing conference in Washington DC every spring – Conversations & Connections (www.writersconnectconference.com) for the last thirteen years. In fact, it was just named one of America’s best writing conferences by The Writer magazine. I think the appeal of this conference is that we have a “no divas” rule – we invite only writers and presenters who have a generous attitude towards helping others learn the craft and the intricacies of the publishing world.

So all that is to say that I believe in supporting other writers as much as possible. I know that I have had other writers who mentored me when I got started – and I’m grateful to writer friends who blurb my books, who invite me for readings or to serve on panels, who spread the word about my work. Again, if you want to be part of this community of writers, you have to not only care about the written word, but you have to support those who write, edit, illustrate, publish.

LM: You were recently named a Ford Fellow, which comes with a \$50,000 purse. Congratulations! How important do you believe awards and funding are for a successful writing career?

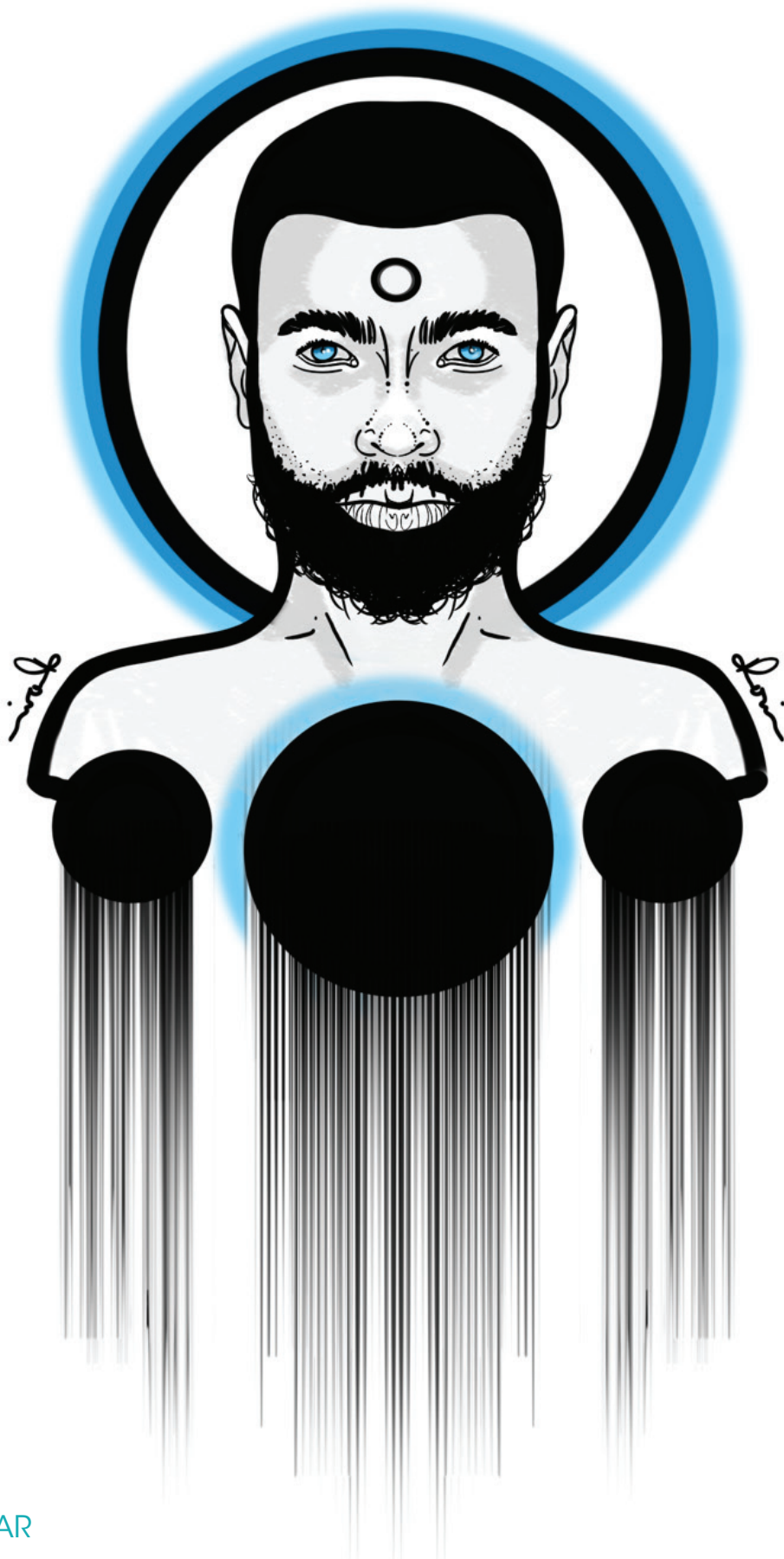
SMD: I was thrilled to be recognized by United States Artists, which awarded me the Ford Fellowship. That was quite meaningful because I was invited to the ceremony in Chicago, where I met so many wonderful writers (Lucas Mann, Fred Moten, Molly Brown) and artists working in other disciplines, like musician Terence Blanchard and vocalist Somi. It was a tremendous three days of sharing our work with each other and talking about the creative process. So it’s not the award itself so much as the network it provides you, the company it places you in, that I value.

But of course, there’s no denying that awards can help your career in more tangible ways – having a book award sticker on your book cover certainly helps people pay attention.

Funding is also crucial, especially for those of us who work full-time and for whom writing is something we accomplish “on the side.” I have a full-time job and I’m raising three children, and I wake up early (sometimes at 4:30am) to write for a couple of hours before I start the rest of the day. Having funding is great because it allowed me last year and this year to take some time away and provide childcare while I was gone so that I could focus on my work.

LM: The writing advice that you provide during your workshops has been highly regarded. What is the most important bit of writing advice for other writers?

SMD: Care about your characters. Know them. Understand their flaws. View them with a critical eye. Figure out what they love, what they want. What scares them? The whole book unfolds from their desires and their fears.



BY ROWAIDA OMAR



A RIDE IN PALESTINE

BY AIYAH SIBAY

EVERYONE WORTH KNOWING

by Jeff Richards

We waited at baggage claim at the Marrakech airport for Raymond and Carmen Kiser. Ray was in a wheelchair. He had a heart condition and wore a patch while he was flying that made him dizzy. When an attendant in a yellow jacket wheeled him out through a set of swinging doors, he was rummaging through the carry on in his lap. He pulled out a candy bar. Tore open the package. He munched around the edges of the bar and licked the chocolate that melted on his stubby fingers. Ray was a chubby man. He carried most of the weight in his belly. It stuck out in front of him like a medicine ball. It was probably as heavy. The rest of him was thinner, a broad back and thick muscular arms and legs though his head was big. He had blue eyes and thick glasses. He wore a Texas Longhorn hat on his head.

I should not criticize Ray for his looks. We were both old warriors. We both had wives who were younger, prettier and smarter than us though Ray was not as willing to admit it as I. I am an old literature teacher who likes to keep the peace.

We gathered our luggage and made our way through customs. On the other side, we checked out the cards that were held up by a cadre of young men and a few women in headscarves until we came upon "Kiser." Ray arranged the trip. We greeted the tall, dark haired, beetle browed man who held the sign. His name was Hassan Choukri.

"Choukri," I repeated, doubtfully. I'm hard of hearing. "Are you by any chance related to a writer from Tangier named Mohamed Choukri?"

"Why, yes, I am," said Hassan, smiling brightly as he helped us with our luggage out to a cab. "He is my great-uncle. But how did you know of him?"

"I was a literature teacher and one of the writers that I studied was Paul Bowles. He lived in Tangier and was a colleague of your great-uncle."

"Isn't it a small world," said Hassan as we climbed in the cab. It was a van that we had rented for the week and we all easily fit. Hassan sat in the front with the driver who spoke no English. He instructed him in Berber and Arabic. Ray and I sat in back and the ladies in the rear seat. They were consulting the guidebook.

Ray overheard me mention Paul Bowles and he told Hassan a story that I heard a thousand times before that he used to attend Andrea and Dick Simon's literary parties and once he met Paul Bowles and they had a long talk about Morocco. "He inspired me so much that once when Carmen and I were in Barcelona – she is a native of that town – we decided to visit Tangier. We were disappointed, I'm afraid. It's such a dirty city."

"Yes, it is," said Hassan, smiling brightly though I'd been strangling Ray at this point, "but they are cleaning it up."

Ray shrugged. He went on to mention other writers he met at these parties such as Meyer Levin, Guy Endore, and Grace Metalious. I never heard of these writers except for the last one who wrote Peyton Place. They were best sellers, no doubt, and us literature teachers are too high falutin' to know their likes.

We arrived at the hotel in the medina. Ray went up to his room and changed to his bathing suit and bathrobe. He took the elevator down to the hamamms in the basement for a steam bath. This is a ritual he goes through every time he travels by air. He says the steam burns off all the medicine in his patch. Makes him less dizzy and ready to face the day. When Ray was forty-two, he suffered a heart attack that bent him double in the middle of Park Avenue near where he worked. The doctors said if he were lucky, he would live ten more years. Then Lipitor came on the market. He was now sixty-four.

After Ray left for his steam bath, Hassan took the ladies and I for a tour of the Saadian Tombs. Hassan told us about the Saadi dynasty and the royalty buried under the tiled floors, but what I remember most was his reply to my question about the meaning of the expression Inshallah, one that I heard several times from both he and his driver.

"When I leave you tonight," he said, as I snapped a picture of the chamber of twelve pillars where one of the 16th century sultan's sons is buried, "I will say, 'See you tomorrow, Inshallah.' That means, God willing. We must add these words to all the things we wish for in the future because it is doing God's will that concerns us as Sunnis. If God wills that I die in an automobile accident tonight, that is what will happen, and I will not see you tomorrow."

I remember this because I am not a religious person. I'm not an atheist. I'm more of an agnostic. The fact is I'm not sure

why anything happens or who is in charge of making whatever happens, happen. The other reason I remember this is that the rest of our day was defined, in my mind, by these thoughts, especially in regards to my friend, Raymond Kiser.

We returned to our hotel to rest for dinner after a short tour of the Kasbah.

Our dinner was an early one before the sun set. We waited in the courtyard of the hotel in the medina for Hassan to show up. We were sipping Coca zero and snacking almond finger cookies.

I made the mistake of asking Ray if the Simons who gave the literary parties were the very same Simons of Simon and Shuster, the book publishers. Ray who seemed totally refreshed after his steam bath and was dressed in his favorite designer clothes, a Ralph Lauren green shirt, blue dinner jacket, and khakis – he still wore his Texas Longhorn cap, said, the very same Simons.

"I used to date their daughter, Carly," he said, brushing the cookie crumbs off his shirt and ordering more cookies and goat cheese croquettes.

"You'll ruin your appetite," said Carmen in a peeved voice. She had probably heard this story before.

"I'm fine. I'm fine," he said, patting his substantial girth. "There's enough room in here to store the Taj Mahal." He leaned towards me and covered his mouth so the ladies couldn't hear. "You know that song of Carly's You're So Vain. She probably wrote that about me. Our relationship ended badly."

"I heard that," said Carmen, laughing. "You know, it's really true. He knew Carly Simon. Isn't it amazing." She thought the world of Ray Kiser and his connections and he thought the world of her.

We have been traveling companions for ten years since we met in Paris where Carmen was attending an OPEC meeting and Ray was recovering from an angioplasty operation. He was skinny back then, a poster child for heart disease, until after his second operation he decided, what the heck. I only have a limited time on earth. Why not enjoy myself? I knew that Carmen did not like this decision but Ray was stubborn. His heart attack changed everything. He had to quit his ad agency job in the middle of the Toyota campaign. "My triumph," he called it. Carmen decided that they should not have children since she was the main source of income. Ray was a frugal fellow. He managed to save a ton of money. It was not like they were poor. They moved to Toronto where Carmen landed a mid-level job in the oil industry. She worked herself up to the top and retired as an executive though she sat on a number of boards to keep busy.

Hassan Choukri appeared in the courtyard dressed in a brown djellaba and a flat yellow hat. He carried a lantern to guide us to Baharet restaurant. He stood patiently by as Ray regaled us about the Majorelle, a botanical garden and estate once owned by Yves Saint-Laurent and now open to the public. We were to visit tomorrow.

"Yves was a client of mine and a good friend. I was on a shot for his company in Barcelona when I met Carmen. She was a swimsuit model," said Ray, smiling at his wife and patting her knee.

Carmen blushed. "Please, Raymond."

But Raymond elaborated more on his close relationship with the clothes designer and how he and Carmen visited Majorelle until Hassan finally interrupted.

"I am very impressed about how many important people you know, even in my country." He looked at his watch. "But I must admit we are running late. I don't want us to lose our reservation."

"Of course, of course," said Ray, standing up with some difficulty. His knees were bad. We followed Hassan out of the hotel and entered the souk. We twisted and turned our way past the vendors in their makeshift stalls yelling for us to buy their wares. Ray stopped at a silver jewelry stall. He haggled the price of a necklace he liked down to 700 dirham and gave it to Carmen. Carmen thanked him and said we must hurry. She had read in the guidebook that the chef at Baharet was the best in Marrakech, but impatient.

The sunlight slanted through the wooden slates in the roof and turned the souk an eerie bluish-copper color. It was hard to find our way through the shadows and around the crowds, but at last we came to a narrow street packed more tightly: teenagers in blue jeans jabbering on their cell phones bouncing off each other; older men in tennis shoes in hooded djellabas looking less like Berbers than medieval monks and women enshrouded in black, a few in burkas that covered all but their eyes. But most were in European clothes and came in all shapes, sizes, and colors.

"We are a multi-cultural society unlike the other Arab countries," said Hassan with a note of disdain in his voice. "We are more advanced. The mayor of Marrakech is a woman and recently we passed a law that allows women to divorce men."

Motorbikes weaved in and out of the human traffic, horns blaring and occasional donkey carts, one piled high with mattresses tipping precariously in our direction, another in tanned leather on the way to the leather auction in the souk. Dana and Carmen followed Hassan who waved his lantern from side to side to make way for the tourists. Then came Ray who wobbled from side to side like a car with a flat. I ran up to my friend.

"You alright."

"Fine, short of breath. Close quarters." He covered his ears. "Listen to the noise."

It was disconcerting to my finely tuned small town ears, all this din mingled together like the crash of brass symbols in the 1812 Overture. Set my teeth on edge. We came to a wooden door in the wall that Hassan unlatched. A guard on the other side greeted us as we stepped over the threshold. We found ourselves in a garden surrounded by palm and date trees, rose bushes, lilies, lavandula, flowering cactus, and morning glory vines climbing the walls. In the middle of the garden along a tiled path a fountain spurted water in the air. It was so quiet that we could hear the coo of caged lovebirds and soft music that came from behind another set of doors that we entered to an elegant mosaic tiled lobby of a hotel. Hassan bowed slightly and promised to return after the "repast."

We sat down at the first table inside the restaurant, a room lined with more dates, palms, and flowered vines climbing up the glass enclosures and overhanging the ceiling like a lush paradise. The tables were arranged around an orange

and blue mosaic-tiled pool. We could still hear the lovebirds cooing in their cages and the soft, reedy Moroccan music played by a band at the other end of the pool. We ordered a Chardonnay and Syrah from the Siroua vineyard in Morocco as Ahmed, our waiter, suggested. He was dressed in a fez, a dark red frilled Moroccan jacket, baggy pants and shirt. We ordered prix fix, endless amounts of Moroccan fare served from a silver tray with the help of an assistant.

First Ahmed poured the Chardonnay and served pastilla, spicy palm-sized meat, cheese, and vegetable pies. Ray corraled half of the pastilla as we discussed the anniversary of the Challenger disaster, a subject that he brought up because he knew Christy McAuliffe.

"I am famished tonight," he said, brushing the crumbs off his hands and asking for more pastilla. Carmen cautioned him about how he should go easy and he glared at her before launching into how he attended Christy's wedding to Steven McAuliffe.

Ahmed poured the rest of the Chardonnay and opened the Syrah. He served the salad. Ray Kiser picked at the dried fruit in one salad and polished off the eggplant and tomato in the other. We discussed the upcoming primaries and Ray informed us that he grew up with Donald Trump. They didn't live in the same town but they belonged to the same country club. "He's a bully."

This was a story I heard from my buddy a hundred times, but still he elaborated about how Trump commandeered the boys at the country club to hunt for stray balls and then he'd sell the balls back to the golf shop and pay the boys 20 cents on the dollar. "That's how he runs his business. Could you imagine how he'll run the country if he's elected."

"You know a funny coincidence," he said as he shoveled the next course, chicken and lamb tagine on a pile of couscous. He tore off hunks of bastilla. Ahmed poured the Syrah. "A funny thing, you know, that writer you mentioned in the cab this morning that lived in Morocco, I forget his name..."

"Paul Bowles."

"He was also a musician. He was good friends with Aaron Copland and as a matter of fact, it was Copland who introduced him to this country."

"The funny coincidence though is that Aaron Copland was from Westchester County. I strolled up to him once in Tarrytown and shook his hand. 'I love your music,' I said. He thanked me and I said, 'Only problem is I have a tin ear.' I was a smart aleck kid trying to impress my friend, one of the Rockefellers, Mike, I think, the one that vanished in the South American jungle," said my buddy, pointing a piece of bastilla in my direction. It was dripping shredded chicken and white sauce speckled with spices. Ray's stubby fingers were dusted in confectionary sugar.

I was losing my appetite and Ray his equilibrium. He wasn't normally this effusive about his connections. Nor did he usually eat with such gusto like a dog that doesn't know when to stop. Even Dana who like Carmen was of foreign extraction – she was Norwegian – and didn't display her inner feelings, displayed them now. "Are you okay?" she asked

"Fine, fine," growled Ray Kiser, waving his bastilla in her direction. Some of the shredded chicken and sauce splattered on the tablecloth.

"Darling, darling, calm yourself," said Carmen, patting his hand after he let the bastilla drop to the plate.

"I'm calm," he said, smiling weakly. "I am very sorry, Dana, if I sound overwrought. It must be the medicine. I don't think I entirely burned it off."

"That's perfectly okay," said Dana, patting his other hand.

Raymond Kiser ordered a bottle of champagne to go with dessert. While Ahmed poured the bubbly, his assistant handed out the dessert: mhencha, almond breakfast buns drenched in honey; milk bastilla, fried phyllo dough cookies layered in an almond, orange, and sweetened milk concoction; almond cookies and almond ice cream. My friend went at the delicious concoctions with the same gusto as before as he continued to name names of the well-heeled in Westchester County as well as Pierre Trudeau in Canada and an oil magnate on the board of Regents at the University of Texas where he had gone to school. He had been invited to one of their parties because he had given a substantial contribution to the annual fund.

But I thought his brain had really cracked when he reached back to his first memories of rushing into his dad's dentist office and staring up at a man he'd seen on TV before. "It was...it was..." We all stared at poor Ray because he was speaking loud enough to attract the attention of diners at other tables. "It was Soupy Sales." Raymond half stood, grabbed his left arm, and collapsed to the hard tile floor dragging the tablecloth and its contents with him. His Texas Longhorn hat fell off his head. I jumped up from my seat, rushed over to my friend, and checked his pulse.

"Excusez-moi, monsieur," said a man in a business suit from another table. "Je suis medecin."

The doctor bent down next to me. He said Ray knocked himself out when he hit the tile. "His pulse is still strong, but as a precautionary measure we must transport him to a hospital," he said in perfect English.

He introduced himself as Doctor Talb and told us that we were in luck because he was a cardiologist. "You are Americans, I assume," he said, pointing at the Longhorn hat that he picked up and gave to me. "Not to worry. I studied at the UCLA medical school." He called for the ambulance on his cell phone.

We waited in a stark room in the hospital with only a few chairs and bare, green walls. Far off through an open window, I could hear the call to prayer. It was still early evening and while the sun had set, I could still see a streak of red sky on the horizon and the outline of a minaret. Carmen sat in one of the chairs, a stolid expression on her face like a mask as if she were preparing for the worst. Dana sat in another chair, wiping tears from her eyes. I sat next to her, holding her hand.

Hassan stood in front of us staring down at his lantern and then into our eyes. He seemed himself about to break out in tears.

An hour later Doctor Talb came out. He told us that Ray regained consciousness. He seemed fine except for a cut on his head when he hit the tile floor. They were doing tests and should know within a few hours if he was to return to the hotel. Carmen sighed in relief and a smile broke on her face like the sun rising. We all hugged each other including Hassan who seemed the happiest of us all.

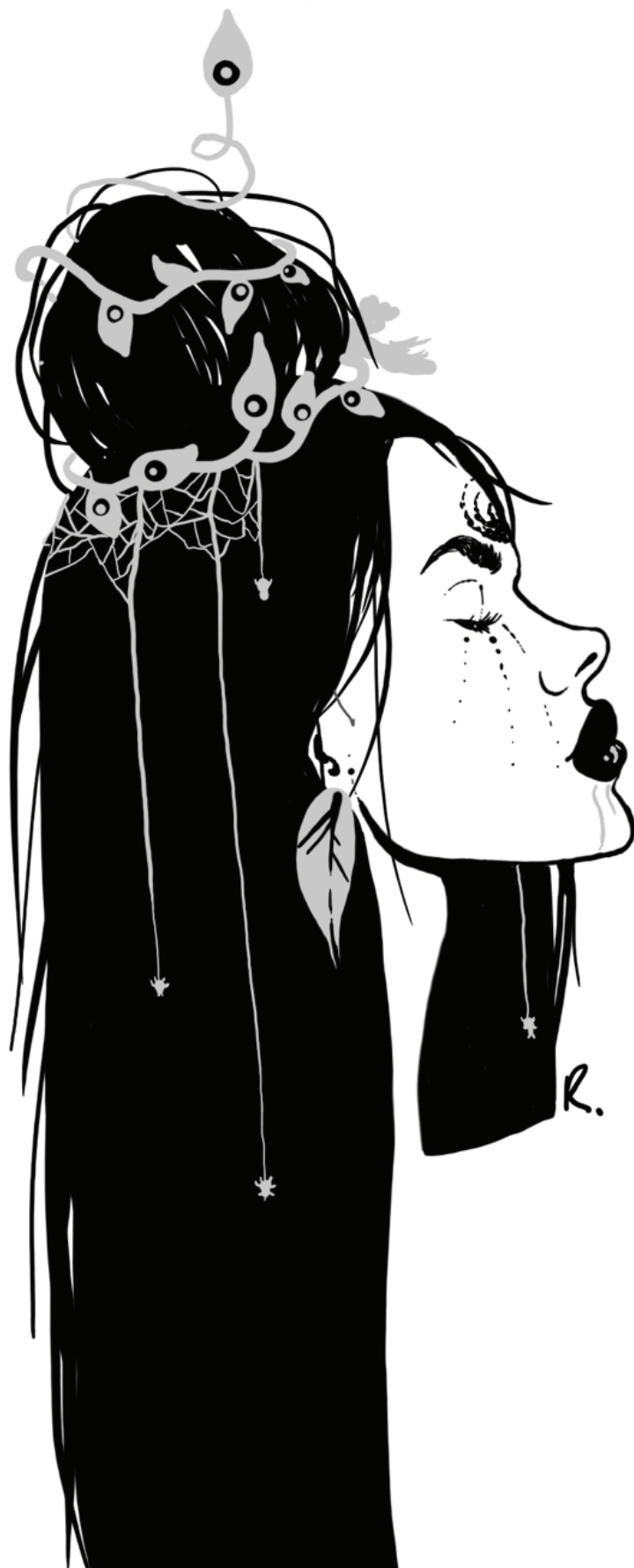
An hour later Ray was pushed out in a wheelchair. He wore a bandage around his head, his Longhorn cap, and a meek expression in his eyes, one of which was black. The sunset on Carmen's face. The stolid expression returned.

"I'm sorry," he said in a soft voice we could barely hear.

They wheeled him down to the taxi and we climbed in for the trip back to the hotel. On the way there, Ray started talking about the first time he traveled to Marrakech when he was a child. He stayed at La Mamounia hotel and met Winston Churchill. He was about to tell us the details when he looked at his wife whose stolid expression froze him in mid-speech.

"Oh, never mind," he stammered, finally. "It's not important."





BY ROWAIDA OMAR

THE MAP OF SALT AND STARS, FICTION BY ZEYN JOUKHADAR

REVIEWED BY ZEENA YASMINE FULEIHAN

Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* follows two young protagonists, Nour and Rawiya, as they travel across seven Arab countries 800 years apart. Nour, born and raised in Manhattan, New York, moves back to her family's homeland Syria with her mother and two older sisters just after her father passes away from cancer. In her search to remain connected with her father's memory, Nour recounts the story of Rawiya, a tale her father told her often, a young woman in the twelfth century who leaves her mother's home to become the apprentice of the famous mapmaker, al-Idrisi, on his quest to map the world.

Though centuries apart, the two characters face parallel routes and obstacles: they cross through the same lands—Rawiya pre-European imperial borders, Nour post—they disguise themselves as young boys to avoid gender-related danger in their journeys, both of their fathers pass away before the start of their journeys, and the list continues. Perhaps the most striking parallel is their curiosity and bravery, which leads Nour to find comfort in imagining herself as Rawiya as she searches for her identity within the trauma of her father's passing and the violence of being torn from her family home in Homs.

Joukhadar's storytelling enraptures the reader in both interwoven tales. For those who may not recognize that becoming a refugee can happen to anyone, Joukhadar's visceral story of how a middle-class family from the United States become refugees in the Syrian war will quickly dissolve the illusive distance between those in the global North and South. Nour's narrative does not shy away from the horrific, heart-wrenching realities of life as a refugee, such as watching a family member drown while attempting to cross borders or having to separate from family and its comfort in order to stay alive. Ill-intentioned smugglers, violent men, and the threat of being lost in the war lie around every corner in Nour's journey, yet joy, companionship, and wonder still flow throughout Joukhadar's prose. In *The Map of Salt and Stars*, we see life as it comes for both Nour's family and Rawiya's mapmakers, and watch as each group changes shape and size along the way, picking up new members whose generosity and camaraderie in their dire struggle for safety and shelter create unbreakable bonds.

Organized into sections by region, each new segment begins with the name of a country and a poem written in its shape. "Words survive. Borders are nothing to words and blood," an Amazigh woman who rescues Nour and her sister in the desert tells her. Through these border poems filled with longing and lament, as well as the continuous theme of mapmaking as a guide to the self, Joukhadar challenges the concept of borders and demarcations: the words of his poems fill the shape of a country, but rather than simply outlining, they depict the human, emotive experiences of those in and across the land. What are countries without the stories of the people that move within them?

The youthful narration of both tales accentuates Joukhadar's strengths as a writer: through Nour and Rawiya's innocence, Joukhadar conveys limitless emotion in their experiences, captivating the reader with a ceaseless grasp. Their age does not render them naïve: rather, Joukhadar highlights the vast maturity Nour and Rawiya have no choice but to gain, accompanied always by their kindness and fascination with the world and those around them. Brilliantly composed, thrilling and devastating in equal measure, *The Map of Salt and Stars* reveals the unbreakable resilience of those rendered most vulnerable in our society and the power in mapping home through people and their stories.

DEATH OF A PATRIARCH

by Marianna Marlowe

In the hot dry wind they congregated, all of them who had come to mourn a patriarch, a husband, a father, a father-in-law, a compatriot, a friend. Dressed in black they gathered, those of them who had come to receive his body and position it in the grave, or to throw a handful of dirt onto the corpse, or to recite from the Quran, or to weep and keen, or to remember and regret, or to wait until after the family has left to shovel in the remaining soil and maneuver the heavy concrete top over the hole. They stood on the barren ground, the lonely area in Livermore surrounded by hills and meadows, rimmed all around by grasses that swayed submissively in the oppressive current. In the distance, the freeway droned and whined. The wind, instead of refreshing them like a cooling breeze, seemed to carry with it a sense of death and despair, of fatalism and endings, of global warming and climate change. The sense of desolation she felt standing there at her father-in-law's funeral, baking in the heat, irritated by the grit of the blowing dust, holding a black parasol over her mother-in-law's coiffured white head, was only reinforced by the rectangles of artificial grass placed haphazardly over the graves, graves that she knew hid the remains of real people, beloved mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles and cousins and friends.

Like crows in the bleak landscape, they clustered around the grave. Her mother-in-law's elegant parasol, purchased decades ago in Paris, looked weirdly incongruous in its modish sophistication. They stood in the windswept clearing, among other flat graves, some sporting small slabs of granite perched at their heads with names etched shallowly in metallic silver or gold. At that moment she felt an acute nostalgia for the Victorian graveyards she grew up reading about in books, the ones beside quaint stone churches, covered in moss and grass and ivy, individual names and personal epitaphs carved carefully on heavy headstones, graveyards that, as the resting places for the dead, felt peaceful—snug and familiar. They had visited her British ancestors' graveyard earlier that year on a family vacation—the differences she couldn't help but note now intensified her uneasiness in this arid setting. She compared the lush greens with the bleached yellows, and the marble headstones aged into picturesqueness with the slick, modern hardness of the square slabs of granite; she saw how her memory of the decades-old trees, oak and elm and chestnut, which lent charming shadow to the garden of graves, clashed with her present vision of a lone pair of struggling saplings bending in the hot wind and failing to give shade to even one plot; she noticed the difference between the plants flourishing in the damp English earth, climbing up fence and wall and gravestone alike, and the plastic pots of fake flowers tilting precariously on the uneven surface of these gravesites by a motorway. Here in the glare of the sun with no clouds, no trees, no shade to bring relief, she felt exposed, like a skeleton left to the elements in an indifferent, hostile desert. At this burial ground it seemed like she was trapped in a Salvador Dalí painting, for here the rituals for the dead felt to her artificial and contrived; the cycle of life and death, of ashes to ashes and dust to dust, was denied, replaced by the disinfection of hygiene and civilization, by the flat hard ground, by the cement sides of the narrow cavity, by the small bulldozer waiting nearby to finish the job of covering the body, filling the hole, placing the concrete lid onto the grave with lonely finality.

Minutes earlier, the plain white van had pulled up, a vehicle stark in its practicality, with no sense of tradition, of gravitas, of solemnity. The cardboard coffin had been taken out of the back of the van by mosque men who, at the appropriate moment, opened it to remove the linen-shrouded body. They handed it, as planned beforehand, to her husband and his brother, to the sons of her father-in-law, who took it, careful with respect and love, with outstretched arms, and together laid it gently, face toward Mecca in the East, at the bottom of the grave in which they were standing. She had watched as they both, dressed impeccably in dark suits, timeless and formal in leather shoes and belts, ties and cufflinks, had lowered themselves, as per Muslim custom, into the trench that had been designated their father's final resting place. At first she had felt the discomfort of unfamiliarity, of foreignness, of strangeness as her husband climbed down into a dirt hole, as the father of her children descended into the ground. But then, as she watched him reach out for his father's body, sharing its heft and weight with his brother, and saw the gentleness with which they held him, she felt only the beauty of children being the last to handle a parent's body, to lay it down to rest, to say good-bye with their tenderness and their touch.

That morning she had kept her own young children from their grandfather's funeral at the mosque, over an hour away in the East Bay, that the family, not having a community mosque nearby in Palo Alto, had contacted for the service. She had wanted to shelter them, to protect them, to keep sad or disturbing images from taking hold forever in their memories. She had left them with her mother, and had attended the service with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, standing and kneeling and praying in the sound-proofed room behind the section reserved for the men and the imam. She wanted to stand by her husband, as a companion in mourning, as a support in grief, but instead found herself playing that role for his mother. She looked through the thick glass partition separating the men from the women, and watched the cardboard coffin being passed from man to man to land at the front as the imam spoke a eulogy, as the congregation rose and sat, worshipped and prayed together. She followed the movements of her mother-in-law, mimicking her as she stood and knelt and held out her hands, palms up, to her god. The atmosphere in the women's section, unlike the men's, was casual and relaxed. Toddlers played with their toys. Little boys and girls ran about at will. Babies slept or fussed. Mothers admonished or called to their children. Part of her enjoyed the warmth and intimacy that came with this informality. Another part of her resented the quiet seriousness that was taken for granted for the men, a solemnity that contrasted with the constant distraction deemed natural for the women.

The day before, her husband and brother-in-law had left together for the morgue to be coached by an imam through the ritual cleansing of the paternal body. She herself had seen it, but only afterward, when it had been washed and prepared for burial in a simple white shroud, placed in its cardboard box, looking, like a wax doll, shrunken and diminished. Her mother-in-law, overcome with sadness and stress as they gazed at the body, this foreign, unrecognizable figure, faltered where she stood, almost falling to the ground. She rushed to hold her up, to support her, to squeeze her shoulders tightly as if to say I am here, you are not alone, you will be ok, this too shall pass. At that moment she wondered why she, the daughter-in-law, the non-blood relation, the non-Muslim, the non-Syrian, was performing this duty, and not her husband or his brother, not the widow's own beloved sons. She could only think that they, too weighed down with their own grief, could not support their mother in hers.

The evening before she had realized that the widow should not be left alone that night, that first night of the death, when her father-in-law had drawn his last breath and been taken away hours later by the coroners in black plastic, the sound of the long zipper closing over the body making the death real, tangible, final. When she shared her concern with her brother-in-law, he reassured her that of course he would stay with his mother, he would not leave her alone. But when the time came for goodnights, she saw her brother-in-law depart with his wife and daughters for his own home a few minutes away and understood that she was the only one left to comfort her mother-in-law, to make sure that she did not sleep alone in the dark master bedroom, on the suddenly empty marital bed, in the room that she had shared for decades with her husband, the room where her husband had died just hours before. Her own husband had already announced his plan to go upstairs to bed, upstairs to where his children lay sleeping, protected from the sight and sounds of their grandfather's death and their grandmother's grief by her, their mother. She understood her husband's need to go upstairs and sleep with his children, away from the bedroom where he had stayed faithfully for hours before and after his father died.

"Would you like me to stay with you tonight?" she asked her mother-in-law tentatively; they were alone together for the first time after her brother-in-law closed the front door behind him and her husband climbed the stairs to join his sons in their sleep.

"Oh, would you?" her mother-in-law responded. "I would be most grateful to you!" Her mother-in-law, speaking English as a second language and educated as a doctor in England, still retained a formal syntax even after forty years in California.

So she found herself lying in the bed of her parents-in-law, trying to fall asleep where her father-in-law used to sleep, feeling the hollow in the mattress carved out over the years by the weight of his large, heavy body. Thankfully, she kept reminding herself as she gazed tensely into the darkness, acutely aware of her mother-in-law's breathing, her father-in-law didn't actually die in that bed, in the same exact place where she now lay. She had found one way, however, to mitigate the awkwardness, to alleviate the tension of sleeping in the same bed as her mother-in-law, the mother-in-law who had, in the early years of her marriage to her son, been reserved and cold, who had failed to welcome her into the family, who had not wanted her son to marry her, who had judged her for years, who had constantly compared her to a Syrian, Muslim, Arabic-speaking ideal. She had gone upstairs herself and brought her younger son down to sleep in the middle of the master bed, in between her and her mother-in-law, his grandmother. It soothed her to have him there with her, her son, her child, her baby, young and warm, his breathing steady and his breath sweet.

Before that she had seen her father-in-law just two hours after he died, in his bedroom, on an emergency cot, the sound of the Quran being sung playing throughout. A sound she has learned to find soothing and has always found hauntingly beautiful. It comforted her to know that he died surrounded by that sound, those words, that music. His body then was still big and sturdy and robust. His skin olive and his face ruddy. His hands wide, his limbs full. He lay on his last bed, the wheeled hospital cot that had been brought in for his final days and placed next to his side of the master bed he had slept in for over four decades. He was naked save for a set of diapers that evoked, she was grateful to see, the dignity of a loincloth. She walked in, after sending her children straight upstairs to sleep, to join her husband at his vigil beside his father. Her husband sat on a chair pulled up to the cot, or stood looking down at the body, wiping away

his tears and murmuring prayers as he massaged his father's feet, rubbed his legs, squeezed his hands and arms, smoothed his hair off his forehead, kissed his brow, spoke his love to him. They stood vigil thus, the elder son, saying his good-byes through caress and prayer and she, the daughter-in-law, witnessing him with the body of his father, listening to the melodic recitation of the Quran, holding the back of her husband, the grief-stricken son.

Only hours earlier, she had been sitting in a local French bistro celebrating her own father's eighty-third birthday. She sat with her brother and sister, her mother and father, her older son and younger son. Her husband had driven south to his parents' house several hours prior, called home to be with his father, the father who had been dying for a few weeks, but who today, tonight, might really go. With somewhat of a "just in case" mentality, with sadness tinged with resignation, her husband got into his car alone to make the long drive from their town to his parents', a drive that took him over the Golden Gate Bridge, past Alcatraz, through San Francisco, by missions and reservoirs. She stayed behind, all of them uncertain as to the timing, the course of events, the future, and wanting to celebrate her father's continued life on his birthday. She was sitting on the banquette, sandwiched between her children, a son on each side, talking over poached salmon and wild rice, when her cell phone vibrated on the table beside her. She snatched it up right away, on high alert for news from her husband about his father, and listened intently, holding the phone tight to her ear against the noisy hum of the restaurant.

It had happened. The patriarch, the husband, the father, the father-in-law, the grandfather, was dead.





LOCAL MUSICIAN PERFORMS IN ESWAIRA, MOROCCO
BY AIYAH SIBAY

THE DAY I FOUND HOME
by Nofel

"Our eyes will see what had been written on our foreheads." The Arabs declaim this as an expression of fate: your fate is predetermined; there's no escape. I leaned toward the mirror—all but my eyes covered with a turquoise face-mask—and I wondered if God had written this day on my forehead, if He did so in Arabic or English, and whether this phrase was mentioned in the Quran.

I thought of when I was a child, an adrift and dejected child, and whether I ever imagined a day such as this one. All my life, I had thought, I'd be searching until I found a place to call home, and now here I was: a twenty-year-old who had been in Canada for a little less than five years, and was attending my citizenship ceremony; my ceremony of finally belonging, of finding home.

I went out of the washroom, after a short episode of rumination, and looked at my twenty-year-old friend, who was staring out of the window. She was wearing a grey sleeping dress and no underwear. I wondered why she wasn't, since it wasn't hot at all, and whether or not she would've felt as comfortable had I not been a queer man. I also thought of

all the times I got called a “faggot” or was threatened with violence for holding a man’s hand, and how much work is still left to do in order to ameliorate the status of queer Canadians.

“A colonizer of a Croatian descent helping a Libyan become a colonizer,” I said to her, giggling.

“Yup!” she smiled.

Later, in line to be admitted into the courtroom for the ceremony, I took a few selfies to ensure that I looked as gorgeous as I could. I was wearing my black prom suit and, what I consider to be, my fancy shoes from three years before; a black tie and a white shirt with black dots, which I purchased two days ahead of the ceremony. In the courtroom, I was so enraptured that I ran out of thoughts, a rare occurrence for my brain. I only gazed at the Canadian flag while smiling at my friend, who took photos of me—ecstasy beaming through her eyes. I did notice, though, the racial diversity among the staff: A Brown hijabi lady welcoming the citizens-to-be, another Brown woman stating the rules of the courtroom and introducing the judge, who, I remarked, is of an Asian descent. So enthusiastic to become a citizen was I that I didn’t even contemplate the political significance of the presence of a non-White judge, and whether he was still confronted with perpetual alienation due to his non-White ethnicity. Does he get asked where he’s really from as he grabs coffee before conducting citizenship ceremonies? Does he even drink coffee? I pondered upon none of that until weeks later. In fact, I was even no longer bothered to pledge allegiance to the monarch, for I had comprehended the meaning of the oath in the few months prior to the ceremony: Canada is personified through the queen and, in pledging allegiance to the queen, I’m pledging allegiance to my country.

When the judge spoke, I didn’t pay much attention to his words. All of my strength and focus went toward holding in my tears. I didn’t desire to stream another St. Lawrence. I felt my feet rooted to the ground as I stood for the oath and, later, the anthem, reminding myself that it’s a stolen land with which I fell in love. I repeated the words to the oath in English and French as loudly as I could, and sang the anthem from the bottom of my heart without shedding a tear. I don’t usually mind crying in public; I’ve cried at coffee-shops, buses, and sidewalks. That day, however, I knew that my lachrymose eyes would go on for hours, if I let them be. (I’ve been sobbing ever since, whenever I remember the ceremony or that I now have a home).

Afterwards, I meandered down the sunlit streets of Vancouver alongside my friend, uttering, probably more than I should’ve, as if in an attempt to pronounce to the whole world and, more importantly, myself my new status as a Canadian citizen: “It’s my first time crossing the road as a Canadian citizen.” “My first time looking back at you as a Canadian citizen.” “My first time drinking water as a Canadian.” I reiterated sentences along these lines for hours, even after we took the ferry back home to Victoria, even after I lost myself to the reflection of lights on the immovable waters of the Pacific.

I was born and raised in a country that hated me, and that, despite my intense desire not to hate it, it forced me to hate it, too. At a young age, I realized that hate, just like love, is overwhelming. I immigrated to Canada from Libya with my single mother and two brothers in 2013. The story of how my family ended up here, I feel, is for my mother to tell and I’ve no right to divulge it. I still wonder what my life would’ve been like had I stayed in Libya, envisioning myself like debris of a hideous building or the ghostly remnants of a corpse. It comes to my mind, too, how much more arduous it would’ve

been to tread through life as an openly queer man in a country with no respect for human rights in general, let alone sexual minorities.

Canada is not a utopia—we live in anything but a post-racial or gay friendly society—but it's in no way comparable to the country I was born in and never loved. I'm fully mindful of my privileges as a settler and a citizen, and I've got so much faith in this country. Canada has hurt and disillusioned me quite a lot, but it had also embraced me long ago and I embraced it back. In spite of, and because of, everything, Canada remains the home I'd been looking for since I was a child.



PERPETUAL POSTPARTUM

*"You are midwife to yourself,
and will give birth to yourself,
over and over, in dark rooms,
alone."*

Caitlin Moran

I've been craving riz w laban¹ this week,
the only thing my mother kept down the last months before
her first C-section. I turn 23 next month,
or 9, depending where you start and if you've killed

plants and hamsters. "Zidik mel7a"² said to an 8 year-old
following the death of her cucumber plant
has a way of ensuring it's true.

Years don't matter when you can't drive to Hamra on your own
or to the market for laban and dog food. My cousin's daughter is
27, out of her third trimester, and I'm the one with

postpartum, trying to get to the market without breaking down
in the parking lot. I run into my father's sister at the checkout because
I put my greasy hair in a bun instead of showering.

"Mnih rje3te d3ofte"³; she piles up her gluten free bread and cakes
oblivious to her niece's "normal" BMI, an approving nod at
the tub of laban I hurry to pay for.

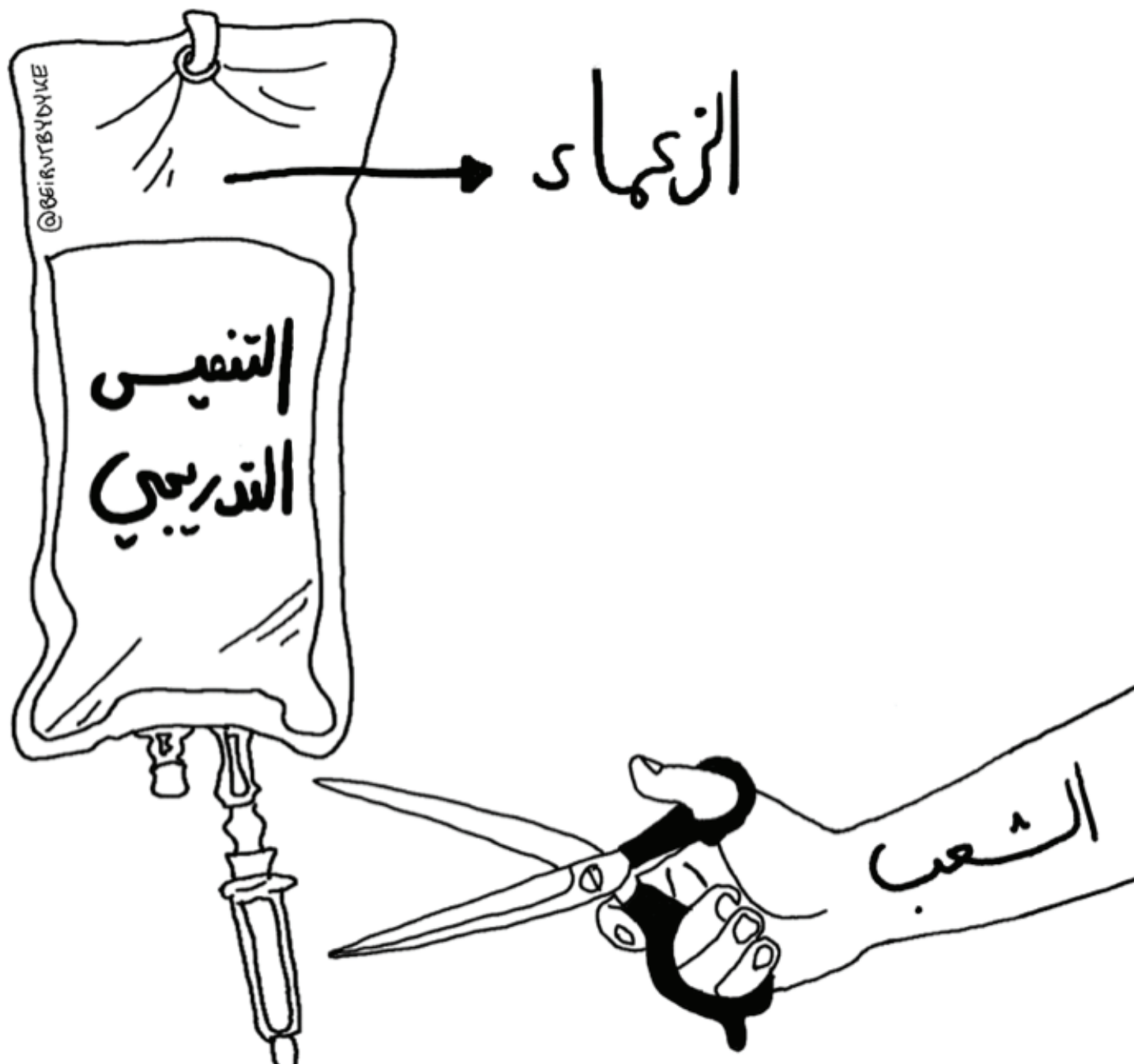
As if watering plants needed markets, driving, or
laban, as if it wasn't simpler than the whimpering dog,
as if 8 year-olds can remember to forget
in this country of mothers.

NINA MOUAWAD

¹Rice and yogurt

²Salty hands. Opp. of having a green thumb

³It's good you lost weight again



THAWRA CHALLENGES
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE

SIHAM

They came for Siham's father at midnight. He was arrested under suspicion of colluding against the French government. The fight for independence took her brothers. The eldest would be killed in the Casbah. The youngest executed by firing squad. The middle brother would survive, but would return home missing his right leg.

Hidden in her cellar were four Front de Libération Nationale fighters—packed tightly like oil-cured olives. The French army slammed open doors if they weren't opened after thudding knocks, their black boots colliding with the age-old wood. Brutish feet pounded the red dirt floors, creating a rhythm no one would ever dance to. The women screamed and pleaded for their sons' and husbands' lives.

The air stilled. They knocked. Her mother opened the door as calmly as she could, invited them in. "Bonsoir messieurs." They asked where the men of the house were. "Morts." As far as she knew, they were all dead.

They took her mother the following week while she was hanging clothes to dry in the midday sun. She was arrested for tending to injured Algerian soldiers.

Soon enough, they would come for her. She wondered if she'd live to see her thirteenth birthday.

ASIYA HAOUCHINE



RECLAIMING A STOLEN SEA
BY AIYAH SIBAY

THE SPECIMEN'S APOLOGY, POETRY BY GEORGE ABRAHAM REVIEWED BY LAYLA GOUSHEY

George Abraham's *the specimen's apology* is a superb meditation on the existential experience of Palestinians in Diaspora. Abraham draws on memory and inheritance to express his authentic self through the prism of varied poetic and mathematical structures. He portrays himself as a specimen of study and muses on family ties, relationships, sexual awakening, and the harsh reality of exile. These poems resonate.

Abraham offers two versions of a poem titled "palestinian/queer specimen attempts to define an algebraic structure for his inherited traumas." His innovative prose is offered in the form of mathematical and scientific phrases, as if trying to puzzle out the underlying connections of his life.

let kernel(j_1) = the arabic you un-inherited, lost in the projection.
hence the kernel
is trivial, hence the mapping is one-to-one, hence by correspondence
you are
the image of your parents' assimilations.

In the second poem with the same title, he continues his attempt to calculate the sum of family traumas.

instead of a proof: a history. if X is the self, covered by spaces A and B , haunted in some topological sense, then we begin with generation $n+1$. Via the injective mapping of ∂^* , your aunt (generation n) inherited the shape of her emptiness from the boundaries of her mother's trauma. an ocean, projected onto a whole ancestry, projected into the intersection of your aunt's queerness & depression, denoted $H_n(A \cap B)$. & before she was a pale, blue thing rotting in the vomit of her own overdose, she was the queer body, splayed & split from itself.

Abraham's work reminds that we seek structures to define ourselves, to make sense of our experiences, our hopes, and our dreams, so we can embrace and whittle our traumatic inheritances to fit our essential, authentic selves. In several instances, he ponders the self within a body, its structure and vessel. In "memory study, in fragmented reality" he says:

say the marrow forgave its captor, bone—
& even that is its own form of shelter;
say a bruise is just a rebellion of blood,
a rupture of capillaries & all the ghosts they
failed to contain & is that not the body
in its primal beauty? what of the self
can evolve without breakage
of touch?

Abraham utilizes Marwa Helal's poetic form, "the Arabic," to ponder the reality of exile. "The Arabic" is a poem constructed to be read from right to left with the inclusion of an Arabic footnote. He also draws on the concept of the maqam in these poems. A maqam is an Arabic melodic system of tones. In the second of three poems with titles begin with "Maqam of Moonlight..." (utilizing Helal's "the Arabic" to be read from right to left), Abraham says:

silver-lunged of wealth dying on talk the me Spare
clean—goodbye thread last His kissed i .Gods
sky the taste almost could i—woundless sliver
Love everything—tongue on pearl—Him of empty
: yes-me afford couldn't

Palestinians in the Diaspora live with competing myths and expectations. The first myth-dragon they face is the accusation by Zionists and their supporters that the Palestinian identity is artificial. This type of gaslighting leads Palestinian-Americans to wrestle with the dissonance of competing identities: American, Palestinian, Arab, straight, gay, bisexual, asexual, or transgender or some combination of these and others. They question themselves and their own reality while the historical record clearly shows otherwise: that Palestine existed and still exists.

One of Abraham's most subtly brilliant poems is titled "ars poetica in which every pronoun is a Free Palestine." Here he weaves together the strands of politics and personal identity. The poem is an expression of protest against Israeli pinkwashing; that is, LGBT-friendly cause-marketing cynically used to conceal Israel's settler colonialism. He replaces gender identifying pronouns with the phrase FREE PALESTINE to reclaim gender identity for Palestinians and all who seek justice in Palestine. However, on another level, I could not help but think of how replacing my own pronouns with the phrase FREE PALESTINE effectively defined how I embody Palestine's cause not only as a protest but as an identity.

no, FREE PALESTINE will never give FREE PALESTINE's self a
name
not rooted in upheaval—FREE PALESTINE, hyphenated by settler
flag:

FREE PALESTINE hyphenated by settler pronouns: FREE
PALESTINE will not
pledge allegiance to Arabic. or English. FREE PALESTINE will exist

in no language—FREE PALESTINE will write poems of olive tree &
checkpoint
& no Free Palestine to be found—FREE PALESTINE will name the
violence

& never the resurrection, like FREE PALESTINE hasn't survived
impossible
histories to get here—it is written: the blood will be on FREE
PALESTINE's
hands

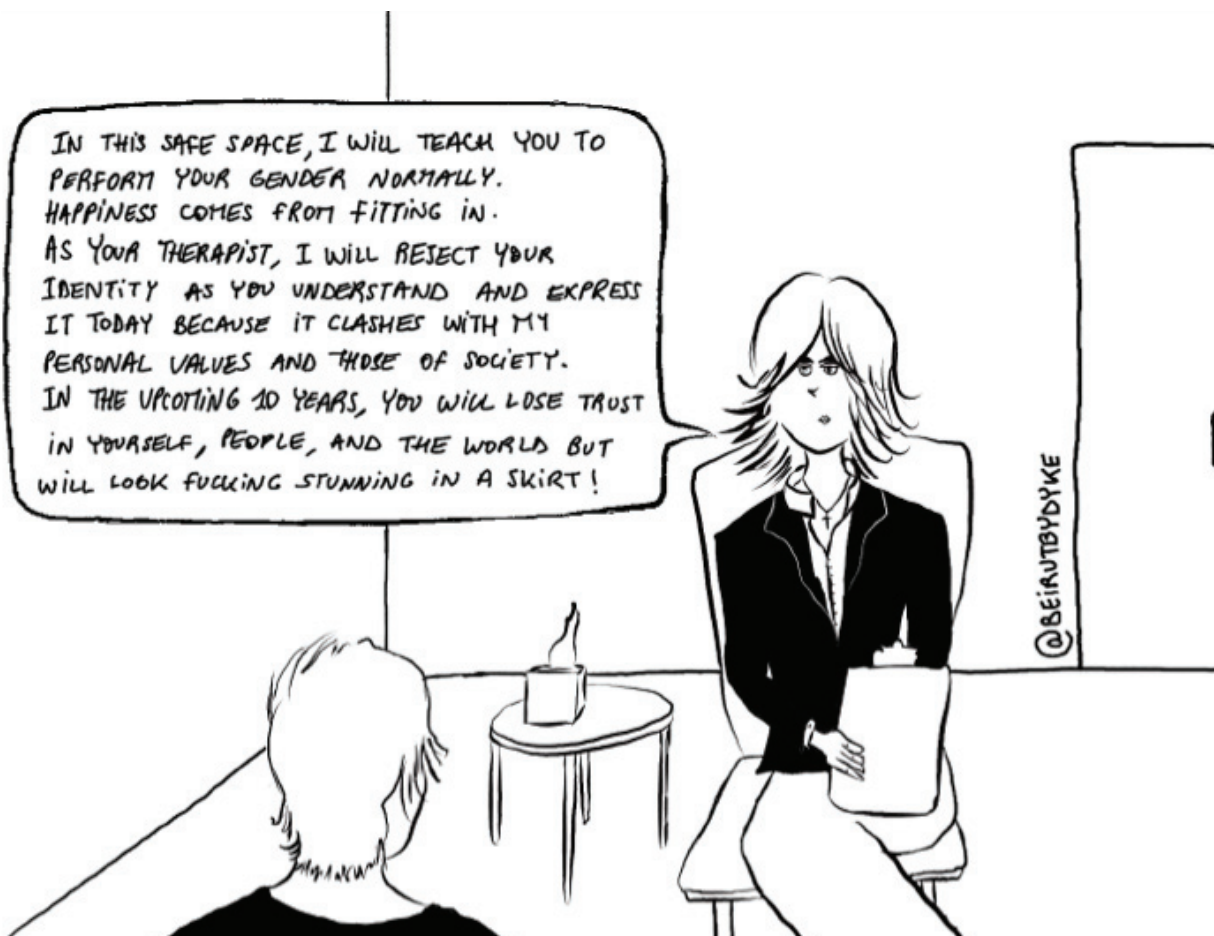
The authenticity expressed in Abraham's work is exquisite, compelling, and evocative. Abraham examines the self, the specimen, to make sense of all his inheritances, memories, and present-day experiences. Through repeating the titles of poems in different iterations he shows us how he frequently returns to test his theories and to develop a form and structure where he can most comfortably exist.

Abraham uses the page to draw the reader into his work with the placement of words and the choice of poetic forms. At times we will find flow charts, deleted words, differing margins, and varying font sizes along with prose in the form of broken paragraphs.

Readers of the specimen's apology are also treated to Leila Abdelrazaq's interior black and white illustrations. The cover illustration is by Jasmine Bell. Abdelrazaq, also Palestinian-American, is best known for her graphic novel, *Baddawi*, a story about her father's experience as a Palestinian refugee. Abdelrazaq mostly uses black and white in her illustrations which communicates themes of innocence, clarity, death, and rebirth. One of Abdelrazaq's most compelling images in the specimen's apology is of a Palestinian shahid, a martyr, whose head is framed by an image of the moon, an object of beauty referenced in Arabic song and poetry. The image can also be interpreted as a halo, symbolizing a holiness of the shahid. Behind this is an image of a Palestinian gazelle (named during the British Mandate), a symbolic image because like Palestinians themselves, Palestine's gazelle population is endangered due to displacement by Israel's settler-colonial policies. The natural world is also represented in this image by images of flowers and clouds. The picture of the shahid is placed in another illustration as a poster lying on the road, and also in an illustration where a young boy on a red bicycle rides past repeating black and white posters of the same shahid image on a stone wall. The red of his bicycle symbolizes life and the new generation aware of the sacrifices of the past. Her images allow us to pause and contemplate Palestinian experiences as we consider Abraham's personal journey as a Diasporic Palestinian.

Abraham is the voice of a generations of Diasporic individuals, not all of them Palestinian, who seek to synthesize numerous experiences into one whole purpose or understanding. Like Abraham, I am also a Palestinian-American. I emotionally responded to this chapbook during my first read. I had tears in my eyes both in recognition of many themes common to my own Diasporic experience and due to the eloquence of Abraham's language and poetic form. He artfully depicts that elusive sense of wonder, loss, and confusion that many experience.

In the specimen's apology, Abraham examines the self in all its competing manifestations: languages, ethnicities, diasporas, sexualities, gender identities, political realities, personal losses and gains, and other ways of knowing and being. I have come back to this volume several times and the entire work continues to grow in resonance. These poems are raw, legitimate, and truthful. This poet is authentic.



CONVERSION THERAPY
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE



WHITE GUILT
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE

THIS IS A POST ABOUT BEAUTY. BUTTERFLIES IN
YOUR STOMACH BEAUTY. COMFORTING BEAUTY.
BEAUTY THAT MAKES EVERYTHING OK AGAIN. A
BEAUTY THAT WAS 3 WEEKS IN THE MAKING. THAT
WAS 40 YEARS IN THE MAKING. A BEAUTY WE
THOUGHT WE WOULD NEVER SEE AGAIN, AND THAT
HAS NOW TAKEN CENTER STAGE. RIGHT WHERE IT
SHOULD BE. WE WEREN'T EXPECTING YOU. BUT YOU
CAME THROUGH. THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT. LEBANON IS
ALRIGHT. WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION.

@ohmyhappiness

BEAUTY
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

WAKE UP. INSTAGRAM FACEBOOK TWITTER. BRUSH TEETH.
WHATSAPP. AYA SE3A LIOM? CLEAN HOUSE. CHECK TIME.
INSTAGRAM FACEBOOK TWITTER. CHECK TIME. RECLEAN
HOUSE. COMFORTABLE SHOES. WALK. WALK. WALK.
KELLON YA3NEH KELLON. 7ARAMEH 7ARAMEH. HELA HELA
HELA. AL SHA3EB YOURID. MARTYR'S SQUARE.
DISCUSSIONS. DEBATES. IDEAS. MAJIDA EL ROUMI. ANA BI
RIAD EL SOLH. INTA WEIN? PICTURE. PICTURE. PICTURE.
EGG'S EVENING PROGRAM. WAYNKON? FOOD. ALCOHOL.
ALLO MAMA? ANA WSOLET 3AL BEIT. SHOWER. INSTAGRAM
FACEBOOK TWITTER. BED. **DREAM.** OF REVOLUTION.

EVERY DAY
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

THE SUN SETS. THE MUSIC BEGINS. THE OLD WOMAN COMES
ALIVE. THIS IS THE MOMENT SHE'S BEEN WAITING FOR HER
ENTIRE LIFE. THERE IS NO BETTER REASON TO DANCE. THERE'S
MAGIC IN THE STREETS. THE QUEENS, HIPS SWAYING SIDE TO
SIDE, SHARING THE SPACE WITH STRAIGHT MEN CHEERING
ALONG, DANCING ALONG. **THERE'S MAGIC IN THE STREETS.** THE
SPONTANEOUS DABKEH LINE. MEN, ARM IN ARM, FORMING A
FLOWING CHAIN OF RESISTANCE. HUMAN BONDS FORGED.
THERE'S MAGIC IN THE STREETS. COUPLES, COLORFUL COUPLES,
CHEEK TO CHEEK. WALTZING THEIR WAY INTO THE REVOLUTION.
ORIENTAL TECHNO, FAIRUZ, BELLA CIAO, BEETHOVEN, BABY
SHARK. THERE'S MAGIC IN THE STREETS.

MAGIC
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

FOR YEARS, OUR COUNTRY HAS BEEN SENDING OFF OUR BEST AND BRIGHTEST OUT INTO THE WORLD, NEVER TO COME BACK. FOR YEARS, YOU NEEDED TO FINISH UNIVERSITY AND FIND A JOB IN LONDON, DUBAI, RIYADH OR NEW YORK. FOR YEARS, THOSE OF US THAT STAYED HERE FELT LIKE WE WERE FOOLS TO HANG ON. **YA KHEYE KEEF FEEK T3EESH HON?** IT TOOK A REVOLUTION FOR THE EXPATS TO REALIZE WHAT WE WERE HANGING ON TO, WHAT WAS BOILING INSIDE US, WHAT WE WERE CAPABLE OF. IT TOOK A REVOLUTION FOR THE EXPATS TO WISH THEY HAD NEVER LEFT. THAT IS THE FIRST MAJOR VICTORY OF THIS REVOLUTION.

EXPATS
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

PART OF IT
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

YOU CAN BE WORRIED AND STILL BE A PART OF THIS REVOLUTION. YOU CAN TAKE A BREAK, TURN OFF THE TV, SLEEP THROUGH A PROTEST AND STILL BE A PART OF THIS REVOLUTION. YOU CAN FLIRT, YOU CAN FUCK, YOU CAN GET MARRIED, YOU CAN DEAL WITH HEARTBREAK AND STILL BE A PART OF THIS REVOLUTION. YOU CAN HAVE CONCERNS, FEAR THE WORST, AND HIDE YOUR MONEY UNDER YOUR MATTRESS AND STILL BE A PART OF THIS REVOLUTION. YOU CAN HAVE VOTED FOR THE PEOPLE IN POWER AND STILL BE PART OF THIS REVOLUTION. YOU CAN BE THE ONLY ONE IN YOUR FAMILY WHO DISAGREES WITH THE ZOU3AMA AND STILL BE A PART OF THIS REVOLUTION. **YOU CAN CRITICIZE THIS REVOLUTION AND STILL BE A PART OF IT. YOU CAN BE A PART OF THIS REVOLUTION.**

YOU CAN DANCE. YOU CAN BLOCK ROADS. YOU CAN WRITE. YOU CAN CHANT. YOU CAN BREAK THINGS. YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR. YOU CAN WRITE STATUSES. YOU CAN FEED THE MASSES. YOU CAN GO TO A RAVE IN TRABLOUS. YOU CAN CLEAN UP THE MORNING AFTER. YOU CAN HUG SOMEONE. YOU CAN REST. YOU CAN HAVE AN ARGUILEH IN MARTYR'S SQUARE. YOU CAN FUCK. YOU CAN FORM HUMAN CHAINS. YOU CAN IGNORE POLITICIANS. YOU CAN PLAY TARNIB ON THE RING. YOU CAN MAKE ART. YOU CAN STAY HOME. YOU CAN BE YOURSELF. YOU CAN PRAY. YOU CAN CURSE. YOU CAN DREAM. YOU CAN DEBATE. YOU CAN VOLUNTEER. THERE ARE **A MILLION WAYS TO MAKE A REVOLUTION.** ALL OF THEM VALID. ALL OF THEM NEEDED.

A MILLION
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

THANK YOU
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

TO THE MAN WITH ONE LEG CLEARING THE STREETS FOR THE PROTESTORS. TO THE MOTHERS WHOSE CHILDREN WERE REFUSED THE NATIONALITY. TO THE SYRIANS, PALESTINIANS, IRAQIS HOLDING OUR HANDS. TO THE GIRL WITH DOWN SYNDROME ASKING IF THIS MEANS SHE WILL HAVE HER BASIC RIGHTS NOW. TO THE FILIPINOS, ETHIOPIANS, SRI LAKANS, BANGLADESHIS, WHO HAD TO CLEAN THE RESIDUE FROM OUR FIRES, IN OUR HOMES AND ON OUR STREETS. TO THE CHILD ON A WHEELCHAIR MAKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE CROWD, **SMILE AS BIG AS THIS REVOLUTION.** TO ALL OF YOU WHO WE'VE MISTREATED, IGNORED, ABUSED, INSULTED FOR YEARS. THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR BEING BETTER TO US THAN WE EVER WERE TO YOU.

MINISTRY OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE BULLSHIT. MINISTRY OF GENDER IDENTITIES AND SEXUALITIES. MINISTRY OF REPARATIONS. MINISTRY OF SECULARISM. MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION. MINISTRY OF REFUGEES THAT ISN'T XENOPHOBIC. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION THAT DOESN'T IGNORE LEBANESE HISTORY, KIDS WITH DISABILITIES, OR SEXUALITIES. MINISTRY OF GREEN SPACES. MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION HEADED BY SOMEONE WHO HAS TAKEN A BUS IN HER LIFE. MINISTRY OF CORRUPTION. MINISTRY OF KEEPING ALL WARLORDS OUT OF OUR LIVES FOREVER. MINISTRY OF OPPORTUNITIES. MINISTRY OF FIXING EVERYTHING PREVIOUS MINISTRIES HAVE FUCKED UP. MINISTRY OF REVOLUTIONS.

MINISTRIES
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

THE NEW PRIME MINISTER
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

THE NEW PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE A WOMAN. A FEMINIST. A QUEER FEMINIST. A QUEER FEMINIST UNDER 50. HAPPILY UNMARRIED, WITH A CHILD FROM A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE SHE IS ON GOOD TERMS WITH. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER SHOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED POVERTY, FAILURE, AND MULTIPLE ORGASMS. HER RELIGION SHOULD BE IRRELEVANT, IF SHE EVEN HAS ONE. SHE SHOULD BE FROM A FAMILY NO ONE HAS HEARD OF, AND KNOW HOW TO CODE. SHE SHOULD BE ANTI-MILITARY, ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT, ANTI-CAPITALISM. SHE SHOULD NOT HAVE PRIVATE INSURANCE. SHE SHOULD BE STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP WITH MONTHLY PAYMENTS. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE IN OUR PROTESTS NOW. OUR NEW PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE **ONE OF US. NOT ONE OF THEM.**

WALKING DOWN GEMAYZEH. BREAK TIME. PROTESTS ARE GREAT, BUT THEY'RE EXHAUSTING. A QUICK BITE TO REENERGIZE, A QUICK DRINK TO REINSPIRE. THE WALK IS ACCOMPANIED BY CHANTS, AS ARE OUR DREAMS THESE DAYS. THE CROWD FAVORITE GETS PEOPLE IN RESTAURANTS TO STOP EATING AND JOIN IN. IT'S AN EXPERIENCE WE'VE HAD FOR 5 DAYS, AND IT STILL FEELS HEARTWARMING. A MAN TAKES OVER THE LEAD CALL FOR THE CHANTS. "LOUTEH LOUTEH LOUTEH BASIL INTA LOUTEH." THE CROWD DOESN'T ANSWER. A FRIEND THEN SHOUTS "LOUTEH MANNA MSABBEH." THE CROWD CHEERS.

QUEER EXPERIENCES AND REVOLUTION 1
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

I HADN'T SEEN HIM SINCE THE PROTESTS BEGUN. HE'S BEEN WORKING, ROADS WERE CLOSED, THE STREETS WERE PACKED WITH PEOPLE, HOPE AND CHANTS. YESTERDAY, HE MANAGED TO MEET ME. BY THE OLIVE TREE, IN FRONT OF THE MOSQUE. HIS DIMPLE, MY SOURCE OF HAPPINESS FOR THE LAST FEW MONTHS, IS THERE. I WANT TO KISS HIM. HE WANTS TO KISS ME. THIS IS NOT A SAFE SPACE. WE SMILE AT EACH OTHER. SMILES ARE IMPORTANT. THEY ARE INTIMATE, DEFIANT, AND BEAUTIFUL. BUT RIGHT NOW, THEY'RE NOT ENOUGH. I LEAN IN. A SHORT KISS ON HIS LIPS. A HAND PATS MY BACK. I TURN AROUND. AN OLD WOMAN SMILES. "ALL THIS IS FOR YOU TOO." SHE WALKS AWAY.

QUEER EXPERIENCES AND REVOLUTION 2
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

WE ENTER THE EGG. GRAFFITI HAS TAKEN OVER. AT THE ENTRANCE, A CONCRETE BLOCK: BASIL YA LOUTEH. WE ARE 3, ALL LOUTEHS. WE'VE LEARNED TO TURN A BLIND EYE TO THIS UNCOMFORTABLE DIMENSION OF THE PROTESTS. WE CARRY ON. RECLAIMING SPACES THAT HAVE BEEN CLOSED OFF TO US FOR SO LONG. WE GO UP THE STAIRS, INSIDE THE WOMB. IT'S EARLY. THE CROWDS HAVEN'T TAKEN OVER YET. A CONCRETE WALL FACES US, A CANVAS FOR IDEAS AND POSSIBILITIES. IT SMELLS LIKE SPRAY PAINT. SOMEONE'S WRITING SOMETHING NOW. THE QUEERS ARE HERE TOO. WE ARE. WE HAVE A SPACE IN THIS REVOLUTION. WE HAVE A SPACE IN THIS FUTURE.

QUEER EXPERIENCES AND REVOLUTION 3
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

FUCK BEING POLITE. FUCK YOU FOR FRAMING OUR INSULTS AS THE PROBLEM. FUCK YOU FOR BLAMING ALL YOUR FUCK UPS ON THE REVOLUTION. FUCK YOU FOR VIOLATING OUR MOST BASIC RIGHTS. FUCK YOUR FAKE NEWS, YOUR SCARE TACTICS, YOUR EXCESSIVE FORCE. **FUCK YOU** FOR TRYING TO FENCE IN OUR PROTESTS, FOR YOUR MEDIA BLACKOUTS, FOR YOUR THREATS. FUCK YOUR TECHNO-SIYESE. FUCK YOUR THUGS. FUCK YOUR HIJACKING OF OUR REVOLUTION. FUCK YOUR CONDESCENSION. FUCK YOUR HOLD TO POWER. FUCK YOUR COUNTER-PROTESTS. FUCK BRINGING BACK THE SAME ASSHOLES. AYREH FIKON KELKON.

POLITE
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

VICTORIES
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS

THE RESILIENCE IS A VICTORY. HOW ALIVE, HOW BEAUTIFUL, HOW CLEAN OUR DOWNTOWN IS. VICTORY. THE DISCUSSIONS ACROSS SECTARIAN LINES ARE VICTORIES. OUR FEARLESS HUMOR IS A VICTORY. THE UNITY OF OUR VOICES. THE BREAKING OF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SOCIETAL BARRIERS. THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP. THE ROADBLOCKS. THE RE-APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC SPACES. ALL VICTORIES. EVERY PROTEST, BIG OR SMALL, IS A VICTORY. EVERY SINGLE PERSON JOINING THE PROTESTS IS A VICTORY. THE RESIGNATION IS A **VICTORY. ONE OF MANY VICTORIES TO COME.**

2:58PM THUGS LEAVE MARTYR'S SQUARE. CHAOS. TENTS DESTROYED. WOMEN ATTACKED. BOOKS BURNED. FIRST AID STATION TORN DOWN. DESOLATION. TEARS. SADNESS. 3:13PM A WOMAN GETS UP. OF COURSE IT'S A WOMAN. SHE PULLS ON A ROPE ATTACHED TO A DESTROYED TENT. SHE'S REBUILDING. A CHILD PICKS UP A DUSTPAN. SWEEPS UP SPILLED FOOD. HE'S REBUILDING. EVERY ONE GETS UP. WE REBUILD. A MAN, TEARS IN HIS EYES, STARTS TO CHANT. BI KASSRO, MIN 3AMMER. RESILIENCE. IN 15 MINUTES, WE GET BACK ON OUR FEET. 15 MINUTES. THAT'S ALL THEY TOOK FROM US. THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES.

YESTERDAY
BY RAJA FARAH
@OHMYHAPPINESS



GUITARE
BY BEIRUT BY DYKE

Artists' / Writers' bios:

RIHAM ADLY is a mother and ex-dentist who is trying to be a full time fiction writer/ blogger. She is also first reader in Vestal Review Magazine and has worked as a volunteer editor in 101 words magazine. Her fiction has appeared in journals such *Bending Genres*, *Connotation Press*, *Spelk*, and *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Vestal Review*, *SoftCartel*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Cafelit*, *FictionalCafe.com*, *FridayFlashFiction*, *Flash Boulevard*, and *Page & Spine* among others. Her short story "The Darker Side of the Moon" won the Makan Award contest in 2013, and she was recently short-listed in the ArabLit Translation Prize. Riham's website: www.rihamadly.com / twitter : @roseinink

FRANK DULLAGHAN is an Irish writer living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He has four collections published by Cinnamon Press in the UK, most recently, *Lifting the Latch* (2018). His work is widely published in international journals.

BEIRUT BY DYKE is an Instagram page featuring comics about being Queer in Beirut. After having worked as a Psychology Instructor and Career Counselor at the American University of Beirut, the founder of the page, Sinine Nakhle, decided to allow her passion for story to fully explode. The aspiring cartoon artist quit her job and joined the University of Leiden to pursue her second Master's degree in Cultural Analysis and Literary Theory. She is currently writing about the politics of sex in clinical psychology and hopes her work informs the stories she tells on her page. Although Beirut By Dyke started as an autobiographical project, it organically became a platform for women and queer folks in Lebanon to share their own stories about access to sexual healthcare, sexual harassment, sexual pleasure and other bodily issues otherwise silenced by an overwhelmingly patriarchal system.

SARA ELKAMEL is a poet and journalist, living between her hometown, Cairo and New York City. She holds an MA in arts journalism from Columbia University and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at New York University. Her writing has appeared and is forthcoming in *The Common*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Rumpus*, *American Chordata*, *Winter Tangerine*, as part of the *Halal If You Here Me* anthology (Haymarket Books, 2019), and elsewhere.

RAJA FARAH is a queer writer based in Beirut, Lebanon. He is a French pastry chef, a ski enthusiast, a pop culture addict, a ruthless globetrotter, and a stubborn activist. This series focuses on shared experiences during the October uprisings in Lebanon. He writes under the pseudonym OhMyHappiness, which is also his Instagram handle where you can find his latest work.

ZEENA YASMINE FULEIHAN is a first-generation Lebanese American writer with roots in Palestine. She is currently pursuing an MA in Contemporary Literature, Culture, and Theory at King's College London and graduated summa cum laude with a BA in English (Creative Writing) and minors in music and Arabic in 2018 from Macalester College. She writes monthly critical essays for the Ploughshares blog and fiction book reviews for Sukoon, was the editor of the twentieth anniversary issue of *Mizna: Prose, Poetry, and Art Exploring Arab America*, and has previously worked in marketing and publicity at Coffee House Press. Zeena is the recipient of the Harry Scherman Writing Award in Creative Prose, the Livingston-Patnode Prize, the Wendy Parrish Poetry Award, and the Nick Adams Short Story Contest honorable mention, among others. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sukoon*, *Inquiries*, *Chanter*, and others.

LAYLA AZMI GOUSHEY is a Professor of English at St. Louis Community College in St. Louis, Missouri. She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Her creative work has been published in journals such as *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Mizna: Journal of Prose, Poetry and Art Exploring Arab America*, *Natural Bridge*, *The St. Louis Anthology*, and a forthcoming anthology of Arab-American creative non-fiction. She frequently reads her work at events in the St. Louis area. Professor Goushey's scholarly work is focused on Arab and Arab-American literature and culture. Her dissertation research examines the teaching philosophies of higher education faculty members in the Arab region. She presents local lectures on Arab and Arab-American culture and she recently served on a panel to discuss the Oslo peace accords as part of a discussion of *Oslo*, a play at the St. Louis Repertory Theater. She writes for Arab-themed blogs

such as <https://arablit.org/> – Arabic Literature in Translation. She is a long-time peace activist for issues in the Arab region including the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

ASIYA HAOUCHINE is an Algerian-American writer who graduated from the University of Connecticut in May 2016, earning a BA in journalism and English. She was an editorial intern and contributing writer for *Warscapes* magazine and the online/blog editor for *Long River Review*. She is currently teaching English to a very energetic group of 9th and 10th grade students.

NOUR KAMEL is perfectly lit and writes things from Cairo, Egypt. Kamel is a writer and editor, a *Winter Tangerine* workshop alumnus, and was shortlisted for the Brunel University International African Poetry Prize (2018). Their chapbook *Noon* is part of the New-Generation African Poets (Sita) series and their writing appears or is forthcoming in *Asameena*, *Anomaly*, *Rusted Radishes*, *Khabar Keslan* and *Closet Cases* (Et Alia Press, 2020).

MICAH KHATER is a doctoral student at Yale University studying History and African American Studies. She comes to poetry and prose through the lens of the historical. As the daughter of a first-generation Lebanese immigrant, her creative nonfiction work considers the meaning of disparate belonging in the Diaspora.

SAHAR KHRAIBANI is a multi-disciplinary artist, designer, and writer from Beirut (Lebanon), currently based in New York City. Her work has been shown in Berlin, Cairo, Abu Dhabi, and Beirut and deals with the intricacies of language and its translation, colonial histories and the tensions between everyday life and the condensed geopolitics of the Middle East. Having spent all of her formative years in Lebanon, she is especially focused on the ways in which political landscapes influence creative output, as well as how the land and sea function as emotional repositories for histories that have been written over by borders and international prioritization of resources over people. She is a frequent contributor to *Degree Critical* and has published an illustrated anthology titled *Loving And Leaving Beirut*, during an artist residency at Beit Waraq in 2017. In 2014, she was nominated for the AREEN Project Award of Excellence in Graphic Design. She is fluent in Arabic, French, and English. She received her BFA in Graphic Design with honors from the American University of Beirut in May 2014 and her MFA in Art Writing and Criticism at the School of Visual Arts in New York in May 2019.

CARINA MACEIRA is an American of Cuban-Spaniard/Colombian decent, raised by her Kuwaiti/Mexican step-family. Today she resides in Kuwait as an English teacher for young children. Because of her traditionally conservative environment she typically shares her work anonymously on social media accounts, such as Instagram, by the handle of C. Medusa (@orchidssnakespoetry), and performs her work within the safe comfort of the liberal art, music and poetry community of Kuwait. She has been writing poetry for several years now and is an active member of Kuwait Poets Society, founded by Rawa Majdi. Her poetry is most times multilingual and touches on Latinx and Arab identity, spirituality, toxic masculinity, toxic religion, fetishism, Diaspora community, mental health, PTSD, and inter-sectional feminism.

MARIANNA MARLOWE lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. After devoting many years to academic writing, her focus now is creative nonfiction that explores issues of gender identity, motherhood, feminism, cultural hybridity, and more. Her short memoir has been published in *Hippocampus*, *Motherwell*, *Raising Mothers*, *The Write Launch*, *Mutha Magazine*, *FORTH Magazine*, and *the Same*, and she is currently at work on a memoir in vignettes titled *Portrait of a Feminist*.

YARIM MAHRIM is currently a forth year undergraduate at New York University completing her Bachelors in Global Public Health and Sociology. As a Coptic Egyptian, finding a community in New York can be challenging, so she clings to the second generation broken Arabic she learned from her parents to humanize and contextualize her poetry.

LENA MAHMOUD is the author *Amreekiya*, an Arab American Book Award winner, a finalist for the Louise Meriwether First Book Prize, and one of Foreword's "Four Phenomenal Debut Novels." Her work has appeared or will appear in *Fifth Wednesday*, *Sukoon*, *A Gathering Together*, and *The Offing*, among others. She has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes. For more information please visit lenamahmoud.com or follow her Twitter and Instagram @lena_mabsutina and @lenamabsutina respectively.

NINA MOUAWAD is a Lebanese poet and Master's student of English Language and Literature at the University of Balamand. Her work has appeared in *Act One: Cutting Edges*, *Rusted Radishes*, and *The Bosphorus Review*.

A. MUSTAFA is a Sudanese-American writer and workshop alum of *Azza fi Hawak*, and *Winter Tangerine*. Her work has appeared in the Arab American National Museum Store, and *Cosmonaut's Avenue*. In addition to writing, she works as an educator, teaching young people community-organizing skills. Whether it is through the written form, or through youth education, she is passionate about scheming new possible ways of being and building in community with one another, and dreaming new worlds.

NOFEL is an Arabo-Anglophone writer based in Canada. His poetry has appeared in *Snapdragon Journal*, *the Packingtown Review*, and *Cosmonauts Avenue*. He is also a regular columnist at *Here! Magazine*.

ROWAIDA OMAR has been drawn to art since she was a child, and so she grew practicing different forms of art in school and as a hobby. She is currently at Eastern Michigan University studying Interior Design and on the side creates art. She enjoys nature and incorporates that into both her drawings and designs. What inspire her work are spiritual growth, philosophy, and the conscious collective.

JEFF RICHARDS' novel *Open Country: A Civil War Novel in Stories* was published by Paycock Press in May 2015. His fiction, essays, and cowboy poetry have appeared in over 27 publications including *Prick of the Spindle*, *Pinch*, *New South*, and *Southern Humanities Review* and five anthologies including *Tales Out of School* (Beacon Press), *Letters to J.D. Salinger* (University of Wisconsin Press), and *Higher Education* (Pearson), a college composition reader. He was the fiction editor of the *Washington Review*, a college teacher for many years principally at George Washington University. He is a graduate of the Hollins Writing Program and the parent of two children who live in Colorado. He lives in Takoma Park, Maryland with his wife and two dogs. www.jeffrichardsauthor.com.

PREETI SHAH works in the healthcare field and volunteers to assist the underserved. Her work has appeared in *Dash Literary Journal*, *The Fictional Cafe*, *The American Aesthetic*, and elsewhere. She received her B.A. in Fine Arts specializing in Music from Rider University and enjoys songwriting. She resides in Queens, NY.

AIYAH SIBAY is a poet, photographer, traveler, and the daughter of Syria immigrants. She has worked as a reporter, columnist and photographer for various publications, and has traveled around the world to work with refugees. She is tremendously passionate about art and writing and using the two to speak against injustices, prejudices, stereotypes, and oppression. "An Alternative to Martyrdom" is a project that seeks to challenge this long held idea that it is through the ultimate sacrifice of life, which is an idea celebrated even here, among those who join the military under the luring valor of "defense," that one is able to offer something worthy to one's country. It is the idea that in his or her death, in another photograph of a martyr pasted on the wall; that we have somehow gone further in the battle against the ongoing occupation. These photographs, instead, explore a way of protesting that preserves life, rather than risking what is the most precious element in the defense and strengthening of a nation. Through this project, I am attempting to present the idea of martyrdom as a less appealing manner of participating in the struggle for freedom by beautifying the supposed continuation of these terminated lives, and to disrupt the common notion that the only method available to defend Palestine within the occupied territories is one that unquestionably poses a great risk to one's life. I am visualizing

an alternative to the conventional manner of protesting by capturing various portraits of Palestinians engaging in deliberate acts of resistance that disrupt the stream of images which, intentionally or non-intentionally, depict Palestinian protesters as a group of violent, provoking men. In this project, each Palestinian declares his own form of resistance, whether it is in reclaiming a stolen sea, or playing the flute in the cradle of a bulldozer.

ANN STRUTHERS recently retired from teaching at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She has published poetry widely in journals and has two collections and three chapbooks. She is a three-time nominee for a Pushcart Prize. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa where she was in the Iowa Writing Workshop. For two years she taught at the University of Aleppo, Syria, as a Fulbright Fellow. She and her husband, Mel, count this time as one of the highlights of their lives. She traveled widely in the Middle East and has lectured in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. She is currently working on some translations from al-Jahiz' *BOOK OF ANIMALS*.

HELEN WING is a UK poet and fiction writer and works as a poet-in-residence in schools in China and the UK. She runs creative writing workshops for performance and poetry book publishing projects with migrant children and refugees. Her work has been published in UK, US, China and Lebanon by *The Spectacle*, *Mississippi Prize Review*, *The Good Men Project*, *Southern Cross Review*, *Sukoon*, *Forward Poetry*, *The Perspective Project* et al. and in the poetry books *Archangel*, *Savage Torpor* and *Nowhere Near a Damn Rainbow*. Her poems were nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2016 and she was long-listed twice for the UK National Poetry Competition in 2018.

