

Ruled by the Pen: A Collection of Poetry and Prose

Alleh Naqvi

RULED BY THE PEN:

a collection of poetry & prose

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dedicated to the best of women, Lady Fatima az Zahraa ؑ and to the Beloved, the most Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I begin in the Name of God, the Compassionate, The Merciful

Foreword

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ

In the Name of God

This project was undertaken with Temple's CARAS research grant for which I was given the opportunity to travel to Amman, Jordan and interview writers to understand female poetic resistance. It incorporates interview transcripts, secondary research, and my own thoughts and research process woven together into a culmination of poetry and prose to answer this question: How do writers, particularly women in Amman, resist cultural, societal, and political oppression?

part one: quintessential otherness¹

“Because Orientalism is a cultural and a political fact, then, it does not exist in some archival vacuum; quite the contrary, I think it can be shown that what is thought, said, or even done about the Orient follows (perhaps occurs within) certain distinct and intellectually knowable lines.”²

~ Edward Said, *Orientalism*

¹ *Women and Gender in Islam* by Leila Ahmed

² Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. *Penguin Classics Edition*. 2003. Print.

this story begins and ends with the mother made of Mercy. there is potential brimming in the water jug but not spilling to fill in the crevices of my mind. i sit at the door of my heart again, only this time, i have let myself in. i enter in peace.

the first and last place i visited was فن و شي³ in jabal lewibdeh. the streets wound about into each other and the sounds of humans filtered through the car. the streets were lined with people who looked very much like me and sounded somewhat different. i was a foreigner dressed in native clothes.

In the San Remo Conference of April 18-19 1920, a new map of the Near East was created and Transjordan was considered to be a part of the British influence post-WWI. The Sykes-Picot accord of 1915 and the San Remo Conference solidified that Syria and Lebanon will be held responsible by France and Iraq and Palestine will be responsible by the British. *any specific mention of Transjordan was omitted, a reflection of its relative unimportance.*⁴ Abdullah was appointed by the British *fait accompli* as the *amir* of Jordan. A vain and self-centered man racked by sibling rivalry, he moved from Mecca to Maan in November 1920 to restore his brother, Faisal's throne in Damascus and restore his own pan-Arab dream.

There are images of Jerusalem on the walls with Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock greyed depicting a land that was never a land, a state without statehood status. the images were probably before Balfour decided to declare it a Jewish state. and perhaps even showed the gravity of hope before President Trump declared Jerusalem Israel's capital. before King Abdullah *emerged with the consolation prize of Transjordan, an acknowledgement of the success of his Maan strategy. Churchill met Abdullah in Jerusalem at the end of March ... concluding the meeting with a handshake anointed Abdullah as Britain's man.*⁵

darwish wrote for you freedom, so

*deviate, with all your might, deviate from the rule*⁶

Strength means to give spiritual or moral strength to; to give courage, confidence, or resolution to; to encourage.

strength: smiling (especially whilst in pain)

i sometimes wonder why we must put 'strong' in front of woman -

³ Fan wa Shay: the name of a cafe

⁴ Robins, Philip. *A History of Jordan*. Print. 2004.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Darwish, Mahmoud. "Letter to a Poet." Poetry Foundation.

*as if woman does not equate to strong
as if woman only stand with the crutch of men⁷*

the poet takes *simple things*
and turns them into delicacies.
the wind comes
and creates
mountains with the breeze
and cools off even the
moral enemy⁸.

zainab⁹ spoke.

from their slumber, the city¹⁰ awoke.

she wrote a story of a woman who buttoned up her coat in a hurry and went to the door, because

*there are a lot of divorced women here.
my mother is divorced, i say*

*write about the lonely men
and there are many strong women here
that makes the man or husband
very weak
(because women can earn money*

⁷ A poem by Abir Safa and one of my personal favorites

⁸ Satan

⁹ A saint in Islamic history; the granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad and a prisoner after the Battle of Karbala in which her brother and family stood against Yazid ibn Muawiyah and saying they do not consider him the legitimate leader of the Muslims. However, this was not a political battle, but rather supposed to be a diplomatic mission in which seventy-two (or as other accounts say, a hundred and ten) companions and family members of Hussain ibn Ali travelled to Karbala, Iraq. Upon arriving in Karbala, the food and water was cut for three days and on the day of Ashura, nearly every man and boy was killed. That night, the tents of Hussain's camp were set on fire, and the women and girls were beaten, threatened, and died of fear, starvation, thirst, and some - such as Sakina, the daughter of Hussain - died of shock after seeing their fathers' heads. The women, particularly Zainab, are regarded as the flagbearers of Shi'a Islam because if they were not present, the battle would be unknown today. In the court of Yazid in Damascus, Syria, she was asked by a high-ranking official in Yazid's army what she thought of the battle and she famously retorted "I saw nothing but beauty." This was a testament to her patience, strength, and resilience as a role model for women and men. After nearly fourteen-hundred years, Zainab's legacy is carried on as the story is recounted in the beginning of every year. In prison, Zainab first began recounting her story and eulogizing the battle, which is now done through poetic lamentations to remind people of the moral and ethical lessons that are to be learned from these martyrs.

¹⁰ Zainab gave a few sermons when she and all the women and children, in addition to the two males that remained had to walk from Karbala, Iraq to Syria. They stopped in the city of Kufa, Iraq where Zainab gave her first sermon and later in the court of Yazid in Syria. It is said that her sermons woke up the city of Kufa because it was their indifference to the injustices carried out by Yazid that caused Hussain to be killed.

- *sometimes more than the man so
she can make decisions)*

she realized
she had no plans.
she went back
to her home
she made for her self
the suffering
and sat
near her fireplace.

*the man can go to jail under the law.
but women should have their rights.
she feels ignored psychologically
in some cases and
these things happen behind the curtain.
the rules are very good for women for Jordan but
cultural norms
create the tensions and dichotomies
of rage and resistance.
it is these norms which women write
into their stories and weave
with experience. but
as with society, norms
shape reactions as much as
rights-based action.*

i thought i had found my answers when i walked in the street at night. my GPS signaled that i was walking the right way, yet again i was at the sweet shop, the church, and found myself crossing the thick ravine that is the main road. instead of making a right, i took a left and walked up a flight of stairs into *jabal hussein*. there were small hotels lined up next to each other (why that would be good for business, i would never know), and i walked into the first one and asked which way was to the hotel i was staying in. the men behind the desk did not speak english. one man walked me outside, back to the stairs and said “right,” pointing to the distance from where i had come.

After the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel, droves of Palestinians came into Jordan seeking asylum and refuge. The goal has always been the right to return one day. The *al-awda*¹¹ protests in Gaza in April 2018 saw one of the bloodiest crackdowns of protests in Israel. Every Friday there was a protest, and every Friday there was a massacre.

a universal truth is this: home is not a place. it is not a person. it is not a thing. it is and always was inextricably and intrinsically within you this whole time.

Abdullah held secret meetings with Jewish organizations in his house. He was assassinated by a Palestinian-Jordanian, and even his own advisor was part of the plot to kill him¹².

i saw a woman and man together at *darat al funan* and the man was stuttering about his finances. i think they planned to marry. the ability to survive is precious. it is how animals breed and how plants prosper, but the ability to live in love and loyalty is a different kind of home.

Fitra is an Arabic word that is described as an *innate disposition* inside every single human being. It is the *essence*, the nature, the *connection to the divine*. Every being searches for Truth and every being *creates a god for themselves to worship*. This word does not translate well into english but this is the closest it has been described to me. While the *fitra* operates at the spiritual level, it does not just encompass the need to know the divine, it also speaks to the common humanity and need for survival. *the need to worship something*.

the universal thread between humans and of all nations and tribes, between gender and race, no human is excluded from this core.

*fitra: (Arabic) the innate disposition of a human; the essence; the need to worship. this operates in the soul*¹³.

a dear friend writes to me:

¹¹ Right of Return

¹² Robins, Philip. *A History of Jordan*. Print. 2004.

¹³ Comprised of the essence (*fitra*) and the *nafs*. The *nafs* have four elements: creativity, aql (intellect), needs, and desires; this comes from verse 30:30 of the Holy Quran.

*i've always thought of it this way:
men see the forest but not the trees
and women see the trees but not the forest.*

when he saw the books, he ripped them.

she had gone to a bookstore one day
and there, she was a threat.
inside
women write:
to be
his or their own

to read:
in testimony to her
fitra.

They [The Jordanian government] banned organizations such as the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) after its members took part in protests against the Jordanians' refusal to allow West Bank villages near the border with Israel to fortify themselves, leaving them vulnerable to attacks like that on Samu', a town near Hebron, in 1966¹⁴.

In Black September, there were many Jordanian and Palestinian women who participated in protests and one such woman was Leila Khaled.

feminine means Designating an object deemed to be of the female sex, typically on the basis of some perceived or assigned quality considered particularly female. Often contrasted with a corresponding object deemed to be male and designated

the now stateless people were stated to be nothing but the British jurisdiction.

and even when i find this body with me inside it, i still find it to be policed by hands of sisters and mothers who would rather just see pretty.

men only ever told me of this body's strength.

¹⁴“Black September.” *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*, by Sarah Irving, Pluto Press, London, 2012, pp. 43–61. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183p7fm.8.

One woman told me she was told to be too much of a feminist to be married, and then *they* were surprised when she was engaged. She had just turned twenty-four. She goes hiking on mountains overlooking Palestine - her home - every Friday.

the stateless body over the stateless country.

but a body who found home in the faith-walls built up, opening the door for Him to walk in.

*Despite her role in the grassroots resistance, Khaled desperately wanted to carry out another high-profile mission, and she didn't want her recognizable face to stop her. She couldn't reverse the media attention she'd received since the Rome hijacking. But she could change her face.*¹⁵

feminine: al-jamil

the *asma ul husna*¹⁶, the names
are written in feminine.
jamil means beautiful and so
all the feminine Arabic names
are His beautiful names.

*the reason mystics write
Allah
as Laila
in their poetry
is because God's beautiful
names are feminine in Arabic grammar.*¹⁷

layla means *night* in Arabic.
when one supplicates in the
night prayers, it is akin to
intimacy between a lover
and his beloved.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The 99 (most beautiful) names of Allah; these are His attributes or qualities but there are many more than 99 names: *هُوَ اللهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ*: He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; **to Him belong the best names**. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. [translation by Sahih International]

¹⁷ Hussain Makke. "Philosophy of Gender Roles". YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDN7uC3OECw>

On trips from Jordan to Lebanon the two of them started preparations for another hijacking, working from Haddad's apartment which, says Khaled, was like a "beehive," with every room filled with people having meetings and making plans¹⁸

*she is told, "You are young, why are your poems sad."
she always reminds herself:*

*that's me.
If i'm not writing, i
will not be here on this earth.*

*the reason i see the nature and the beauty around me is because of writing.
also thinking about who will read it and like it but*

*bad things will happen after all
you are a girl.
do not make
political posts on Facebook.*

*i got a call after i made a post about the King.
we do not have freedom of speech here in Jordan.*

*the idea is with her.
when there is parchment, man
has spelled the letters.
There is a sentence
she says to herself:
i am finding
i'm writing because
there will always be a war
with swords. but
i don't know how to let this go.
this soft war
has just begun.*

¹⁸ "Black September." *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*, by Sarah Irving, Pluto Press, London, 2012, pp. 43–61. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183p7fm.8.

an ideological battle has started in the midst of the Cold War when the war was given a taste and fear was given a name. there are ideologies we all carry inside us, reverberating in our ears like swarms of bees licking honey off their coats.

She looks at the nature and details to write her poem and after a long experience.

because it is experience which teaches us about death. the ones who are alive know there is no difference.

*i don't know how
to let this go,
she said.*

freedom of speech is described as the first amendment in america. it is *freedom to express one's opinions without censorship, legal penalty, or any other restraint, esp. when regarded as a right.*

freedom (of speech): the idea of an ownership over the tongue; speaking one's private truth in public without fear of harm or persecution

the chai was hot and minted in
a curvy clear glass. the cold seeped
through my fingertips and
my chest expanded.¹⁹

private truth

*writing is not a reflection
of the real world.
it is the world within
this world.
the idea of speech
begins
with the idea of
ownership of
the self.
and now,*

¹⁹ Said by Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai which is a commonly known dua or supplication: "My Lord, expand for me my chest and ease for me my task and untie the knot in my tongue" [20:25] This was said when he received his mission to overthrow his adopted father - the Pharaoh - and wanted to gain strength and remove the lisp from his tongue so that he may be understood by the Pharaoh's court. For more information, refer to *Tafsir al Mizan* by Allamah Tabatabai.

our *nafs*
mean *ours*.



Taken at Darat al Funan, Amman Jordan on a Galaxy S8

In Jordan, the King was first established on April 3rd 1949 when Abdullah was crowned King and Transjordan became Jordan after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. It was now the mirror of its ancestor.

*We need more than just elections
We need a leader.
in Jordan, if we have a leader saying
that education needs to be better
everyone will agree on it.
said one man who wrote
poems about women
in the Quran.*

i wonder why the mouth of a king
grows crops while the mouth
of a passerby
is only filled with weeds.

but a leader would
bring words.

“you’re a woman why do you write?”

God has been made either into a villain or into man himself. they’re both the same knowledge tree in Genesis. there was never a tree of knowledge. woman never came from the rib of man. theology is debated in the same religion but

*another problem is:
she believes in secularism.
she says this openly and
believes in their issues.
she works with freedom
of speech for women and also
freedom of speech about men.*

the monarchy
took her friend.
she believes him dead.

*It is not individualism.
there are a lot of people in civil societies
not Islamic societies.*

everyone comes to define
Islam
for themselves.
while some take it to be
a divine right
others hold it to be
an apolitical journey
inside.

(Sunni) Islamic politics
remain to not be rivers
where white milk flows.
Islamism remains to be
the gestures of gods.

*She is free
to write
anything she wants and
free to say anything she wants
without any limits that her husband or
society impose on her.
and her husband does not stop her.*

*secularism: the belief that politics works separately from the
divine; God should not interfere in man's life.*

but when you witness your friend disappear because he wrote about the history of God when you
witness a call from the government agent

when you witness your brother convert to Christianity in london and can only tell an american.
when you become hushed in protests and your voice becomes a tree
leaves can be cut but the root stays the same.

maybe american pseudo-democracy seems to be a dream; often, you forget them when you wake
up.

then maybe a secular government would keep gods away. a man can leave his parent's house, but he can never take his parents out; a woman becomes a guest in her home.

*Religion is not political. I think
this is just a new thing.
Muhammad tried his best to not be involved in politics.
Saqifa was done freely.
At that time they could not have
two people ruling.
there was nothing forced.*

history marginalizes just like
the monarchy.
when claims are made
to be true
Truth is washed with whiteness.
but Jordan, the land of
black irises and
roman ruins, has people
with a voice.
they have always been speaking.



Democrates and graffiti art in Derar Ben Al Azwar St. 7, Amman, Jordan. Taken by a S8 Galaxy near the stairway next to Darat al Funan.

In Black September, the PLO fought against the Jordanian government under King Hussein.

In November 1968 the cat-and-mouse game of legal restrictions and police suppression of Palestinian organizations came to a head with “clashes in Amman [which] left 24 dead and 89 injured.”²⁰

The Jordan government has had an unsteady relationship with refugees in the past century, particularly those coming in from Palestine.

we were in a pizza shop and eating bread stuffed with warm melted cheese and i sit across my translator, my friend. she says,

Allah built you to be free. and to be free is to be responsible.

in Jordan, if you publish something it stays with you forever.

Since her parents thought she had to study something worthy, she switched from media and journalism to software engineering. During this time, she wrote a book about refugees.

*recently she wrote
about the idea
of book.
each book has
a different idea,
person etc.
and she wrote
about the idea
of work in Jordan.*

*it is the idea
which stimulates
the aql.²¹
it is the idea
which feeds the
fitra.*

²⁰“Black September.” *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*, by Sarah Irving, Pluto Press, London, 2012, pp. 43–61. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183p7fm.8.

²¹ Reason; part of the nafs; separate from the soul where the fitrah operates from

and she wrote
so personal.
she began writing
poetry in 2016.
and is writing
about the Palestine
issue and how it affects
her personal life.

freedom of thought is to *reason without restriction or interference; (also) free will.*

freedom [of thought]: to live in such a way where you question everything but still are finding the Truth.

skin of Zainab binte Ali²²
horse of her brother²³
sword of her father²⁴

no one could recognize the women. (they weren't wearing their veil.)

²² It is narrated that Lady Zainab's skin after the battle of Karbala had become darker in complexion, making her unrecognizable even to those closest to her. It is also narrated that it was the skin of her face which was seen after the Army of Yazid took the women's face veils. Other reports say it was the *chadors* or head coverings which were also taken, revealing the hair of the Women of the Prophet's household.

²³ Zainab had two brothers at the time of Karbala; Abbas and (Imam) Hussain. It was Zuljanah, the horse of Hussain which wouldn't move to take Hussain into battle. It was the horse of Abbas which carried the flag of Hussain (his brother's) army and it was this horse which carried the news of his death to the women after he died - and his arms severed - whilst trying to get water from the Euphrates River after all water and food supplies were cut from the army for three days before the battle commenced.

²⁴ Imam Ali's sword is called the Zulfiqar. The name Zainab means "the pride of her father." This sword is also said to be metaphorical in nature and passed down from one Imam to the next. One scholar describes this not as a sword but a weapon.

tell me a secret: does a woman write differently than a man? what would she have to write about other than gendering her body into a sensation. tell me, what reaction am i absorbing if i am writing about the hands that have afflicted me. tell me, what reaction should i be expressing if i am a product of a country that slaps me with tales of freedom. what is a woman without a man. if man is taken to be god, woman is the origin of divinity.

Worth with a noun or adjective complement: to become or come to be.

we are fragments - i think - returning home, inside the universe we create rather than the bodies we rent.

Worth: perception of one's inner self, also known as one's soul in the theistic conception of the world.

because you were not created

for anything less than paradise.

so do not sell yourself for anything less.²⁵

until woman carries her living self to One, worth will become nothing more than man's assessment of the female body. at the same time, he assumes he owns his body. it is not that man is the protector of woman from other men. rather, he is her protector from his self.

*my sister is a woman before
she is a writer. she needs to
my sister needs to
empower herself.*

*and father was a poet and
brought books so
it is man who brings life
he gave me
this inspiration into the home
and strength, a woman
who brings love into a house*

*but the eyes of the society is not developed;
And then I took my way in life and in writing.
not only in Jordan – all over the world.*

²⁵ A hadith - saying or tradition - by an Islamic saint. In this case, this is a hadith by Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, the successor of Prophet Muhammad according to Shi'a Islam and the fourth caliph in early Islamic history.

We are not reading
between our veils. why is it
that only the eyes are uncovered
for a *niqabi*?

*teaching
makes the woman
the confidence and strength.*

She
comes before
Writer.

*We have a good situation in Jordan. but
teaching is a means of learning.
it needs more empowerment.
when you teach
you become -
in essence -
knowledge.*

*through schools.
the natural way. but also
reading and travelling and*

*i see the eyes of God.
making a relationship
between herself
and the world.*

to be alone inside a city unknown is to grow roots to firmly establish a foundation before setting off to grow leaves.

it was winter. and i thought Jordan was perpetually warm. i think my lack of coats pointed out just the neo-colonial mindset i am both a product of and producing as i packed up my suitcase and thought of the sun.

it remains behind the clouds.

And as the resistance organizations grew stronger and more confident, they operated freely in substantial areas of Amman and towns such as Irbid in the north, challenging King Hussein's

*authority and, in the case of the PFLP, openly calling for an end to “reactionary” monarchies such as that of the Hashemites.*²⁶

King Abdullah of Jordan needed support from the British after people stopped paying their taxes. British planes flew over the area and they listened to the sound of power.

Autonomy means *The condition or right of a state, institution, group, etc. to make its own laws or rules and administer its own affairs; self-government, independence according to the OED; or, more generally, liberty to follow one's will; control over one's own affairs; freedom from external influence, personal independence.*

autonomy: The ability to access and act on one's free will without hindrance.

Elif Shafak²⁷ offers a Sufi interpretation of verse on *nisa*²⁸: *men*

*are the maintainers of women*²⁹

one might read as lowly men, not as a servant or a slave. they read as gods themselves. another might read this in the name of the divine where *man is the support of woman*³⁰ and what is more encompassing of God's protection than the mercy He has for His servants?

a dear friend wrote to me: *the idea is the same, man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.* there remains only mint leaves in my tea.

Sunnis gravitate towards secularism because of saqifa.

everywhere man is in chains is equivalent to the parable of “a man with one or multiple masters.” who are we worshipping if we do not believe in worship?

history teaches us that no Truth exists without discovery.

a dear friend writes to me, *men are ambitious. when this ambition is too much it becomes pride,*

²⁶ “Black September.” *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*, by Sarah Irving, Pluto Press, London, 2012, pp. 43–61. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183p7fm.8.

²⁷ Shafak, Elif. *Forty Rules of Love*. Viking. 2010. Print.

²⁸ Woman in Arabic; also refers to chapter 4 of the Quran

²⁹ Holy Quran, 4:35

³⁰ *The Sublime Quran*, trans. by Laleh Bakhtiar

arrogance was the first fall.³¹

in a Christian context, father is considered *God in relation to Christ, to mankind in general (considered as his offspring, the objects of his loving care, or as owing him obedience and reverence), or to Christians (as his children by adoption or spiritual rebirth). Also occasionally in non-Christian contexts: a god, a male deity.* it can also be used to refer to a *superhuman person regarded as having power over nature and human fortunes; a deity (use in the singular usually refers to a being regarded as male (cf. goddess n.), but in the plural frequently used to refer to male and female beings collectively). Chiefly applied to the divinities of polytheistic systems; when applied to the Supreme Being of monotheistic belief, this sense becomes more or less modified; An image or object (as a plant or an animal) worshipped as symbolizing or constituting the visible habitation of a divinity or as itself possessing divine power; an idol*

god: man and his ego; the nafs; symbol of power and authority; an idol or deity; worshipped through imitation or reflection.

*I don't see poetry
as a tool to express
but a tool that you discover
your self.*

*when the heart is soft, only then
can it open.*

*when writing about Yusuf's mother
he says, I found
that when a father and mother lose
their child, their relationship
will not continue the same way.*

³¹ It is narrated that Iblis destroyed the jinns when he was a ruler of the jinn on Earth and he then spent the next 10,000 years or so in worship so much so that people assumed him to be an angel. But when Adam was first created, he again turned toward his arrogance and boasted of his supremacy over man.

This is what the poem guided me to.

the poem is ruled by the pen
but the pen is guided by a sword.
resistance lies in subtleties between
what is and
what is discovered.

when in adolescence, my life was built on my father's shadow. the shadow turned into blood
inked letters known as *arizas*³² thrown into a river.

*God gives*³³

nature. the self reflects the world in perfect symmetry. it was a four-year-old, after all, who
claimed her burning *chador*. still thankful it was on her head. and her eyes were burns running
red.³⁴

the divine only works for those the unsealed hearts.

a friend writes to me, *following fiqh strictly does not give you moral values per se.*

folk music plays in the background. there are strings and flutes and no lyrics but a song of
distance and divine. soft strings hum in tandem to the sound of nature.

this chapter gives laws pertaining to women. nisa means woman.

the evergreen trees are reaching for the blue deep and the yellow taxi cabs appear to be simple
and true. there is a couple in front of me. or perhaps they're just friends. the girl is white with
blonde hair. the man has a brown beard and tattoos lacing his forearms. he lights a cigarette.
buildings are cobblestoning.

smoke mixes with his yellow chai. the air is chilled.

³² Letters written to the twelfth Imam, Imam al-Mahdi عج who is said to be in a period of occultation according to Twelver Shia Islam

³³ Holy Quran 4:35

³⁴ This refers to the story of Lady Sakina, the young daughter of Imam Hussain, after the Battle of Karbala in 61 AH in which the women were unveiled and tents set on fire.

nisa: stranger to everyone but the strange; tranquility to the traveller³⁵

a woman is driving a car and she is trying to reverse it with the help of her friend? stranger? another woman in a scarf. only i only see the driver's scarf - white - as she backs up and the taxi behind her honks. once. twice. the man is grieved that a woman is slow. but then she turns the wheel once towards her and drives forward. returns out with a red jacket and jeans and meets her friend - now confirmed - as they walk across the street and greet a new day.

i step inside from the brisk. then i sit and wait for the sun to rise.

*The woman
can take
the violence from your character,
he says. he wrote
the story of Musa's wife.*

³⁵ wayfarer

part two: fitra

“فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ
وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“So set your heart as a person of pure faith on this religion, the original *fitra* endowed by Allah according to which He originated mankind (There is no altering Allah’s creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know.) [30:30]

when sitting in الرومي in shoman library, i think this is the peace found in draped money plants from round clay bowls on a shelf and students sitting to read through their laptop screens and i wonder if it is the end of the semester or if they are just interested in reading. perhaps both. perhaps just the latter. the latte is cheap here, because there are students here. and in my *irfan*, i will find rumi scribbled in the margins of my ocean filled eyes that i call my screen. the God of

all sings the tune of lilac scarves and black boots and raven faces and purple mothers and an oasis of knowledge waits in the shelves of my mind.

the complicated pillars of honeydewed limestone and the evergreen rain drops their colorful eyes. their scarves are a oneness. the unity is becoming only bearable between the home i found here and the home i build there in my *masjid*. a few days ago at jacaranda gallery, i read dia batal's *fragments of being* as fragments of *beauty*. there are no Jordanian-Palestinians - a stateless people cannot exist as a state - but there are Palestinian-Jordanians because a stateless people always exist *within* a state. fragments of their darwishian poetry survive because *You know who your mother is*

yes, i know my mother's chai skin. i know her coffee colored hair.

*As for your father, be your own.*³⁶

i've made many men my father, but never one as my self. and i think i learned to forgive in poetry as i learned to forget the sweat in beatings. The violence is not in hand gloves but the stains on sweaty cheeks. i think i left my feminism with him.

patriarchy is an institutionalized system of domination of women through social, economic, political, cultural or other means by which a woman is marginalized, oppressed, and silenced. This is where the East and West converge. and this is where water marks separation. also written as *The predominance of men in positions of power and influence in society, with cultural values and norms favouring men.*

my dear friend once wrote to me: *women are like water, while men are the rocks.*

patriarchy: a familial system; man leads his family to discover themselves. a system marked by complete submission [of man to the divine] and humility as opposed to domination, authority, or power.

it was *jumma*. the markets were empty save for the coffee & falafel shops. there were two little boys. one with combed hair and glasses rounded around his pale face. carrying coins to wait in line next to the men for a turn at food. The other sat in the back of his father's worn blue car - the color faded to white from the bottom of too much dust & not enough water. The boy gazed out at the group eating & drinking & smoking & maybe one day he will be a part of such a group.

³⁶Mahmoud Darwish, "To a Young Poet"

The city is built on mountains. carried on the back of an empire & the evergreen circulate the patches of sand dry goats. skinny & brown wade through a patch & then there is a row of barren trees i can spin meaning into.

by making a people believe the white man's skin is their own, you have successfully colonized land. worship is no longer to the divine but gods of race and racisms.
religion is no longer an ideology but a competition.
the white European man is god.
because only god needs worshippers ripped from their blood.

There was a man in a red *keffiyeh* round his head today at al quds falafel. The boy in the front wore gloves as he rolled the green dough into balls to plop them into the grill. He rolled them around the round pan to drain the oil and hand it over the boys in the back. His acne was ripe red and flushed against the chilled day. The man had a white beard and served me coins with warm grilled bread and i walked over to my turtle tea shop where i found two green turtles gurgling in the murky water.

There is a woman with purple hair and a man without hands sitting in a wheelchair by the kids toys begging for change. Then there is the long red patterned dress and the noise of shopkeepers in their alleys. I climb up a flight again only to find the words rainbow etched into the street sign.

i sit on the bench and go back inside. stand see a cat lurking outside. Grab the food and walk back to the turtle shop only to have her follow a few paces and stop. I keep walking briskly now walking against the tired.

make love not America great again.

the children still kicked
their ball down the stairs.

*what is it like here for women in your opinion?
i went to the south of Jordan and
a lot of women can't
study because of their families
or work or even go outside without
permission.*

the restaurant name was written in english. She took two silver coins out of her pocket and gave them to the old man. His wrinkles sighed deeper into his blue eyes, the red kuffiyeh around his

head bristled slightly as he took the change and punched a few numbers in the register. the pock faced boys flipped the green falafel balls in steaming oil to her left. she took the warm sandwich and returned the man's smile.

what of religion? why follow it?

It's about finding God -

not the God people talk about –

but God inside me.

this divinity inside me are the beautiful names. the qualities, the attributes, the manifestation of the divine all bound by this necessary and intoxicating thing called Love.

religion is the *action or conduct indicating belief in, obedience to, and reverence for a god, gods, or similar superhuman power; the performance of religious rites or observances. also in plural: religious rites. now rare except as merged with sense*

religion: a set of principles for self edification comprising of belief, action, and morals (in Arabic: usul, fiqh, and akhlaq). or, the practice of worshipping a god/God

and what is this God inside you?

akhlaq.

what's freedom?

to Read.

Allah built you to be free,

but instead we

follow people's opinions

than His.

many men have made many gods and they worship through many religions. some become necessary when divine is warped into tyranny. others become infused when there is immorality.

Ayatollah Baqir al Sadr says that pride is the death of a nation.

what is it's birth? if not mercy. if not belief in being great.

religion informs the public of what is correct and what is unforgivable. the only difference is that the fear those experience towards the divine is now felt towards people.

this god within me is no god at all, but godly qualities. the asma ul husna can be man's attributes as well if only man wants them to be.

freedom is a religion.
it is freedom which informs
our faith.
to be born in mercy and
become into being and
religion too is only for the free.

before freedom, there is
humanity.
the humane is the self
which informs our being
to be
good.
before freedom, there must
be mercy³⁷.
compassion³⁸.
kindness³⁹.

the white house stood with glass doors and a sitting area for her only; books lined the shelves in the walls, languidly reading the stories of old. i imagine the books reciting her poetry to the walls and them cozing into a nook further into the glass door, hugging the coldness outside.

and she said to me, I am a poet before I am a woman. Not a 'woman poet.'

Culture means *In extended use: to refine, improve, or develop (a person, the mind, etc.) by education or training; to cultivate (an art, subject, etc.).*

***culture:** adj. an institution of beliefs and ideologies that either facilitate or discourage developing the intellect and creativity of people.*

the paradox:
free is defined

³⁷ Ar-Rahman

³⁸ Ar-Raheem

³⁹ A hadith by Prophet Muhammad states, "And whoever is not kind has no faith."

as limitless, but
humans are created
limited.

politics are created
when power hugs the
tongues of the youth
and cuts away
their opposition into
blind submission.

limits are placed
to be
little speech
here is
a woman who thinks
writing is not a mirror
when it has always been
a stained glass
to me. i write *as*
but she just *writes*.

politics is now a dichotomy of power and authority and in terms of gender, we now have only one definition of women's freedom.

freedom means *the state of being able to act without hindrance or restraint; liberty of action.*
Frequently with to and infinitive.

freedom: after a free mind comes a freer self

it is defined by any woman. but not just Woman in opposition to Man. Woman and Man are another dichotomy of power but not authority, because in the Islamic conception of the world, authority rests in the throne of divinity and this infinite authority also has infinite power to give authority to whomsoever is worthy of it and to give power to whomsoever deserves it. This is the secret of vicegerency on Earth. In the scientific conception of the world, power lies with those whom one can see. Historic systems of authority are then linked with the power structures of Man against Woman and now Woman against Man in retaliation. retribution. reparation. this

dichotomy never existed until the human began to hinder the will to think, there is a hindrance to the will to act. meaning, when we no longer think freely, we cannot act freely either.

the self (*nafs*)

Rationale

Creative

Needs

Desires



Make Love, Not America Great Again Graffiti Art @Al-Baouneyah St. 35, Amman, Jordan in a parking lot near jabal lewibdeh. Taken by the author with an S8 Galaxy on January 2 2019.

the night seemed to expand over my mind and i read through my hot pink textbook on the train. the bumps and occasional shouts dulled over Droeber's words of the old empire of Rome. no one thought anything of the ruins; a theater was still staged in the middle of the street across a great expanse of a courtyard where little boys between the ages of seven to fifteen were playing ball. the main road ran up to the Citadel and mountains above where i walked up to in the ruined afternoon sun.

neo-oriental means generally refers to how Eastern people particularly Muslims are depicted post-9/11.

neo-oriental: the way in which ideologies, identity, and western ideas are infiltrated into the diaspora Oriental in order to demean the Oriental's intellectual capabilities, opposing worldviews, and divine conception in order to push for the Orientalist perception of progress.

bodies are also a map of power. this body is not my own. ownership does not come from possession but from creation, and i did not create my self.

even if all i be is matter, then what does it matter if this feminine body maps a white gaze. i will always see through the white gaze. although i may not be white, i am whited in diaspora.

Transjordan was seemingly unimportant though it was contained in the jurisdiction of Palestine and what of the body who cannot see her self?

body reflected

*Cox arrived
when the British authorities
were increasingly frustrated
at the administration of Transjordan.
the unsentimental colonial officer was
a reflection of this frustration.*

i came to know that i will remain an Outsider even in a place where i look like an insider. i think neo-colonization is the action or process of making neocolonial. i was told i look Palestinian.

because of your scarf, i assumed

neo-colonization: asserting your own perception of and on an Other.

one man began guessing what i was. he first thought Yemeni and while he was close ideologically, he then began to list Arabia in the pin holding my scarf.

Palestinian.

Jordanian.

Lebanese.

Iraqi.

Afghan (not in Arabia)

i called myself american because that is all i can say to muse diaspora. it is all i can say to explain my nationality and identity at once. but it wasn't an identity and it never will be. by identity i refer to my immigrant eyes and *chai* colored skin. i refer to the way in which diaspora mused us both. i refer to my self as a slave and a servant, in submission to Love.

war and kids

is a theme in recent history.

The 1951 Convention for Refugees states that a refugee is someone with a valid fear of persecution on account of five characteristics: race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and social group. The convention occurred after the Holocaust.

*there is a camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan
and it has terrible conditions.*

*i took photos there and bring the people to me
and make photos about kids*

and then write a story based on the photo.

in africa, there was an exhibition

and they kept them.

there was an exhibition in Moscow in February.

sometimes i take pictures that are not my own

and take things i like in the pictures.

such as a lonely chair sitting out in winter.

if i saw a man holding that means

there is something broken

Cox arrived when the British authorities were increasingly frustrated at the administration of Transjordan. the unsentimental colonial officer was a reflection of this frustration

Britain would not allow an alien wedge to disrupt its lateral territorial connection between its two newly acquired strategic possessions of Palestine and Iraq. From its very inception as an entity Transjordan value, not for its own sake but as a buffer and a bridge among lands of inestimably greater importance was recognized⁴⁰

a buffer
for the British
or a bridge
for the Oriental.

the politics of identity arguably enhances the politicization of gender. because gender is not an identity or an expression. it is the fabric of the complementary. the mirror of the unseen. the right of divinity.

Leila Khaleed's role in the plot was kept hidden even from the other commandos taking part, several of whom were women. She was responsible for training them for the operation, but they didn't know that she had chosen—despite arguments with Wadi'a Haddad, who wanted her to take a safer role in the mission—to take the hardest target, an El Al plane.

*the body would be torn apart
if there were two heads said
Rami, a 24 year old man Julia
Droeber interviewed in
a playground.
He was living with his family
just outside Amman.
the human is one
body. the society another.
and each is one mind.
and both minds are
in one body.*

women do not resist
by writing. but
by being
heard.

⁴⁰Robins, Philip. *A History of Jordan*. Print. 2004.

the quintessential trope of the writer:
to be heard means
to be
understood.
to be
recognized
to simply be
a writer means
to exist
as you are.

women do not write to resist.
they resist so that they may write.
there is a voice
that comes to you.
there are words sitting
inside you
scratching your throat.
throttling your stomach.
whispering to your heart.
words sit in silent reveries
until you let them
be

for there is no God but God⁴¹.

⁴¹ The first part of the testimony of faith (shahadah). For more information, refer to William Chittick's *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*.

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Interviews are kept anonymous for privacy reasons. Most - if not all - of the interviewees requested to be kept anonymous because they revealed political opinions which they do not want to be leaked or attached to their names, respectively.

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Afterword

This project began with the idea of understanding resistance and faith especially when misconceptions about the Islam have become internalized by the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Muslims, both Shi'a and Sunni, are caught between dichotomies of what one can and cannot identify with and what one must be in order to be truly "Muslim." In this collection, I wanted to write against these false misconceptions and orientalist dichotomies of Muslims and particularly focusing on the Muslim female experience by using my faith as a means of activism. I travelled to Jordan specifically because it is both a country that is labelled "safe" by the US Dept. of Homeland Security, yet there is still repression and oppression due to the government. Jordan is also one of the ten remaining monarchies in the world and labels itself as an "Islamic" country, though, as I can tell, it is anything but "Islamic."

I identify as a Shi'a Muslim woman and this faith, this religion, is central to my being. I came to believe rationally and I practice this religion willingly. I am of Pakistani heritage, born and raised in America, though I do not identify as American. I do not identify myself as belonging to any country. I practice modesty (*hijab*). I am also a writer and a student.

My research process first included finding people to interview and creating questions to ask. At first, I did research to find out about Jordan and the cultural, linguistic, and poetic scene in Amman before traveling there over winter break. I then spent eighteen days with my translator meeting women and even a couple of men about their poetry, writing, and resistance, as well as the issues they face in their society and what they wish was different. I also tried to immerse myself in the city and the lives of the individuals I interviewed to encompass their stories, struggles, and strength. The interesting issue that arose was that despite being someone who passes as an Arab and blends into the cultural fabric easily with both dress and values, I could not speak Arabic fluently. My language was both a barrier and a testament to the fact that I was an outsider looking in, despite being someone who could fit into the cultural life.

I use different formats throughout in order to bring attention to the history of Jordanian politics in academic language and correct grammar but then shift over to poetic-prose and then complete poetry by breaking grammar rules in subsequent paragraphs through lower-casing the

letters except for those I wish to highlight. The “I” is lower-case because it is the ego that I am abolishing as I write the words; it is not the author - I - that is important. Rather, the significance lies in the message itself. In addition, I often use the term “my self” with an intended space in between. I am referring to my soul, to a metaphysical and divine creation. I am not referring to the exoteric body known by the term “myself.” By the space, I intend to create a distance from body and soul for it is the soul that is given a body within Islamic thought, rather than it being the case that the soul is encased inside a body. The italics are quotes from the books I read as well as the English translation of the answers given to me during the interviews. I organized the poetry with these transcripts in order to give the different voices to speak to each other as also critiqued, commented, and responded to the responses given to me with my own analysis and understanding of the topics at hand in the unitalicized portions. This is where my bias comes through; while I am empathetic to the resistance efforts and writers in Amman advocating for secular and democratic values for their country - whether through their personally held beliefs or published work - my ideal of a government is shaped by my Shi’a worldview and reaction to American democracy. This conception of ideal governance is neither secular nor absolutely democratic. My goal was to reconcile these major dichotomies - of secularism and theocracy, feminism and Islam, democracy and monarchy, individualism and communalism - all beginning with the cleavage between theistic and atheistic worldviews. I see a severe lack of theistic based writing in modern literature and seek to revive theism and Islam as an active motif throughout this collection.

One of the dichotomies that I want to highlight and clarify is that between feminism and Islam, as it is central to the conversation of women and resistance in this collection. Within the Muslim community, it often seems as if you can either conform to western thought by identifying as a feminist or be what is known as an “oppressed” Muslim woman. I reject this idea; however, it is true that the term and ideology of “feminism” has different definitions and connotations amongst different groups of women and this was especially true in Jordan. The woman identifying themselves as “feminists” were not identifying with the entirety of the movement nor were they lacking or diminishing their Muslim identity. Instead, they identified as “Muslim feminists” for agreeing with the minimalist definition of feminism: basic human rights and respect for women. This would include the right to education, work, health facilities and self determination, and to be looked upon as a human being. In my own understanding and research into Islam, I find that not only are there women’s rights and gender equality entrenched in the Quran itself, but also that it is the *practice* of the faith and the convergence with cultural values, norms, and traditions that removes, distorts, and degrades the role and importance of women in Islamic thought - rather than it being evident in the scripture or traditions of the Prophet (pbuh). In these instances, culture works through Islam rather than it being Islam that manifests itself through various cultural practices. Therefore, I do not identify as a Muslim feminist. Islam transcends the boundaries of a temporality and exoteric existence into an esoteric reality. Islam means ‘to submit.’ If I have submitted to Islam, why must I submit to another ideology? However, for a country steeped in cultural traditions, the practice of Islam can be different from the reality of the message and this makes the identification of a Muslim feminist necessary to distinguish oneself as a supporter of “liberal” values, those being basic human needs: education, self-determination, and no more subordination and subjugation, creating a variant of their own form of Islamic-based women's resistance which they label as feminism.

Overall, my goal with this collection was to highlight the struggles and resistance efforts being made by Muslim writers, and particularly women writers, in Amman to show how these writers are using their craft to express their own grievances and thoughts by not only building the confidence to execute such material but also facing the hurdles in their own society to be published and, as a result, be heard.