

## ***The Olive Tree Speaks of Deforestation to my Body***

Tell me my body is a thing you pulled from a lake;  
or my body is the lake itself -  
All vast darkness,  
the type of empty only an unmourned grave can swallow;  
tell me you too have tasted the ghosts  
whispering in the Mediterranean sea-breeze for centuries,  
& how that makes home a rootless thing;

Tell me my body is the regrowth after the deforestation,  
or a funeral organ - tell me i know how to regurgitate a haunted being  
While still having the will to sing;

Tell me you dream about my body sometimes,  
When your ancestors ghosts steal your pulse at night  
& your throat becomes a reaper's scythe;  
    & in this dream, my body is the ocean,  
    Your ancestors are the wind turning every  
        seashell into the saddest melody;  
    Your teta is the  
        receding shoreline.  
    The moon's gravity is the cancer that stole her  
        before Israel could;  
    Child, to be brown is to be a body that can survive tessellation  
        In more ways than one;

Tell me my body is guerilla warfare;  
Tell me i am no man's land;  
Tell me these white people don't make an israeli-Palestinian conflict of my throat;  
They keep calling me a ticking timebomb -  
    say I was born unto a soil that loved me so much,  
    it swallowed my roots whole;  
I've seen my own kin beheaded before my eyes,  
& I still have the strength to oil my murderer's  
hands before setting them ablaze;

Tell me I am a premature burial;  
Tell me existing feels like being buried alive sometimes;  
    & it's okay to feel that way;  
    Tell me it's okay to be the anchor that stopped the ship in its tracks;  
    The flood before the storm that begat Zion's fury;

Tell me it's okay to speak death in a room of smiling whites,  
i gave them oxygen -  
who's to say i can't strip the air back from their greedy lungs?

Tell me it's okay to sing  
Even when my leaves are the only living thing to  
tame the wind around me/  
Even when my entire body is submerged in salt & fury

Tell me it's okay to grow  
To rise  
To blossom  
To be the Eden before man dared enter my gates;  
Tell me my body begat the branch that led Noah to freedom;  
or that my roots are the anchors that did not surrender to the flood;

Tell me my body is freedom/  
the most stubborn resilience.  
Tell me I have survived too many earthquakes  
& fracturing handprints to surrender like this -  
    with the whole world watching;  
    with the whole *Mashriq* on my back;  
    while i can see  
        freedom-

    a distant speck in the horizon -

        swaying in the breeze -

***the Burning Abyss speaks***

i've seen your kind before -  
demon child of ash-stricken diaspora,  
of aftermath without cease fire,  
got inferno sitting furiously on your tongue  
ready to ignite every demon that crosses you -  
haven't they been saying you belong  
in me your whole life? our languages  
are not so far apart - we speak  
bloodhound; speak implosion; speak  
fallen angel; how our mouths are hell-gates,  
our tongues, all forked malebranche,  
& this is my charred gospel, or how to  
conjure a dark fiend & find a friend in it, just  
know that the monsters you summon here  
are not welcome unless you set them ablaze first -  
just ask your friends -  
the ones that love best  
the only shadow to burn stronger than  
light does; ask if they ever hugged you  
without feeling an ember's embrace,  
i know what it means to see  
everyone you touch go up in flames;  
what is loneliness if it isn't the smoke  
emanating from the scorched earth you  
call "home" sometimes? if it isn't the  
molten aftermath of drifting continents?  
maybe i am the Palestine they run from;  
set me free and watch all hell break loose -

collapse  
in me -

there's no burden here for those  
who are already burning

***Alternate Names for my future Daughter***

descendent of rocks and  
scraped knuckles / child of shattering  
dawn, and crystalline twilight / child  
who had the bible belt bruised out of her  
genome / daughter of olive tree and  
pomegranate root / cathedral of  
mispronunciations / colonization's  
aftermath / goddess of stone riot  
& frozen elegy / house built on stone  
& sand / jericho before the walls  
came tumbling / david  
born into goliath's fists / hairline  
fracture / ghosttown  
eviction notice / haunted  
body / hollowed or  
hallowed / dying thing  
who did not drown in styx/  
the *hawa* that set the system  
ablaze / *amal* / fatal  
contradiction / *hayat*, despite/  
the greatest revolution this world  
will ever witness / the girl  
who refused her own  
cremation.

**aftermath**

*for those we buried*

when my father's cousin  
drifted off into eternal slumber -  
limbs outstretched like branches,  
ready to re-become dust  
gracefully,  
the way all endangered forests  
tremble –  
his sisters could not bear the sight  
of their own home  
uprooted.

depression –  
not this unkempt pagan Earth  
temple; not this staircase collapsing  
into oblivion; not this  
family broken by the weight of soil,  
again; not this genetic pool knotted  
like ivy; chromosomes clinging to crumbling  
foundations for dear life; not this  
family waging biological warfare against  
its own kin; not this  
Arab family condemned to the  
tectonic plates snatched beneath their feet;

the neighbors didn't talk to us the same;  
went from  
*we never see you any more,*  
to  
*why don't you just go back*  
*to where you came from?*  
(if only we were that lucky)

it is an unbearable sight. to see  
occupation-diaspora families succumb to this  
deforestation; to see a mother lose her  
homeland and child  
in the same decade,  
as her family

drifts apart

like Pangaea

the

emptiness / hollow

only

a

Palestinian / rotting

Mother / tree

could

taste.

## *for Teta*

when i say my teta was a warrior, i mean i was raised  
by a woman who fought so many invisible battles  
you could almost call her peaceful; it was almost  
picturesque - those summer nights on her porch,  
her laughter illuminating the night like fireflies;  
i called her mother, once. the way she cradled  
my infant not-corpse like prayer beads; & every lullaby  
was just a lullaby, not another battle song of a severed  
tongue labelled *security threat*.

& wasn't she always haunted music;  
melody of displaced soils - of olive tree  
turned magnolia blossom; when i think of  
home, i see her garden; grape-leaves  
blossoming like hands reaching towards some  
invisible heaven; butterflies flocking in my teta's  
wake, reminding us that even the shadows  
we leave behind are still brimming with life  
& radiance;

& she knew shadow, like  
all luminous bodies eventually do;  
she met death face-to-face the first  
time cancer tried to make an eviction notice  
out of her already evicted body -

she's heard this story before.  
tale of oppressive, infectious hands draining  
every white thing from her; tale of  
untamed overgrowth, of barbarian in  
colonization's undertow; & like all who  
have learned to escape such trauma, she fought  
her demons with her fists held high - swallowing  
her sweat & chemo aftermath like every  
IDF bullet that missed; wrapped her head in  
a butterfly scarf to make a garden of her thinning  
scalp & when she won,

i guess death got jealous of her inability  
to catch fire, so he stayed.  
& made a war crime of her family tree; Sido died

the most American death - heart attack  
at 42, making her widow in a land where no one spoke  
her charred language; when she re-married decades later,  
the family exiled her, damned her *sharmouta*  
for daring to to make a regrowth of her heart;

we come from a lineage of women grieving  
the loss of men who die too soon; when sido  
died, teta wore only black for two years & never came  
out of the house - witnessed her garden turn  
Graveyard & suddenly all the butterflies migrated  
to some other Eden; call it Paradise  
lost; when i say grief is an inherited trauma,  
i mean every member of my immediate family  
has suffered a different form of depression without  
the language to diagnose it; if we aren't grieving with  
every inch of our bodies, were our ghosts ever here  
to begin with? perhaps teta's cancer  
came back

because her body was the only thing this post-colonial  
world hadn't taken yet, & the thing about zionism  
& cancer is they both damned my teta's cells  
for existing; they both tear families (& bodies)  
apart under the guise of self-defense; they both colonize  
everything you once called shelter, carving hollow  
the parts of you that grew best, that learned  
to survive when you become parasite  
in your own home/when your body becomes  
its own security threat; when i say my teta was a  
warrior, i mean she was a peaceful woman who died  
the most violent death/the most Palestinian death  
& her daughter still weeps sometimes; still can't  
see a butterfly without thinking of woman turned  
shrapnel & i promised

i wouldn't make a political statement out of  
my teta's corpse, just like i promised i wouldn't  
title this poem "cancer," & the thing about promises  
is they're too easy to break when you're being  
held at gunpoint; when your world loves best  
the parts of you that surrender to their own  
reflection;

teta once said Palestine was our promised land. until it was taken by those who believed it was their *promised land*; & the thing about home is you can never really call a single place home - side effect of ash-stricken diaspora; you can never really call a body home - not when they off us like hand grenades; & maybe the need to make home of a burning thing is the reason i'm writing this in the first place; or the reason they brand us demon or premature implosion; & maybe every word i speak is really a bullet ricocheting through generations; or chasms re-birthing every disfigured body back into an air that loved it; or every butterfly that flocks around my tetá's headstone in winter.

***Ode to my swollen, infected Spleen***

*After Angel Nafis*

there's a weight in you that screams at  
unholy hours; & this is the first time you  
were led to believe your body is not a chasm;  
when your gut becomes an ocean in love  
with its tempests & the invisible islands  
swallowed whole in the wake of you -  
you've got the colonizers shaking in their  
boots; every white thing trembles at  
the sight of the expansive planet you've become;  
there are parts you never knew existed  
until they occupied too much space.  
until your own weight fills your haunted,  
hollowed frame & everything inside  
you bursts & swells into  
a cacophony of organs & white blood  
cells - how could you expect to house  
all this fluid & turbulence & history without  
imploding? don't they know you have a  
whole country in you? how can  
you expect to be whole when home is  
a borderless entity; when you fit the  
infinite into a single body - how do  
they look at you & not see God in that  
swell & undertow? In the Goliath  
they made of that fist-sized organ, or the  
holy ghost your immune system has become;  
they look at you & see a defenseless thing; a city  
in love with the carpet bomb's embrace;  
you ever look at a body on fire & see  
God in the burning? you ever sing hallelujah  
to an infected thing because it did not  
kill you? because the battle makes you feel  
so alive you've forgotten the martyr your  
body has become? you're still unlearning  
the parts of you that shrivel & shrink beneath  
the confines of gravity & you've began teaching them  
to swell.           to crash.  
to flood.