Poems by Noor Smadi

ABSTRACT. To have grown up with limited to relatively zero representation in pop culture was a challenge. I felt invalid and invisible in my struggle. I had voices in my head telling me that I’m the other of the other of the other but no one to relate my experience to. However, I still found power, solidarity, and strength in all things intersectional. The joys and tears that we share because we all are familiar with the pain is what pushed me to write and share my story. I found my savior to be Audre Lorde who stood strong and proud in her skin. I found my savior to be my own grandmother who taught me what I know about my Arabness, my womanhood, and my resilience. My goal in writing these two works is to show the world that Arab Brown women are multifaceted, complex, and a plethora of rich and colorful identities that we picked up along our journey. I reflect the paradox of complex identities and how often they are surprisingly mutually exclusive to describe the wholeness of being. I capture moments of wholeness as they truly reflect what it means to simply “be” or exist in a society that constantly needs you to justify, explain, and defend yourself. I write in order to create a safe space of acceptance, abundance, and simply existing.

The time the falaha[1] made me cry
I stood there, for 30 minutes
Listening to everything you had to say,

I saw me. That’s a first.

You know not to live in shame, because of Audre Lorde
You know to fight for the motherland, because of setek[2]
And you stand tall, because of both

Their white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy
Your jet black hair, keffiyeh, and code switching

Their “where are really from?”
Your ”We’re gon impeach this mofo"

Their “Do you hate America?”
Your “I’m doin this for my people”

Their “go back home”
Your 13th district, 13 siblings, and worried mother
All waiting for you, home.

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[2]Translated: Grandmother. Refers to the influence that Tlaib’s grandmother had on her

*This was written after being honored with meeting Rashida Tlaib in person at a dinner in Atlanta for American Muslims for Palestine.
Resistance/Survival

I’m boiling sage to drink,
I’m realizing that America,
comes from my people.
But this poem isn’t gonna unfold
to make you believe
that my brown skin and dark hair
is finally “American” enough

To make you believe
that my hips have uncurved, or
My skin has bleached, or
My tongue has forgotten its mother
As I can tell you, that
I’ve tried...

But I will not run away
from where I come from
And I will not tell you stories about
Little Syria as the origin of the World Trade
Center in Manhattan
To convince you
Or anybody else, that
I deserve to exist in the same place where I
was conceived

Instead,
I will speak my mother tongue at WalMart
I will wear my keffiyeh around the same
streets
Where my mother would be called a raghead

And I will remind myself to exist loudly
Not exist
but survive, prosper, and roar.

There is no doubt
that since its inception,
This country hates me.

I have known this way too early
For me to pinpoint a day or an event.
But maybe, it started at home.
Noor Smadi is a visual storyteller based in Atlanta, GA. Her artistry ranges from realist photography to abstract acrylic paintings. Inspired by both the physical and metaphysical, Noor tells the stories she witnesses hoping to give voice and representation. She employs her intuition and vision to explore questions of identity, decolonization, resistance, intersectionality, and healing. She uses art as a medium of self-determination, self-expression, and self-care. Art has been created to give a voice to those marginalized and oppressed. It makes her feel capable of change, whole, and hopeful. She is especially skilled in mixed media on canvas, incorporating unconventional media like wax, coffee, wine, and everyday surrounding objects.