

Familial Identity Diaspora and Orientation...

III:

“Foreign”

By: Urbi Khan

“And we were foreigners, strangers, that thought differently from the people whose country we had come into without being asked or wanted.”

- Excerpt from, *Light in August*, William Faulkner (1932)

I was born into a nation where people acted the same –
Talked the same –
Looked the same –
And dressed the same.
With a few rare oddities.

City and country – it didn’t make a difference.
It was the Motherland. But then I moved...
To another country, another town, another terrain. With diversity – like Holi.

I was welcomed with open arms.
I was welcomed home.

A few words on a document, declared this foreign land, barren white, my Home.

Suddenly, I moved again from a house in rows to an upscale tower.
The needle could be seen from my bedroom window.

Grade five, grade five. What a time to be alive!
Two more years to go and then I would be in junior high!

Once I entered my new school, I felt a strange feeling.
One that was foreign to me.

Once more I was treading on foreign land. Coming-of-age in a foreign land.
Veni, vidi, vici.

One day, afterschool, I was gathering my belongings in the
mudroom. When I overheard a Black boy by the name of
Kevin, conversing with a group of other yungins of how
all Muslims were *evil*.

Never had I heard such words of bigotry coming from a soul so young ‘n innocent.

This was before “ISIS”. But I knew of 9/11.
I saw it happen from the safety of the Motherland.
And I thought of my Khala, the American, the New Yorker, the Musulman.

Post 9/11 –
I had heard what the Musulman was to people. An apparition. Almost a caricature.

The issue was dealt with. But not solved. I felt cheated and hurt.

Another day, class-time. A read-aloud of the devastating story of Hanna Brady and her suitcase. This was my first time learning about the gas chambers but not of the mass-incarceration of Jews.

A Palestinian boy named Ahmed, raised his hand during the Q and A session. The teacher picked on him.

“My father said that what the Germans did to the Jews was the right thing to do,” he said aloud.

Dead silence. Sweat breaks loose. The teacher confronts. And we carry on, like humans do.

The boy still held his side of the rope and the authority thought it resolved.

I learned about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

That day I learned that hate repeats itself because we never learn.

As I grew older, I learned that the Motherland has struggled forever. A country built on so much bloodshed that it has become numb to its own inner workings. To achieve that so-called “sameness” of my childhood, it had come far. The Motherland is only 46 years old today, born out of hate.

But they’ve moved on, like humans do. To survive.

My barren white Home has tried to hide its blackened past, fueled with tedious hate. Now it is being confronted. A subject to learn and not to be repeated again. My Home is a 150 years old today, born out of hate.

But they’ve moved on, like humans do. To survive.

I don’t blame Kevin or Ahmed for the words they once said. I don’t blame the histories of my identity. But I can’t really say what I felt when I first heard the bitterly spun tales.

Maybe the blame is on the culture. A culture that can be so black and white.

A culture sadly, not so foreign to me or anyone except for the new-born babe who is stepping into Earth now.

A culture of hate and oppression, fear and manipulation – that has been built and treaded on for centuries.

The culture of hate is practised relentlessly.

You just have to turn on the TV.

As a human being – not as a woman, nor a youth, nor a Muslim or any of my other prescribed labels –

I believe that we are not born and bred into hate.

Nor to love.

We are born and bred to survive.

Along the way, we pick up on hate and love.
Some pick hate to survive.
Some pick love to survive.

As the going gets tough, or so do we say.

Life can be seen as being built on blocks. An individual must choose what these blocks can be:

resilient and durable
or
weak and shabby.

My skin remains foreign.
My identity remains foreign.
My name is foreign.
My accent is not foreign.
So, I am not considered an alien.

In this life thus far, I've learned I can be just me, simply. So, I have chosen *love* because it seems like the less tedious choice -
as my durable building blocks,
as my cultural foundation to survive.

- From the bickering mouth of a not-so-foreign foreigner.