

Two poems

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May 2025

In a world increasingly hostile towards all that is perceived as 'other', I have often battled with the concept of personal identity and the notion of 'passing', in particular with regards to ethnicity, nationality and immigration status. With the rise of far-right politics globally in recent years, I have been forced outside my relative privilege often, never more so than during the most recent enduring attack of the Israeli regime on Palestine, driven by supremacist ideologies.

These two poems speak to my experience of occupying and responding to the challenging space created when my multiple identities clash with far-right ideas. The first poem (Origin) speaks of resistance to forced identification. In the second (People), in the absence of coercion, I relinquish my identity willingly, but confronting and framing it on my terms.

Origin

You ask me where I'm from.
Brighton, I say,
well, just north of,
to be exact.
That's not what you meant,
but I don't owe you
my provenance to consume
like an imported orange.
peel and segment,
juice spilling
over the vulnerable flesh.
Of all people,
I want to entrust
the complexity of my heritage
least
to those demanding it,
however politely.

People

My people are killing
your people.
And there is nothing
I can do about it.
I go on a solidarity march.
I write to my MP.
I started learning Arabic,
again.

My people are killing
your people.
And there is nothing
I can do apart from
wearing the shame
like the star of David necklace
that I tuck into my shirt,
whispering my heritage.

Neither of us can go back,
and the irony is not lost on me.
You, denied your right of return;
Me, wilfully abandoning my
birthright,
not bearing arms,
but witness
to my people killing
your people.

My mother calls me.
She cries.
We are suffocating,
she tells me,

we are scared to leave the house.
I want to tell her
that when you have no air
in your lungs,
you cannot cry,
you cannot leave a house
that is no longer there.
But I am suffocating, too.
Choking on the bitterness
of my unspoken words.
There is no air in the lungs of
your people.

My people are killing
your people
And there is nothing
I can do about it.
I write to my MP again.
I stopped buying
the hummus that tastes
like home.
Still, the bombs
keep
coming,
killing your people,
killing my people,
killing that childish
two-thousand-year-old hope
of freedom.

I refuse to let my children kill
your children.