

walking in the birthplace of jesus

Stone buildings

Pitted

with

so

many

bullets

See through

Like lace

Panties ripped off

kalandia² gnaws away at the day. young boys compete for attention to sell gum, dried chickpeas, cola, melting booza,³ anything to me and this great wall of people i cannot see the end of. faces like la columna rota.⁴ in front of me a woman stares at the trail of ants walking faster than us. i taste the pasty breath of people in front and behind me. this wait rings in our ears like the loud car horns of taxi drivers.

i buy 2 cold sabbar from one of the boys.

in the past i remember
peeling piles with aunties in Ann Arbor
carve away
the bark
slice
one
line
down sabbar's thick alligator flesh slow to avoid
invisible devious needles that stick inside the hands for days
gut the marble green meat from its skin
juice trickles into my palms slithers
down toward my elbow drops beneath my feet
the kitchen floor is sticky

we linger against the humid air waiting to enjoy the thorny green and magenta globes. nights like that eat away at a'mamee's⁵ patience. little cousins hurricane around adults trying to catch gossip. like kemo sabe we drag our feet through pothole avenues side kicking our selves. days turn to decades for green cards and visiting visas. we barely wake up everyday at dawn to open the store. this wait clicks punches like cash register keys.

and sabbar always slides cool down the throat
against the anger of our restless bodies and
every one always smiles while they devour
sabbar
prickly green
grenades

ready waiting waiting to

explode

¹ cactus pear and or patience / endurance

² checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem

³ ice cream

⁴ a rotating column: self portrait by Freda Kahlo

⁵ baba's side of the family

u'7ibeck hata i'll ta-ib⁶
for gaza winter 2009/2010

we are tired
of writing poems
about israeli fighter jets.
tired
of wrapping metaphors around
bombs and buildings broken like a donkey stepping on an alabaster
water and glass and blood and meat and skin
and and and

we bow to Allah, and prayer rugs sinter with
Palestinian innards and flesh
burnt into
walls—zionist graffiti says we rape all Arab women
next to a piece of a child's foot on the ground
*hata i'll ta-ib*⁷

we are tired
of our enemies saying
the old will die and the young will forget
only half right
we all die

these images are etched into my sky
gorse disfigured constellations I see at night

every morning I
write poems
lather body with olive oil soap
so the scent of Nablus lasts on skin

we raise watermelon wedges to sky
green peel black seed and red flesh
fly

we respect *hamas's* palms mending
Gaza sidewalks rebuilding
Gaza streets
broken and scarred into memory
palms mold civilizations out of debris

we remember Darwish
we read his poems
and sing *u'7ibeck ya'falesteen*
*hata i'll taiB*⁸

⁶ I love you to exhaustion: line in Marcel Khalife song titled Yateerul Hamam/ Pigeons Fly

⁷ till exhaustion

⁸ i love you Palestine till exhaustion

u'7ibeck ya'falesteen
hata i'll ta-ib

i remember my *sito Sada*
i wear her thob
i lie next to a Gazelle
on the beach of Deir al Balah
take off *sito Sada's* thob
and cover the Gaza sunset with it

this night i go to sleep
a tired virgin
i wake up in the morning light
a man-of-war

Weighting

baba works all day
behind a cash register
sells stogies
fills coolers with
juice, pop and miller light beer
stocks shelves of green giant corn, peas, dusty Advil bottles
and cup o' noodles

walks into our home
drags exhaustion
beneath his feet

at midnight
we all wake up and eat together
4 kids, 3 uncles, one aunt, mama and baba
simple meals
of *Zeit wa' Zatar*⁹, bread, and tomatoes
to pass the time
with him
let him know his family is
waiting

none of us are hungry
but we eat
because it is the first
time we see him all day

one day baba is still home at noon
the doctors say that his blood is too thick
they give him coumadin
to thin blood
slowly till it becomes like water
*zenizem*¹⁰
so thin
breath leaks out

so thin
mama scrutinizes
me as i pull off
my shirt
it fit only
10 days
ago
she
traces
my
spine

⁹ olive oil and wile thime

¹⁰ holy water found in Mecca

with
her
thumb
his
scent
withers
like
the
space
between
my bones and skin

this is how i grieve

i take out the trash
i clean compulsively
fold the blankets on the bed
i sleep on with mama
dust vacant chairs

wipe off the empty table

i am just not hungry
i have not seen him all day
i wait for him to eat

Darwish's Rebellion of Butterflies

he says my mouth
is distinctly Palestinian
stuttering just short of
i a n he realizes he just
made his first

move forward

i take this to mean many things
people don't want to travel
on trampled land
fear for their safety
US State department advises against visiting
Germany, South Africa, Palestine lips
hum news of deaths and new baby cousins named
Zaina and chat on the corners the concerns of
bombs and brides bothering mothers in law
these lips never smile
fully
knowing
words bellow beneath the
fleshy surface
simple words no longer suffice
how Palestinian it is to
be
blown
up art

these

lips

suck
your particles in
hopes they will
clinch to my lungs
breath and body heave
skin and screams ascend
legs outstretched to
touch a life span of time
behind me clasp

my back against
your torso
wrap your arms
around my waist like wind
tired in our moaning
these lips thirst
to belong somewhere
in this sweat

before negotiating
the terms of this
fragmented
land
so far away from what it once was
simple and unoccupied
they have become desperate and
gasping
for someone
somewhere
something
to belong
and since nothing ever works
to keep us grounded we settle
for something
somewhere
someone
to kiss

poem for beginners luck