Poetry for Palestine
Abdul Karim Sabawi
BLOOD FOR FREEDOM
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Abdul Karim Sabawi

BLOOD FOR FREEDOM
“Spartacus gave the slaves a hand that defies nails. Christ gave the poor blood that defeats the sword. I, ladies and gentlemen, I am laboring in the laboratories of language all day developing my own special invention that will change the world. Simply put, I am looking for a word for my people that can repel the bullets”. Abdul Karim Sabawi
Table of Contents

ABOUT THE POET .............................................................................................................. 9
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 11
ERASURE ............................................................................................................................. 12
HOME OF PASSION ............................................................................................................ 14
EPHANY ............................................................................................................................... 16
A PROMISE .......................................................................................................................... 17
THE HANDBKERCHIEF ....................................................................................................... 18
THE MASTER ....................................................................................................................... 19
THE RETURN FROM THE VALLEY OF DEATH .............................................................. 22
THE INK FLOWER IS BLACK ............................................................................................. 24
THE PIPER ........................................................................................................................... 28
THE CLIMB ........................................................................................................................ 29
THE LADY ............................................................................................................................ 31
APOLOGY ............................................................................................................................. 33
YOU'RE LATE ....................................................................................................................... 34
THE CLOWN’S FINAL PERFORMANCE ............................................................................ 36
CARNIVAL ........................................................................................................................... 37
YOUR SKY IS BLUE ............................................................................................................ 38
A SONG TO AUSTRALIA .................................................................................................... 39
WALTZING MATILDA ....................................................................................................... 41
SATAGRATHYA .................................................................................................................. 45
OBSESSION ....................................................................................................................... 48
OFF SCRIPT ........................................................................................................................ 53

Illustrations

Imad Abu Shtayyah.............................................................................................................. 11
Fayez Elhasani ................................................................................................................... 12
Irina Najj ................................................................................................................ 14
Imad Abu Shtayyah.............................................................................................................. 16
Ayham Anwar Hammad .................................................................................................. 17
Fayez Elhasani ................................................................................................................... 18
Fayez Elhasani ................................................................................................................... 41
Marwa Alnajjar .................................................................................................................. 22
Naji Al-Ali .......................................................................................................................... 34
Imad Abu Shtayyah.............................................................................................................. 36
Irina Najj ............................................................................................................................ 37
Fayez Elhasani................................................................................................................... 38
Marwa Alnajjar .................................................................................................................. 38
Irina Najj ............................................................................................................................ 41
Fayez Elhasani................................................................................................................... 45
Imad Abu Shtayyah.............................................................................................................. 48
ABOUT THE POET

Abdul Karim Sabawi was born in 1942 in the Toffah District in Gaza city. He was educated from a very young age by his iconic father Sheik Hussien Sabawi who himself was a self taught man. Sheik Hussien was well versed on religion and had an enlightened moderate approach to life, so he vowed to wage a war on illiteracy in his neighborhood by running a school from his home in Toffah for teaching children and adults alike. His library included a rich variety of books including an impressive collection of classical as well as contemporary poetry.

Abdul Karim Sabawi authored five novels; the first four were part of the series 'Land of Canaan', which document Gaza’s history and traditions by way of story telling. Covering the life span of the old city from the late 1800s to 1948. His fifth novel 'Searching for Sustenance' was inspired by his long years of exile in Australia. It captures the experiences of Palestinian and Arab migrants in the 1980s. Sabawi has also published several books of poetry and has won various awards, including the Gibran Award for his first novel The Phoenix and the highest Medal of Honor in Gaza in 2014 for his exceptional achievements.
You shake my loaded branches
Music pours out of me
Sadness pours out of you
Your chest splits like ears of corn

I say tomorrow...
You say tomorrow
The horses fling their mains
And always
Time betrays us
We don't meet
We don't share a drink
The hours pass
And we remain horrified
Of the next moment

I will call this long separation
A passage
I will embrace the path to crucifixion
I will call out your name
Engrave it on my lips
In my blood
In the eyes of my children
So be my fire
If you wish
I am yours
My guillotine
My death
My victory
Written on the first morning when Abdul Karim Sabawi woke up to find himself a refugee in exile.

When you were parched  
We quenched your thirst with our blood  
Now...  
We carry your burden  
Disgraced we cry in shame when asked  
Where do you come from?

Dishonored we die  

If only the stray bullets  
From the occupier’s guns  
Were merciful  
And pierced through our legs  
It only they tore through our knees  
If only we sunk into your fields  
Deep to our necks  
If only we got stuck  
And became the salt of your earth  
The nutrients in your fertile soil  
If only we didn’t leave
The gates of my heart
Are wide open to misery
Don’t ask me where this wind is blowing
Don’t ask me about a house
Or windows
Or trees
The Bulldozers were here
The Bulldozers were here
And the houses in our village
Fell like a row of decayed teeth

They haven’t colonized Mars yet
And the moon is barren
Uninhabitable
So carry your children
Your memories
And follow me
We can live in the books of history
They’ll write about us,
“The wicked Bedouins
Landed in Baghdad
The wicked Bedouins landed in Yafa
They landed in Grenada
Then moved on
They packed their belongings
And rode their camels
Leaving no trace on the red clay
All their artifacts
Faded
With the passing of the years.”

What does it really mean to this world?
What does it really mean?
To be Arabs
Native Americans
Or Dinosaurs

Refugee Camp, Jordan 1968
HOME OF PASSION

Sea and sky
And waves...
Like wild horses neigh
And birds with foam feathers
Countless...
They hover

Sea and sky
What is there of Gaza?
Only sea and sky
And lives forgone
Pledged for the homeland
Eyes hiding the tears
Lighting up the candles
Despite the deep wound
They manage to smile

Sea and sky
A homeland for passion
Its lovers wear high medals of honor
Love is like war
A battlefield
Bravery is for those who win
And those who yield
Love is like death
It is destiny
A fate we divide amongst us
They said ‘belong young man’
And for her youthful eyes
My heart belonged
Sea and sky

Sea and sky
A brilliant light
Or did the veil move
Revealing your smile
Was it a breeze that carried me
Or was I blown away from the seventh sky
Is this gold...or scatted hair
Beneath your scarf
Your hand waved goodbye
I prayed for you to be safe

You wrapped your veil
Around your head
And departed
The sun has set
Darkness has descended
A wound gushed open
Murdered ...I fell on the beach
Sea and sky...

Gaza 1996
I know
You own the world
The dagger
The whip
The hanging robe
The entourage
The Policemen
The Guards
Hunting dogs
I know your strength
Your army
Your horses
And your men
I know your shadow
When it falls on the objects
It destroys them
I know your eyes,
And what is between them
Of Betrayal
But
I also know my heart
And I
Pity you.
A PROMISE

Oh mother
Unrestrained is this black foal
He throws me off his back
I fall...covered in blood
He neighs feverishly
Reovlts
Stumps his hooves
I stay calm
I pull myself together
In spite of the wounds
I climb
A second time
A third time
I climb
Until I mount the settle
Pull out my sword from its sheathe
And wave it
The battlefield will roar
And your eyes will see
When your window opened my lady
The crowd in the square roared
There was chaos
Brave men competed over you
Each worrier
Warned before he killed
Meeting death
Is noble
For those who drank for your eyes
A toast for happiness
A toast for misery
The bird of death flickered
The sun began to set
Its rays painted red
With the blood of the knights
Beneath your balcony
Embraced a thousand and one martyrs
So for whom will you smile now?
And for whom will you throw your handkerchief?
THE MASTER

In loving memory of Zoheer ElRayes. The poem was recited on his 40th day memorial. In here the poet likens his friend Zoheer ElRayes to a sufi master...

Is it true you departed
Without looking back
You didn't make it to our promised gathering
You took what you won
Your gains
Your glory
Your sovereignty
And all I have is what you leave behind
Grieve
Sorrow
Eternal loss
My master

Did desperation creep
Into the soul
When Arab unity was postponed
And the flag of Rome and Persia united

When Jerusalem was wounded
You cried out to your people
From the shores of the Atlantic Ocean
To the Marbad
You shouted
But only your echo responded
And the remains of Khola in the radiance of Thahmad
Oh master

There you are
Silent
Refusing to speak
And I know about you what there is to learn
If our day should be pitch black
Than tomorrow is coming
And the day after...
My pinfeathers will shed
I will grow little by little
My arms will be stronger
My hands more powerful
Oh master

I may be nourished
And the birds will sit in their nests
In barren land
The roads might look alike to me
And I might become more lost
Or I might find my way
I might end up where the others are
Where I might begin again
We will always meet
We will talk always
You, the leader who guides me
And I your follower
Oh master

You were our vision
When our eyes became tired and night-blind
You saw us standing
Around us marched the palm trees
The tamarisk
And the herbaceous plants
You tried to worn us
And we believed you sometimes
But sometimes
Our souls were overpowered by blindness
We came to you in the evening
You said to us
I see now my coffin
A child will be borne amongst you
He will inherit my power and rein
He will walk you through the tents of the refugee camp
To the fields of Grenada
And there he will erect a mosque in my name
Oh my master
There you are dictating your message
Announcing your answers
Announcing Gaza the Kingdom of lovers
Forbidding anyone from entering the city
If their hearts are not maddened by love
If they have not fulfilled a promise
To the ones they love
Mercy my master
The city is besieged

It is grieving over its son
It is wounded in its flesh
Its enemy is lurking on its borders
So open your doors for us
To let the lovers come in
To give them your clothes
And offer them your drinks
To entertain their loneliness
With a bountiful conversation
He who complains from your absence
Will be shamed by his tears
And he who pursues your return
Will rejoice
The singers will enjoy their songs
Oh my master
I return with them to my homeland
Their hand in my hand
And I let them live
Inside my soul
Within my being
And I know...
I will die when I die
In the comfort of my bed
But they will live forever
So why is it that when I'm asked about them
My strength betrays me
I weep
I hear thousands of mothers of massacred children scream
I hear their anguish cries
And feel as though I have returned to Gaza... alone!

Did I really return from exile?
To look through the rubble
For my family
Is this Gaza?
Or just a dream...hallucinations?
Thirty years have passed in exile,
Thirty years...
I have buried friends,
And I thought soon my friends would bury me
So how did I live for such a long time?
How did the bullets ignore me?
...And the hanging robes
...And the fire
How did they all miss me?
I pray to your holy face
That I awake from this nightmare
And return to my insanity
Your sweet tenderness...
I have returned
Beautify yourself like a bride
Decorate your palms with Henna,
Your eyes with kohol
Take me into your arms
Don’t say I’ve grown too old
Here I am,
Hiding my grey hair from your eyes
Ashamed.

The invaders are tired
But I am not tired
For who can count the waves
As if I'm wearing the wide pants of a peasant
I am dancing Debka
As I watch the boats of the crusaders retreat
As if I have cut off the noses of the first wave
Of Tatars
As if I've outsmarted the wickedness of the mighty
Do invaders leave anything other than their skulls
So shut the gates
Smile
Let the oranges radiate in the groves
The oil run in the olives
The wheat become more golden
The Palestinian sit straight
On his horse.
THE INK FLOWER IS BLACK

In loving memory of Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali

The hen-bell flower blossomed
The lovers were intoxicated
Her breasts...a pair from heaven
His heart gave in to the seduction
He wore his blood
A wedding gown
The ground where he collapsed
Was once green
But after the caress
It became as red...as a rose

The ink flower is black
He shapes it with his fingers
A bee...
A palm tree...
A young girl on horseback
A planet retuning from the past
A ball of fire
Embracing the dry and the barren
Turning the earth into a flame
And pillars of smoke
How wide is our vision
How long our yearning
How one dot of ink
Can reach into our depth
A thin bud that cannot see
Wrapping itself
Like a robe around our necks

Naji closed his eyes
And rested
But hanthalah cannot rest
Hanthalah is covered with wounds
He laments his stolen land
Hanthalah holds his raggedy tent
Against the wind
Does he feel pain?
Does he smile?
He walks
Proud
In the streets of the camp
Was he in the valley of Bysan
Planting and plowing
Was he in Gaza
Dancing Debka at a wedding
Was he in Jerusalem
Ringing the bells for Easter
Was he paying attention
In class to the lesson
There he goes
Spreading his ideas
And teaching us what he learned
There is our nation
In pain
At the moment of birth
Let us now rise from the rubble
And build what they destroyed
Hanthalah raises his two fingers
Signing victory
He calls out
Let us march forward
How did he penetrate
Into our depth
How did we let him
Slowly grow inside of us
He is holding his arms
Behind MY back
He is leaning forward
Into my essence
He accompanies me
And returns to me my dignity
He pins a flower
Into my button hole
Spreading in my horizon
Green fields
And birds that migrate
Away from their nests
Lines
That seem like trees
He gives a child
A stone
He winks at her ‘throw it’
She throws it at a tank
The chains of the tank advance
The book falls out of her hand
Her flesh becomes one with the dirt on the ground
Hanthalah runs to her
Pulls her together
And holds her up in the sky of Palestine
A moon …
The fire begins

Naji is serious … and sarcastic
Sane and crazy
Cries until he laughs
And laughs until he weeps
The flower of ink is black
And that in my mouth
Is not water
I have been troubled since I abandoned silence
And silence is gold
And I excelled at speaking out
And words are of fire
I was playing
But this was no game
When I opened the inkbottle
Inside it I saw a dormant genie
I got nervous
I spilled the ink
My fingers got stained
I wiped them...one stroke
And another
There were streets
One stroke and another
The occupiers came
A crowd of paupers came
To resist
My heart was intoxicated
With pride and joy
I stuttered a little
I rambled a little
Was I aided
Or was I killed
By the alphabets

They burned my mouth with their bullets
The ink filled my veins
And my blood ran in the printers of the press.
THE PIPER

The piper was in love
He suppressed his feelings
And wiped away his tears
He sealed his chest on the tender wound
His heart obeyed
But his pipe didn’t
The pipe let out his torments
Gave away his secrets
Moaned of his pain to the night
A sigh
A tear
A listening ear

They killed the piper
A decade passed
And when the wind seduced the pipe
His fingers moved in the sand.
THE CLIMB

What trees shaken by the wind
What Howdah is wounded of the distance
What boat navigates its way through stormy waters
Slippery robes pulling it into the deep
But it resists
It is my heart that shakes
It is my heart that bleeds
It is my heart that drowns

Allow me to recall
Her face
She is still a child
Her voice
Like the singing of the birds in the garden
When whey drink from the water
Her laughter
Is like the landing of a flock of pigeons
Onto a green filed
Her gasp
The sound of me falling
Off my settle
I pray a hand
Will descend through the thick clouds
To wipe my terrified face
To touch a wound
That flares when the night is silent
Like a wild horse that has never been broken
And who can help the people now?  
Like scum inhabiting the earth  
Digging into the ground to the earth’s placenta  
The parrots teach us how to name defeat  
A victory  
And we bury our necks in the sand  
So the crime can pass

Allow me to recall a wave of her hand  
For I have parted without satisfying my hunger  
And when all her subjects denounced her  
I was called by my name,  
I did not hesitate  
And now I am climbing my road to crucifixion  
So watch me climb  
The wound in my forehead is a smile  
My path is covered  
With laurels and gold
THE LADY

If only your curtain fluttered
As did my heart
When I began to sing
If only my tears
Touched your heart my lady
I wouldn’t be descending this planet tonight
Ostracized...cold...miserable until agony

At times
I defy the mountain
It rests on my back
I rise with the load
Light...I don’t tumble
I ridicule fragile shoulders

At times
I am sliced in halves by a straw
I shatter like a ceramic pot
That fell from the grip
Of a trembling hand

Who will cast me with the rose
Who will cast me with the pointed stone
Here I am performing ablution
With my blood
Preparing for the prayer of passion
I stagger...and collapse
Between the two swards
The wise mind
The crazy heart

At times
I am early
At times
I am late
But I never arrive on time
'The lady waited for ages...then left'
'The lady waited...the lady waited'
'The lady...'
Tonight
I arrive at the exact time
But I am kidnapped by death

All the rivers
Pass through my flesh
I am torn into banks...
Grooves and deltas
Birds store me in their crops
The roots of the forest
Absorb me
My white bones lay
In the belly of the whale
And my spirit
Like a bird
Flutters in darkness
Who else but you
Can gather my pieces
And return to my face
Its features
Who else
But you
My love
The master of this time
The master of all tim
APOLOGY

Your eyes move me
In the morning
In the evening
They take me high
And teach me the names of things
They open doors for me
So I can see all the secrets
I die in their depth
In your overwhelming presence
I weep
Your majesty
I laugh
Like madness
I am astounded by you
You dress me up
In medals of bravery
Then throw me into the mob
Like bait for the lowly and vulgar
You undress me
Like you do your sward
You wound me
And wound by me
I radiate while I bleed
I quench the thirst of this earth
So roses can yield roses
And buckthorns can yield buckthorns

My love
My written fate
If only you...if only I...
But you ... I...
I am anchored into the desert
Alone in my exile
I pray uttering your name
The intense heat subsides
The sun becomes a cloud
A pigeon falls into my palm
It carries a sign
A branch becomes green
As the fertile wind of the earth blows.
YOU'RE LATE

You are late
I called for you
Since it began raining
At the beginning of the night
I roamed the cafes and the streets
My hair wet
Panting behind you
Like a stray cat

You are late
The patrons at the bar persist
“Are you alone?”
My sharp stare
Slaps them
You are late
In the corner
A passionate woman
Looks like a sunflower
Turns to her lover and whispers in his ears
He nods
Wrapped in ecstasy they leave
Surrounded by the scent of the promising night
You're late
The bar is desolate
Sadness sprouts off the marble tables
Like a willow tree
Deserted by the birds
I collapse
I shiver in the cold breeze

You are late
The rude barman came back
For the thousandth time
A smile hanging from his lips
He leans over
“What is the time now?”
“Lady, it is one”

You are late
Never mind
I will gather my things now
Defeated
I will leave quickly
The wind will spread out my hair
And will plant me in the darkness
The wet road
The giant willow
THE CLOWN'S FINAL PERFORMANCE

Suddenly
He was overtaken by tears
When the spectators applauded him
The make up began to melt on his face
His false colors began to fall
The words were lost from his tong
Like a straw in the wind
He trembled
All he could hear
Were the cheers of the audience
Encore...
Encore...
He took off his fool-cap
And hid with it his chickenpox face
He fell sobbing
The spectators drowned in laughter
The curtain fell down
CARNIVAL

Take off your face
Before you enter the ring
The knights of fate
Who were promised
And were defeated
Took off their faces
Like they did their shoes
And left them at the door step
Take off your face
‘But I am not wearing a mask’
Take off your face
‘This is the face I was born with’
‘take off your face
‘I have no other’
‘Take off your face
This is the rule of the game’
The crowd surrounded me
Thousands of hands reached out to me
Touching me
Skinning my face
Down to my neck
They carried me to the grave
And wrote on my gravestone
‘this is the grave of the one faced man
we killed him and didn’t care’. 
YOUR SKY IS BLUE

Your sky is blue
Your sea is blue
Your eyes are like radiance of a holy feast
Inconceivable happiness
Your hands are the paradise of Eden
Bunches of roses and white lilies
Your face
Eternal peace
Like dawn
What glory and elegance
I am astonished by those
Who are not in love with you
For they know not how to love and adore
You are my food along the desolate journey
My water fountain
My vintage wine
My messages to you
Are carried by the flocks of birds
By the ring-doves
You are more precious than any blood
That flowed
From any tear
That dropped
The ravenous has shaken its feathers
From the blood of the murdered
And spread out his wings and hovered
How can we not promise our lives
And pledge to our children that we die
Or see the dawn
Rising from the darkness of the night
In your eyes.
A SONG TO AUSTRALIA

Your stars may be brighter
Your clouds fuller
Your soil made of ambers
Your pebbles of precious stones
Your water may taste like honey
The forests of your eyes may be luscious
Your women may stand proud and tall
With delicate hands and glorious lips

You may be the oasis of our time
Your shadow may stretch further
Than your green horizons....

In you, I may change my youthful habits
The style of my clothes
The food on my table...my drinks
I may change for you all of my friends
The newspapers I am used to
My songs...my books
I may change in you even my tongue
The color of my skin
And more...and more....

But I cannot change my heart
For my heart...
Is unchangeable.

I left my heart...
On the doorsteps of Gaza
An orphan child still in rags

When hungry, he eats bread and thyme
And when he is cold,
He calls out for Palestine
With her eye lashes she wraps him and keeps him warm
He chases a tank with a stone
And draws on the walls of the old city
Legendary love poems
WALTZING MATILDA

There are many cooks
But Matilda’s cooking
Is unmatched
There are many barmaids
But oh the wine from Matilda’s hands…
And there are so many beautiful women
But none with her enchanting glance

After dinner…
Matilda lets down her hair to dance
She raises a storm
Until the nightingales go to sleep
Her fluid waist
In the arms of the prisoners…
Like a water spring
Matilda… take my hand
This land is vast
Viva Australia

The whips transform into flower vines
The clinking of chains
Begin to sound like jewelry chimes
Our yesterday is a dream
Our tomorrow is a mirage
But this is our day now
As we sink into the depth
Of Matilda’s black eyes

We pass the time
Killing kangaroos
Killing aborigines
Matilda turns her face away
“I hate killing” she says
But they made us get used to
all that we hate
They uprooted us from our land
And threw us into this wilderness
Sing for us Matilda
Sing for us
Matilda’s lips begin to move
She sings to the sea
“Take me to where I was a child”
We begin to fly on the wings of the birds
Across the oceans
The islands beneath us appear like dots
There is London
Matilda listens to the beat of the Big Ben

Did she steal one shelling
To deserve being exiled to the end of the earth?
Victoria robbed nations
Stole the joy from the mothers
She was crowned queen over the blacks,
The yellow skinned,
The hungry and the naked
Let Victoria be a queen
But you Matilda
You own my heart
You are the queen of my soul

The sea stretches wide
As wide as my wounds
I tell Matilda
Steal one more shelling
And I will steal another
Let them exile us one more time
"Where to?" she asks
"Maybe back to London" I say
Matilda’s eyes laugh
My heart of stone begins to beat
A Kookaburra laughs from the top of a tree
Matilda embraces me
She murmurs "oh boy!
We were both uprooted from the earth
From a sacred homeland
The arms that sprung you here
Also tossed me this away"
I shout defiant
"But I am an Arab
From the land of the prophets"
I feel ashamed
Of my grandfather's headgear
Of my father's piousness
Matilda says "don't be silly"
I felt cold... trembling
I asked her to come near

*******

I had brothers
They threw me into the well
The caravans carried me to Egypt
Was Egypt the decade of love
Or the illusion of a dream
And where is that woman that taught me to sing
On the eve of eid?

They march with a virgin to sacrifice in the Nile
So the water will overflow
You are my Nile
Let your waves run through me
Until I am one with the seasons
Until the blood circulates in my veins
Life and death
Seven fertile years and seven draughts later
From the beginning of my life
Till the end
I am fearful for you my Egypt
I am fearful for me

Why do the guards fall asleep when the foxes awake?
When the grapes are ready to be picked?

How many years
Must pass?
How many times
The bells must ring in Bethlehem?
How often is a child born
How often is a child crucified
In the arms of his mother
How many times
Must Jerusalem fall?
Must the blood rise and flood into
Churches and mosques
My homeland,
You’ve been lost for 40 years
I am old and still climbing my way
Along the Via Dolorosa
Dragging my tiered steps
On your earth

Oh my homeland
My open wound
How much more blood
Will satisfy your thirst
The tears fall
I scream
Matilda wipes away my tears
And offers me a flower

Written one year after Abdul Karim Sabawi immigrated to Australia in 1981
SATAGRATHYA

I testify
There are no weapons more lethal than yours
No men and horses mightier than yours
And of all those who have occupied my land
Yours is the darkest, most dreadful occupation
You choose to kill
But killing is a parasite
It will eat away your spirit
Take aim
Kill
Until you're exhausted
I am not like you
I won't allow you to stain my soul
And to seduce me into killing you
Three things stop me
My beliefs*, values and heritage
I am not like you
Ignorant
Arrogant of my ignorance
Why not ask the sea waves
Ask the sand
where did the past invaders go?
Visit the museums,
The size of your head is no different to theirs
Neither is the size of your shoes
Nor will your fate be any different
I am not like you
Raised in isolation
In closed communities
Apart from all the others
I am an Arab
My seas are wide open
My sky is without end
With enduring sunshine
I am not looking to eat someone’s food
Or steal someone’s land
I inherited my land
From my father and his ancestors
I inherited all religions
And I pray on Friday, Saturday and on Sunday
I am not like you
Pretending to sit on God’s lap
Carrying a vengeful sword
Starting war after war
My God is in my heart
Light, love and mercy
I walk slowly
I plant a seed for charity
It yields a tree
I dig for water wells with a needle
I build an ark for the survivors
And wait for the rain
Which will bring in the flood
I wait for the breeze of revolution
To come and take away the oppressors
I am in no hurry
The sun that will set today
Will rise again tomorrow
I have patience
I have strength
I have mercy
I have forgiveness
My God is compassion
In his name
I will liberate my land
And all the lands.
I will restore humanity
In the soul of man
I am not like you
So take aim
Kill
Until you're exhausted

*Satyagraha is the Philosophy of nonviolent protest, or passive resistance. Mohandas K. Gandhi introduced it in South Africa (1906) and, from 1917, developed it in India in the period leading up to independence from Britain.
*Islam has strict rules for killing in the battlefield and forbids the intentional targeting of civilians in times of war.
OBSESSION

Your dagger is as sharp
As the edge of a song
When it cuts through me
No one can tell if I'm dancing...
Or staggering

You besiege me
I resist you
I stand firm like a fortress
Only to fall apart
At the first negotiation

You enter inside of me
Then you withdraw
Repeatedly
Every time opening my wounds
My flesh has become a sieve

In the silence of the night
The backs unload their burdens
Weary sides settle on the beds
I rest my head on the night’s shoulder and sleep
Suddenly you prod me
I jump like a stabbed horse
And neigh until the hands of dawn
Wipe your face from my windowpane

Trees yield fruit once a year
Only Gaza’s sycamores yield fruits seven times a year
But you my old thorn tree
You leave your fruits on my table
Each morning
Each evening

We are destined to be lovers
Always we divide our food and drink
At the crossroads
We claim it is the final farewell
But in our hearts we know
We are lying

You hold your breath as you follow me
Tiptoeing on the earth with great care
You don’t want to frighten me
Don’t bother
Your footsteps send sparks in my blood
Like those ignited
When the horses’ hooves strike the rocks
I escape from you to the end of the world
And when I arrive at the place
That nobody has yet discovered
Yours is the first face I find
Should I kill you?
All the oceans in this universe
Will not cleanse your blood from my hands
Your face jumps out at me from the icons
From the old women's prayer beads
From the children's toys
From the eyes of the small birds

You inhabit me like anxiety
See with my eyes
Talk with my tongue
Embrace with my chest the swords of your enemies
And give my back to the daggers of your mercenaries
What kind of ravishment is this
Return my self to me
Or take me away forever

I carry you on my face like a scar
And when I perfect the disguise
You denounce me
The swords leap out from their sheathes
There he is...
There he is...
And the crowd attacks me

I entered a city alone at night
The guards ambushed me
They tore open my chest
This time they didn't take the blackness
They took all of my heart
And left me with only blackness
"Return my heart"
I cried
I went to the tribes for refuge
But they refuse to give me shelter
The hearts of the bests were softened
But not the hearts of my tribe
Is it that easy for your fingers to sneak into my depth
For your hand to wrap around me
And squeeze me like a lemon
Throwing my rind in the street
I ask the passers-by
Who am I
Was I walking thus, and laughing, and talking?
And if this is not me,
Who is this man who stares at me
From the windows of the bars

The feet of the pedestrians kick me like a rag
Until I see the hem of your dress
I wipe my face with it like a child who has found his mother
What kind of a mother are you
I am naked and you are weaving clothes for strangers
I cry from thirst
While your eyes’ smile is a spring of laughter
You open my father’s house to strangers
My arms are too weak
My father’s sward is heavy

The owner of the vineyard chooses his grapes carefully
He matures his best grapes
For his guests for many years
I am sorry my loved ones
I have nothing to vintage for you but my wounds

In your absence you overwhelm me with all this presence
So when can I forget you
And when can I remember you
When I live you in every second
What kind of a cursed bird am I
To sit on the egg of the rukh
Counting the hours anxiously
For the evil bird to hatch

What a disobedient prophet am I
To be so unloved by God

My sins stretch out across the horizon
And my only refuge is the Jaws of a whale

I know that you are my inescapable doom
I know that you take no lesser proof from your lovers
than death
Is that why you ululate in the funerals
Embracing men only when they are corpses
Well, let your face glow now
Your smile radiate your features
You, the most beautiful of all women
My corpse is embellished to meet you
And my funeral is on the way
There is my coffin at the start of the procession
Carried on the shoulders of my seven children
Their heads held high like seven ears of wheat
What can I leave behind for them
that is better than glory
And the road that leads them back to Palestine

Australia 1984
The death machine  
*Ceased to chew and devour*  
The sharks have gone to sleep  
And the whale is napping in the distance  
Intoxicated from the blood of it prey  
Only the wreckage remains  
Above it the seagulls hover  

What did your eyes see  
As the pieces of wood floated  
Above the water  
And you swung to the rhythm of waves  
Between life and death?  
Did you see the coast guards  
Coming closer  
Only to take photos  
Before becoming distant once more?  
No lifesavers were tossed  
The orders are strict  
But our laws  
Permit those drowning  
Along our shores  
To pray  
So let us pray together  
'Our Father in heaven  
To you the glory  
Peace on earth  
And love within us'  

Your wide eyes  
Like a Dahlia flower  
May rest now  
Sink to the bottom  
We will finish the prayer  
'God Save Australia  
And protect our reefs  
From the curse of the drowned  
Amen!'  

Australia February 2014