

First they send in the girl soldiers.

They look better
—not the soldiers themselves, I mean
no, no; the optics—
than sending even a tiny battalion of boy soldiers
to peel the old woman
off her son's grave.

Ruth Eglash, writing for the Washington Post
Has an article on the rise in the Israeli army
of voluntary orthodox girl recruits:

“Within a few weeks of starting their military service,
many Israeli women head to a tailor
to have their oversize uniforms altered
to be more form-fitting [...and] fashionable.”
Army cum gender equality cum runway.

If you hover over her name,
Ruth Eglash, a helpful little box comes up.
It tells you Ruth is a
“reporter covering [for] Israel
and the Palestinian Territories.”

In other words, colonialism's her beat.
Cuz that's part of how you steal a country, dontcha know,
right from under its indigenous inhabitants' feet:
Proper nouns turned adjective—
Israel as “Israel” is a nation-state,
Palestine, as “territories”, pile
of black caviar on a plate,
ready for eating.

*Have you ever been to territories
in the summer? I hear it's lovely
this time of year!*

Keep up with that kind of thing,
and you'd very likely stand to win
the very khummus out of the bowl
with its traditional blue & white [star of flowers]
motif.

¹ this poem is in response to this video, showing a Palestinian mother attempting to halt the demolition of her son's grave in Al Yusufiyah cemetery in occupied East Jerusalem, to make way for an Israeli theme park planned in its place. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_jGFb3Yyv0

But anyway this isn't a poem about khummus.
It's a poem about the old woman
it took an army of them
to peel off her son's headstone
the better to make way for a Flintstones'
ride in the theme park planned in its place
whose building plans, she
—alone! surrounded by bulldozers & guns—
was delaying manifest
on the holy, holy land
of Proper-Noun Nation-State.

Another article,
kind of about the same thing: shows
a photo, courtesy of the Israeli DEFENSE DEFENSE DEFENSE forces
—as Proper-Noun Nation-State doth consistently, methinks, protest too much—
shows a girl crowned in orange sparks
haloing her face.

A girl
“from a mixed gender
combat unit
us[ing] machinery to reach
missing people
under the rubble.”

Dina Kraft, with a K, Correspondent
On Twitter, @DinaKraft
—coming atcha all the way from Lod, in Proper-Noun Nation-State—
begins her reportage this way:

“Rain is pouring
down and the soldiers in helmets and neon-orange
rescue vests
are covered in mud,
but the search for the missing
under the massive piles of rubble
continues
for the third straight sleepless day.”

It takes Dina Kraft w/ a K
til about the third paragraph
for her to craft this sentence:

“The missing people the soldiers
are trying to rescue
are plastic dolls
and the scenario of [Proper-Noun Nation-State]

being under nationwide, missile attack
only a drill.”

Now, if you already know anything about al-Lydd
—*al-Lydd* is to *Lod* as *hummus* is to *khummus*—
you’ll know it was taken not just with the miracle of words
sublimated into colonial strategy, no no—
but a proper[-Noun] massacre
miracle mission possible
accomplished in a mosque.
But this isn’t a poem about khummus
or plastic dolls
or mosque massacres
or people shot dead in their hundreds, praying
an entire village, in [insert territory name].

It’s a poem about the old woman
it took an army of them
to peel off her son’s gravestone
to raze the way
for God’s Chosen Proper-Noun children
to play.

*It’s a well-known fact
about people from territories,
that the mothers
—having too many of them like sons—
just don’t care about their kids,
according to what the settler-townies
from Crown Heights, Brooklyn,
have to tell you—
a common rhetoric
among Proper-Noun Emigré Subjects
of Proper-Noun Nation-State.*

Why else do they send them off to Khamas then, why?

Why else valorize their lifting stone against tank
baby faces eye-level with the tread?

Why do so many ululate like it’s a wedding
when their daughters and sons return to them
as stillness?
As future soil for olive harvest?
As future soil for trees?
Trees so ancient and deeply rooted,
they transmogrify loose earth into ground?

There's a book everybody read that I never did,
all about trees.
How, they speak a secret language.
How, scaled to the eye of God, they are
as interconnected as mycelium.

Another article I half-read one time
—corporate time theft, they call it,
when you read about injustice unfolding
on the job—
that said that if you approach a plant
with even just the *intention* of cutting,
it releases a stress hormone
detectable in the lungs of its leaves.

The thing about life is it gives you about a million metaphors:
feast on a platter big as the world.
It's cheating, really—a poet barely even has to look.

Cuz now I could say this poem
is about how the olive trees in Palestine
have been communing with one another in the language
of centuries;
that they are older than the Washington Post.
That they know & remember,
the name of the soil that fixes them
remembrance as nitrogen & phosphate nourishment through the earth.

Or I could say that this poem
is about witness:
that bark & branches bristle
with eyes
from the river to the sea.

Or I could say this poem
is about a people
so unbelievably lost & lonely
in the desert
they'll spend three days unearthing humanoid plastic,
all of it without sleep.

But this poem isn't about humanoid plastic.

It's about that old woman, rooted so it took an army
to peel her off her son's grave,
an army to knock her off her feet.
Did she learn it, all this

resilience
directly from the trees?

It took an army of them, I tell you,
and that's not even a metaphor.
You can watch the video yourself.
For the purposes of this poem
here's a quick summary
of the rest of it I'd started to tell.

Two soldiers have hold of her;
a girl one and a boy.
They pull with their whole bodies
throwing their full weight away from her
like it's a game of tug-of-war.
There's another effortless metaphor for you:
The Olympic Games in Palestine
will be televised! Except here the referees
decide the score.

They tug & tug & just can't move her.
They tug & tug but she's firmly latched.
An arm clad all in black hugs the grave
in steadfast embrace & holds onto its side,
all granite.

They call for reinforcements.
Reinforcements are sent in.
Another girl soldier, two boy soldiers,
rifles slung across their shoulders
all of them well-equipped
bullet-proof vests over Midas-touched chests
five of them now, against one.

Four Proper-Noun soldiers in combat
vests, boots & guns, and the last of them
—half the OG battalion—
wears, on his hip, a pistol, and a smart
button-down shirt in corporate pastel baby blue.

They tug & tug & just can't move her.
They tug & tug but she's firmly latched.
An arm clad all in black hugs the grave
in steadfast embrace & holds onto its side,
all granite.

They tread on earth teeming
with the dead, returning.
Trample it for future
laughter of their kids.
I wonder idly if the sand was hot that day.
If the woman's heart wasn't the only thing burning
that blighted bright bulldozer of a day.

One of them grabs at her armpit and pulls,
the other makes a vice around her elbow.
Strategy being: disable the joints of her limbs.
One of the girl ones traverses the grave
to come out on the other side of death
all to claw at the woman's hand, fused to granite,
desperate that the mother release her grip.

It is objectively amazing, I tell you.
Objectively amazing: five against one.
Objectively amazing: one weaponized hand fused to History etched in granite.
Objectively amazing: all the rest with guns.

Do soldiers get overtime, I wonder,
in that military-industrial complex?
I think about what if their shift was ending
and the woman's grip still a vice, steel.
Are there timesheets to report it?
Do they need, from someone more senior
a signature or sign-off, some big check?
Time & a half, to erase the past?

I don't know anything about her, or her son.
But I know most of his name.
While mourning him newly they'd carved it in stone;
Muslims don't let our dead grow cold,
once having lived and been loved.
We bury with the flush of living
red on our departed's cheeks;
before the bluing of the body
before stagnation of the blood.
Except sometimes when the corpses are kept
by the Proper-Noun army,
in the Proper-Noun open-air mortuary
that is the Proper-Noun Nation-State
they've sworn to protect.

How is it, that Zionism has so faithfully replicated it,
when Jews don't even believe in Hell?

His name is علاء محمد سليمان نوفل نبابته².

The patronymics of his name older
than the age of Proper-Noun Nation-State.
Say it: *Alaa* meaning: heights unreachable.
I'll admit I'm guessing at the Muhammad part;
all I can see's the "M,"
though statistically speaking, it's a fair bet.

But if it is Muhammad, here's life again serving metaphor:
acres of arboretums blood red with low-hanging fruit.
Cuz, get this: It's the most common boy name
in Proper-Noun Nation-State!
The name of our prophet, peace & God's blessings
rain upon his namesakes before him.
Not that they ever publish that in the lists.
Zionism is like that, strangely literal.
Literal erasure, from the public record.
Literal erasure, from the face of the earth.
Literal theft of graveyards of memory,
returning.
Literal refusal, to say their names.
Though the same literalists will conflate Zionism with Judaism,
for convenient, figurative, plastic, PR clay.

In what world would it be possible,
to peel a white woman off like that?
From her own son's headstone?
His defiled future theme-park grave?
For five against one
to still her joints from bending?—
Fulcrum that could move the world.

That's the thing though about white supremacy:
putrid, ancient, enduring alchemy
turning brutality borne from "I want what you have."
into God's own manifest destiny.

Umm Alaa³ born branded,
Alaa too therefore, by literal extension,
blue baby
umbilicus wrapped around the throat.

² Alaa Muhammad Suleiman Nofal Nababteh
[This is the author's transcription of the name in English; the family might spell it differently.]

³ Mother of Alaa.

Oh! Would that you were not born Arab, ya Umm Alaa!
Would that you'd never blessed his name in prayer, Muhammad, إكخاتم الأنبياء⁴

Would that you were a Rachel
or a Sarah
or a Shani
or a Hannah
or a Rita
or a Tal
or a Rebecca
or a Shira
or a Mira
or a Maya
or an Aviva
or a Ruchul!

Then, they'd say your name!

Would that you'd been among God's children,
chosen by want of melanin
white devil with an appetite for war!

Would that you spoke, ya Umm Alaa,
an appropriated kind of Arabic, a different flavor of *kb*.

Not *kb* like خير, for goodness.

Not *kb* like خالد, for eternal.

Not *kb* like constant friend & companion, خليل.

Not *kb* like خليهم! ها يروحوا فين من الزمن، والأيام اللي جايه كثير⁵

But *kb* like Khamas,

kb like khummus

kb like khagha⁶

kb like khhhhhhhh-tfffffffff!

Take that, Umm Alaa,
for holy water!

Irrigate with it your dead son's desecrated grave.

⁴ "The final prophet"; one of the epithets given the Prophet Muhammad.

⁵ "Let them! Where will they go to escape Time, with so many tomorrows are coming?"

⁶ Mispronunciation of the Arabic word for "shit," as appropriated and used in everyday Hebrew.