

fall seventeen

Dear Readers of Aftab,

Aftab's history has been one of relentless strife. Over the years, the magazine has resurrected itself, each time promising to kindle the spark of its creativity. Like its contributors, Aftab has scoured every creative corner to call home. In the end, we cannot "fit" anywhere. And perhaps this is the most frustrating rite of art. But we at Aftab take pride in this friction.

Enclosed you will find words gnashing against the pages, grazing your fingertips with haunting scars. You may find your heart stained with watermarks of the printed images. At once chaotic and serene, these pieces capture raw emotions of this harsh, chimeric world, and attempt to mold them into a morsel that allows the mind to ruminate on these experiences wholly.

The intention of this year's executive board is to go back to our roots. Our namesake, which stems from Farsi, signifies sunlight. This issue, like every issue of Aftab sheds light on the work of artists, poets, photographers, and writers that may find themselves without a garden for their work to flourish in.

We present to you narratives of identity and explorations of culture, each gently plucked from our brave and talented contributors. Their stories, we hope, will illuminate not only discussions of art, but also foster recognition and appreciation for experiences of all kinds.

Please enjoy the Fall 2017 edition of Aftab, in all of its misfit glory.

- Hajra Jamal Editor in Chief

Cover photo by Syed Husain

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Mine

For once in my life -Isn't that a funny phrase? For once in my life As if all my 19 years of living Led up to me saying "for once in my life" because 19 years 6,395+ amount of days only did I do what I did once. Now what did I do you ask? I did what I've never done before.

I spoke.

And now that I've spoken I'll never have to speak again.

- Khadijah Iqbal

7

Samma

Royal March

I woke with multiplying fears and passions, escaping the sinister comfort to join the promising steps of the marchers. To join their voices as they streamlined in perfect formation to bridge the gap between two worlds. Dust encapsulated the floating figures within my mind, and I was drawn into reveries of freedom. My father laced his shoes with ferocious zeal, and my mother handed us refreshing smoothies, the ice lulling the sharp tang of raspberries. We matched the sunrise and we set out to vanquish horizons.

And we began. As I glanced around, colorful expressions filled the faces that surrounded me. We were all foolish. Unrealistically optimistic for change that we felt was imminent. And so we leapt into the streets, our hearts in our hands, and we dove dauntlessly toward sunkissed pavement. Our journey was silent, aside from the scrape of stones under each step. Gazes bore through the clouds of dust that rose with each movement forward. Dust coaxed tears out the edges of our eyes, united with those of hope and anger.

The silence between each body twisted into links, and we were chained to each other. The sign for the bridge approached and the cool water drifted calmly under Edmund Pettus and refueled our confidence. And as we conquered yet another curve, we saw them in the distance. Standing tall and solemn our expressions mirrored each other. Our arms dangled at our sides, fists clenched around peace that threatened to escape with each passing step. It was a short distance but jaded time laced itself in between our footsteps and the quiet slow motion enveloped us in its surreal waves. And then a scream ripped through the water. Cutting through the comfort and credence. Cutting through the murky glass screens of those that watched. We could see them charging, their footsteps approaching quicker and quicker, the fury kicking up dust faster and faster, clouding our convictions and tight uncertainty approached us with a tinge of despair. And the derealization settled in and careened through our bodies, and the chains melted until the burning metal branded our skin. And then it stopped.

I was on the ground and streaks of blue and purple decorated my body and vision. The red of sweet fruits was coughed up on the concrete, and I was sewed into an open wound. I laid my head on the pavement, red seeping from under my hair. The world greeted me sideways. I couldn't right it.

Couldn't Be

But he couldn't be a terrorist right!

58 die and he's not a terrorist Headlines will call him a grandfather The audience will awe- he has a family

But so do I

But instead of holding hands before dinner We look down and stay bismillah illrahman ilrahem In the name of God the most gracious and merciful But mercy only comes in shortsleeves and shorts Not long sleeves and hijabs

The headlines won't call him a terrorist He'll be called a lone wolf - aw, he's lonely

But so am I Taking the blame alone Because apparently white isn't scary White is too pure Color is too dirty

And maybe Maybe it is because I find my fingers are stained with ink from every newspaper Stained with stereotypes And I can't scrub off terrorist no matter how hard I rub Yet those same headlines that called us terrorists will call him troubled

It's funny

because troubled and terrorist are comprised of the same 4 letters but one is 4 you and one is for me And here I am a subtitle, just another name screaming for attention, but I'm too small and your eyes skim right By: me And for so long i have accepted being a subtitle holding up the weight of headlines But when do we realize each headline is out of line? that each line is a filler A distraction When will we follow the line and get to the point And for how long do i have to wait at the back of line until it's my turn to speak How long do I have to wait for a comma, like charlottesville or Las Vegas to make you pause And think And just like that spit you hack up as I pass you on the sidewalk Each day I will leave the back of the line with nothing but leftover words swirling in the back of my throat, But I am done being shoved into take out boxes I am done swallowing my anger I want to take out this box I have been living in and rip off this label that has stained my identity

And while I have a gun aimed at my head

While I have white men in white cars in white button ups in a big white house praying for the death of my faith All he will have is excuses pinned to his But I will not be pinned down by hatred because the only pins i will allow to hold me together are the ones that graze my hijab

Either way

He will be named mentally ill But how can he be when I'm the only one who's sick Sick of being chased down

And when they say walk a mile in my shoes How can I? if yours are cushioned And i'm running barefoot I've spent my whole life bare I was taught to work twice as hard to have the bare minimum Yet I always find myself inches away And when you scream out your black mercedes and tell me to run back home how am i supposed to run across a sea if cloth is all you see

How can I run on asphalt if it'll never be your fault but always be my fault It gives me hope that gravel comes from a rock There has to be something concrete Something at the bottom of this Because in a world with no sidewalks laid out for people like me We can't walk So we run

ISTIMUE PLL.

And when I asked God for a sign. I realized it was right in me the whole time Because everyday I wake up And have one more reason to breathe Taking in (breathe) is my sign Because in order to take you out I must take in And I won't stop inhaling until I run right into truth

Because even white lies have to stop to take a breathe White will never be spotless A lack of color doesn't mean a lack of existence And when white lies trip, I'll be there to catch the hiccup And I'll look up and exhale because I won't need to run

Anymore

- Aya Ouda

Photo by Mariam Munawar

Photo by Muhammad Joyo 13

Museum

As porcelain and stone we stood upon glass over water My white fingers made to curve towards Your carved grey smile.

Where the only sound is greed and the only clock is light and pillars of ivory marble glow.

Straight teeth and full pockets replace the red hands that sculpted us.

My curved whited hands falter Your carved grey smilk fractures

But tourists don't like tears.

Laughter is as brittle as the glass beneath us which shatters with a crash that echoes above in an ebony alarm.

The pockets lighten The water carries All traces of porcelain and stone away.

Until the only sound is greed and the only clock is light and pillars of ivory marble glow.

- Isha Fazili

Photo by Yahya Khan

Crash

Eleni

A collision of hope and uncertainty gnawed at my stomach. Would I find a sympathetic woman or a cold, distant one on the other end of the telephone? I hoped that Calliope would understand, but she was unpredictable as ever. I counted the rings.

Ring. Ring. Ring. Ring. She picked up on sixth one.

"Hello?" The brilliant softness of her voice was so familiar. I found myself in her embrace, in her laughter, in our past, present and future all at once.

I'd only ever known two worlds, our block, and my yiayia's house. Calliope's voice sent me back to both of them. Now, one of my worlds was disappearing, and the only one who might understand was Calliope. After all, had this island not broken her own heart, years and years ago?

"Oh, I'm so sorry." She answered when I told her. My grandmother's house has burned to the ground. There was a hesitant sadness in her voice. Then she said;

"Eleni, I don't think we should talk about this."

"Please."

She didn't say anything for a while.

"Well, how many times have I moved?" she'd finally asked. I paused.

"I can't remember." I answered

"Do I cry every time I leave somewhere?" she'd asked.

"You're a pro at crying on public transportation and arriving somewhere new like your heart hasn't just broken." I answered.

"Fair point. Not the one I'm getting at."

"I know. I know." I sighed. "You move so often you can't remember your address half the time."

"And I'm perfectly happy."

"Are you!" I prodded.

"You and your family are happy and healthy and you'll make plenty of new memories in the new house. That's all that matters." She said. Cold as ever.

I sighed again. "You don't get it. You're just a nomad. You know how much I love that house and this place and everything I've had here. You've already left it all."

She fell silent.

"I just don't think you should be so torn up over it. It's just four walls." But she was lying. I could hear it in her voice. I grew angry with her again, and hung up.

~

Calliope

Eleni's father and my father hailed from the same Greek island. They grew up together, lost touch and incidentally ended up raising the two of us down the street from each other. I remember I found her so captivating when we first met. We were just kids, lost in childhood. Close as sisters. Both half American, half Greek, we'd spend the year in our little hometown on the East coast. She'd leave for the summer returning to her yiayia's house on the island.

"You're so lucky. Take me with you. Take me to Greece." I'd tell her. My father's parents had died long before I was born and we never returned.

She'd laugh. "One day you'll come. You'll see my yiayia's house. Eat her food. See our beach. You'll see it all. Then, maybe you'll understand."

~ Eleni

Sundays and summer were the only times I truly felt Greek. We'd go to a Greek church. We'd go home and eat Greek foods. The rest of the week, we were American. The rest of the year, we were American. My mother used to teach Calliope and I to bake on Sundays, when we would return home from church. Most often, we'd make baklava, the three of spending all of Sunday in the kitchen together.

My mother would sing as we worked:

Eho monaha mia kardia Ke pos na tin miraso Apo ton ena ton kaimo Ston allo na peraso

Dio kardies apopse m' ankaliazune

Dio agapes, dio foties Pirkagies anavun na me kapsune Dio parapona, dio maties

Eho monaha mia kardia Se pia na tin hariso Pia apo tis dio na mpi mprosta Ke pia n' afiso piso

> I have only one heart and how to share it From one longing pass to another

Two hearts hold me tonight two hearts, two fires Fires light up to burn me two complaints, two looks

I have only one heart to whom shall I give away Which one from the two must be upfront and which one shall I leave behind

Standing at the counter, one girl to her right, and one to her left, Calliope and I would sing alongside her, memorizing the music that filled the sunlit kitchen. My mother used to say after singing that song; "I have two hearts, one is here, and one is there." The baklava would bake for just over an hour, and while it browned my mother would teach us syrtos, the greek folk dances she had danced when she was growing up. Often my father would come watch us from the doorway, clapping when we curtsied, losing our balance and falling into each other, giggling. At sundown, I would run to fetch my parents, and our two families would bow our heads in grace before sharing a meal. Calliope and I would rush through dinner; eager to perform the dances we had learned for our parents. One evening they joined in, both generations circling counterclockwise around the room until it was time to go to sleep. That was almost twenty years ago. Eleni

The summer before we left for college, I brought Calliope with me to our island for the first time. I had told my grandmother that Calliope's favorite dish was the one we made together every Sunday, baklava. My grandmother had baked one to celebrate our arrival, and upon entering the house, we fell into its scent. Calliope had smiled at me upon recognition of the smell. She'd looked at me with one of those big, goofy smiles. I can still picture her standing at the kitchen counter, eating baklava straight from the dish, the sound of the sea coming in from the open window and my grandmother sitting at the kitchen table, amused by the strange girl I had brought into her home for the summer.

We spent summer days by the ocean and summer nights in the city, dancing with the other Greek and Greek-Americans who were happy to rediscover home for a summer. Calliope fell in love with the island. "I never want to leave," she told me at the end of the summer. "I'll come back with you forever."

We returned to our island every summer together until we became young women, finished secondary and graduate degrees, ready to take on the "real world". And then there was the last summer. The summer her first love had died. It was the summer my grandmother sat Calliope and I down and told us that the house would be ours come the end of her life. It was the first summer I felt a sense of fleeting time. The first summer I realized that maybe the return home had an expiration date.

Calliope

Eleni called often the first few months after he died. I answered infrequently. I left the island as soon as the doctors said I was healthy enough to take a plane. I flew to Paris and rented a tiny apartment. She called and asked questions I didn't know the answers to. What will you do now? How do you feel? Will you come back to America soon?

I worked in a flower shop, making just enough money to pay the rent and then some. When I wasn't working, I did all of the things he and I had planned to do together. I roamed museums. I sat in Luxemburg gardens and read. I travelled to the coast on the weekends, visiting small towns. I imagined him beside me.

I stopped cooking. I ate very little. I ignored calls. I made friends, but

I cancelled almost all plans to see them. I bought records after record and lay on my bed in my studio, listening. I was very much alone during that time, accompanied only by my books and by my music.

Eleni

The winter after he died I went to see Calliope in Paris. She had gone quiet, and lost weight. Her already slim figure was now too thin for comfort. I could feel the bones of her small frame when I embraced her. I found her studio piled high with books and records, filled with flowers. The cousins on the island had called to say that my yiayia had died. It was a week before Christmas. It was a grey Paris day, and we were walking along the quais when I told her. I asked her if she would come back to the island with me. As she had promised, my yiayia had left the house to both Calliope and I. I wanted her to come with me to sort through the things. To decide what to do with the house. To mourn together. But Calliope refused. "I never want to hear about that place again, Eleni. That house is yours now, not ours." I knew there would be no further discussions. Not now, not ever.

Calliope

Despite all of my efforts, I grew fond of the Paris. I grew fond of the customers who had become my friends, and fond of the grey skies that plagued the city in the winter, fond of the tender autumns, fond of the cold springs, fond of summers spent by the sea to escape the dreadful summer heat. The realization of my affinity for a place crept up on me one spring day, as I spoke to my mother on the telephone. "The gardens are so beautiful when the flowers are in bloom. I do wish you could see them." I heard myself telling her. Panic crept into me. Attachment was far too familiar, but his loss still stung. So I left.

Eleni

I could never keep track of where Calliope was. She always wrote letters. That was her one constant.

She made homes out of people, over and over and over again. Travelling for work, staying in one city for a few months at a time, a year, longest. The return address on the top left corner of the envelopes was always changing. She would write to me about her research, the book she was working on, the journal she would be published in next. She'd tell me about the people she'd met, the friends she'd made. Her loves.

The year my yiayia passed was the year I returned to our island, and never left. I married and had children, raised them in my yiayia's house. When I answered he letters, I'd try to write to her about my life. My children, my wife, my work. Tell me about you, but not the island, she'd say.

The last time I saw her, I showed her a photo of my family on the beach on the island. The white sand, the turquoise water and the cliffs stretching behind us. "They're beautiful" she'd said, looking at the children. "Beautiful."

I could see her eyes soften in recognition of the colors of the ocean, her eyebrows furrow, recalling her past. She looked away.

"Show me pictures from your vacation to India now" she'd smiled.

Calliope

Eleni lived in the place I dreamed of every night. I dreamed in the hues of the ocean. Of the blue water, the colored homes, the white churches, the water lapping at the boulders covered in deep green. I dreamed of her yiayia, of the neighbors, of the weddings, the friends, the old women who taught me to sew, the fishermen by the sea, the families at the market. The island was my true love. Tainted by death. She lived in a place I could never return to. My knees went weak at the thought.

You

You could never get her to stay. You could never get her to leave. She was always leaving, always going, always running.

But when you were with her you felt like she was all your own. All skin and skin and skin and she was never going to go. You knew better. She'd be gone in the blink of an eye. But you never talked about it. It was always about right now. About tomorrow. About this weekend, maybe.

She'd read books and tell you about their characters, their places, their stories. You found a little bit of her in every single place and character she loved. Her eyes danced when she told you about them. "He lives in Norway. On a canal. His house is pink. And he writes about his country." And you could see her then, vaguely, at some point in the horizon, at some point in the future, in a pink house in Norway, writing.

> "What happened when you left Costa Rica?" you ask her. She tells you: she just got up and left one day. After months. "I was

staying at some guys guest house and he took me on a hike the very first Saturday morning, and after that day I never slept in the guest house again. But then I finished my work. I kissed him goodbye. I caught the next plane out. That was it."

It will come, you know. You have to know. She will finish her work. She will kiss you goodbye. Disappear. This is not a secret. She does not try to keep it from you. Her habits of fleeing. It is a harsh truth to swallow. It burns on the way down. Sometimes, you want to ask her to stay.

You want to say "Take me with you. Whatever comes next. Wherever comes next." But you know. She'd be gone the next day.

Calliope

Eleni was my only true home. I returned to her in waves. She was the one I always came back to. Crashed into. There was something so beautiful about the way we loved. I would try to stray. Try to leave. Never succeed.

Eleni

I wrote to her that I was with child. My fourth.

~

Calliope

I dreamt of my mother, pregnant with my youngest sister, on our island. Radiant in our sunlit kitchen. Laughing by the ocean. Dancing with my father, her pregnant stomach creating a space between the two of them.

Eleni

I wrote to her about the my oldest son's soccer final. He scored the winning goal. The pride of the island. The happiest evening of the summer. \sim

Calliope

I dreamt of him, tall and thin, a swagger in his step. Running across the field. Collapsing into a pile of happy teammates. The smiles, the singing, the celebrations.

Eleni

I sent her a photo of my nieces wedding. My red dress flowing in the light evening breeze, a candlelit evening. I am laughing in the photograph, my wife and my children by my side.

Calliope

I dreamt of the last wedding. Dancing in his arms. My dress. My long hair, blown by the wind into his eyes. Our escape to the ocean on his motorcycle. The screech of the tires. The sounds of the waves crashing onto the shore. The sounds of the bike crashing into the car. The beeping at the hospital. His cold hands. His bruised chest. The flatline. The last flight away from the island.

Eleni

There is no return address on her last letter. I never hear from her again.

- Anaïs Kessler

Photo by Syed Husain ×...



Fear of the Warrior

Your statute lurks in the darkness I cannot see you, but I know you are there Your spirit speaks to the fear that I know you know I feel

> As you stand like a warrior in a darkness that haunts me

I know that I must run to your shield in order for it to protect me

I seek your defense in the darkness, As you seek to create the exact darkness to protect me from.

Photo by Saad G. Hasan

- Hina Ahmed

Catalina

She dreams of a confident blue. Not the caesious glow of sandy shallows but the simmering navy of ocean floor. Not a hollow wave or chapped smile but a satin truth that gleams, a tide of laughter that rings, trembling to a bright beating crest of flecked white.

- Isha Fazili

Photo by Syed Husain

Stand

I've found my communities stand by me in times of need. I don't want to talk about politics, but the risks of our inhumanity. The President signed an Executive Order banning seven Muslim-majority countries.

> My motherland, was not on the list and I was relieved, but I am not just Lebanese; I am a piece of the Middle East. praying for my people, trying to inform strangers that we are all equal, regardless of circumstances we cannot control.

We cannot sit by the sidelines, we must speak our minds, think only to better lives. We must stand up for our communities and allies because our oppression is linked.

- m.h.

Emerging Mirrors

Large, hollow eyes protruding out of The boneless face of Boney Bones

Delicately, deteriorating wilted wings of Doveless Doves and their Bloomless Blooms

Helpless to themselves And the disruptive convulsions of The haplessly, helpless Heart

That seeks to claw its way out of locked Chambers of broken glass

The unbroken, broken glass of rhythmically, riddling,

Restless hearts And their aching longings for Rest.

Vibrant, bright eyes Enlivened from a love that lives and a love that grows

Mirroring sullen, dark Faces of the shameful secrets of the heart Darkened with ashes of coal From their hiding Their dull eyes brought Alive by the The presence of the safe sanctuaries Of a beauty that awakens, a beauty that moves A beauty that alters shadowy boxes and their stoic souls

- Hina Ahmed

Lock-less Love, Unlock Me

I hold you here as a hostage to my fears Of being alone

Your dependency on me Locks you in, locks you into my home Locks you into my Heart

Locks you into a love, A locked love Your love is locked

Lock-less love, Come find me

Lock-less love, Un-lock me.



- Hina Ahmed

Photo by Adnan Mutee

Unexplainable Thoughts

Her thoughts are the waves that wash away dreams Thoughts that run deep, deep in the ocean they sleep Darkness that lies under the ocean she cries

She wants to feel peace yet still those thoughts heap Thoughts that leave her, feeling unreal and meek

The sea holds her troubles, her lies and her fears So vast is the ocean, so vast is her dream So vast is her mind, she can't control its divine

She wants to be heard, her life is a blur Her sins are now screaming, they want to be free Each prayer that she whispers, each day that she dreams She waits for each moment to be given what she pleads

Patience is key, she heard from the seas But it's her thoughts that mislead her, they take over with such ease.

- Amira Admani

Original art by Taeesha Muhammad

" There is an unspoken language in being a woman. No matter the origin, there are customs and societal norms that dictate the movement women make."

Lost Love (We Rise)

To listen to the song, visit bit.ly/MikzSong (lyrics)

verse 1: lost love, holding on to you

but I can't seem to let go, even when i want to

for fear of striking your heart,

in the wrong place, in the wrong ways

but.. chorus: hold on cause, we're coming up again

this low will end, and we rise

yeah, we rise

lets talk about lost love

verse 2: sing, lost love, I fret that I've found it

and I'm so worried, about you

and your mess I can see so I say,

don't let it get under your soul because we'll make it out alive

but

chorus: hold on cause, we're coming up again

this low will end, and we rise

we rise

Yeah

outro: <u>hold on cause, we'll c</u>ome up again

this low will end, and we'll rise

Mikaeel Jan

Photo by Abdullah Tahir

Snow White Exists

Tomar nana-bhai mara geche. The words immediately translate in my head. My grandfather is dead. Her face is turning a deeper shade of scarlet. Maybe she will shatter into a million pieces. Crash onto the kitchen floor. Or maybe if your heart gets pulled enough the tear will cause the person to Just vanish. Vanish from sight. I thought my mother would disappear. I couldn't understand how Death could be so Evil. So Selfish. So Ingenious. It knows All. That despite the gun metal streaked oceans that separated me from him The years when I couldn't grasp his slender wrinkled hands Or smell the musty air that lingered behind each of his steps Knowing that somewhere in the world his breath was swirling into my own Connected with me That gave me comfort Strength. But there is nothing in sight but loss. Death took my grandfather. Now It tries to steal away my love, my favorite toy. She already sits there

Missing her pink hued glow. The lively folds of fabric seem to have lost its luster. It's nothing more than a rag now. It shrouds the immobile shell of the captivating woman My mother used to be. My frozen statue of naiveté crumbles. Warm pearls drop down my spotless cheek. I hope she doesn't disappear.

- Farnaz Rezai

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