

Odkac, Hafso Sheikomar

I remember the smells and sounds
coming from my mother's kitchen,
the food my mother prepared
sambusa, chicken *biryani*, and *odkac*.

I eat and remember my mom
sharing family stories
as she mixed flour with salt
and beef steak with *xawaash*
and cardamom powder,
she spoke of what my grandparents went through
and how hard it was to live
without food and shelter
losing families and relatives
in front of their own eyes.

As she sliced tomatoes, chopped onions,
cut carrots, and minced garlic,
her eyes welled up from
memory and onion
as she recalled how war was in front of them.

Cooking brings out the stories we need
to learn from, as if mixing spice with stories
folds together our life and emotions,
and sharing food together
helps us share life together.

My mother's kitchen is a safe space
to talk about war and death,
to talk about the meaning of sacrifice
and not giving up,
over a full plate of *odkac*.

The Child I Was, Hafso Sheikomar, Somalia

I was the child
who smiled when she flew
from Kenya to Somalia
to meet her sister, brother and grandmother
for the first time.

I was the child
who didn't have many friends
who looked down and spoke in tiny voices
mostly with her brothers.

I was the child
who spent all day crying
when her mother took her to school
because she would rather play with sand
than read or write.

I am the young woman
who feels scared
for the nine-year-old girls
who lost their parents,
who run from men
who force themselves
on these young girls,
and a system that
does not punish the men
for their actions.

I am the young woman
who wants to live a life
without fighting, killing, stealing,
without destroying homes and bodies,
who wants to dream
of children who live in a magical universe
like little children should.

Letter for My Homeland, Afghanistan, Nila Safi

I remember the beautiful sound of *Adhan* (اذان) that I used to hear
five times a day (الله اكبر),

I remember the laughing sound of children in the hallways of apartments,
I remember walking under the long lasting trees
on the sunny days coming back from school,

I remember the sounds of singing birds early in the morning
to awaken us for *Madrassas* (مدرسم),

I remember those days when we used to run away
from the garden after chopping roses,

I remember those cold days when the city used to sleep
under the blanket of snow,

I remember standing in the line for buying fresh Naan (نان)
from the bakery when the winds were blowing,

I remember I was best friends with happiness, shouting with laughter,

I remember the fresh smell after the rain,
as if playing with my best friend, happiness,

I remember never wanting to say goodbye to the heart of Asia,

I remember I carried my beautiful box of memories with me,
I remember my tears writing the story of immigration,
I remember not knowing how much I loved you
until I had to leave you, my homeland.

My Memory Box, Nila Safi

My old box full of memories
tells different stories,
stories which show the beauty of my emotions,
like when I was a little girl playing on the beach
making strong buildings from the soft sand,
or when I was a guardian angel working with my grandpa
under the pink sky to grow Mustard flowers
to give to friends and teachers.

I am still the little girl who carries the fragrance
of my country's soil in my hand,
the little girl who makes utensils
from soil for her dolls.

Now, I am the rainy sky who cries over old memories
all night in the youthful new year,
and I am a fresh new morning
after the dust is cleaned from the air.

I am the music in the air
who makes the trees dance in the winter.
I am the loud waves who play *kabaddi*
with children in the summer.

Inside of my memory box I am
the incomplete puzzle,
who is still looking for missing pieces.
I am an incomplete song
who is still looking for those
missing lyrics.

I Speak for the People of My Country Afghanistan,
Nila Safi

I speak for the women in poverty in my country who are sitting next to *naanwaie*,
the bakery, in their blue chadors hoping for just a piece of naan,

I speak for those children who are collecting plastics
from the side of the road to warm their houses,

I speak for those girls who are not allowed to have an education
because of their gender,

I speak for the old men who sit at the side of the road waiting and waiting
each day in the hope of finding work to bring a piece of bread home,

I speak for those who cannot see their loved ones again,
the ones who never had the chance to say goodbye,
whose loved ones disappeared from bombs or violence on the streets,

I speak for those mothers who are sitting next to the hospital door hoping
for what the doctor will say, longing to hear the words, "don't worry, don't worry,
your child is fine, not hurt in bomb blast,"

I speak for those people in my country who have no one
to ask them if they are alright,

I speak for those who do not believe in humanity anymore
because of today's reality,

And I speak for those who are still hoping for a better tomorrow.

Remembering My Best Friend, Ada Safi, Afghanistan

I remember my friend, Shabnam, my best friend,
My friend who rises like a sun,
My friend who turns boring lessons into fun,
My friend who made me live every moment of my life.

My friend who led me to the beautiful truth,
A truth that makes me love the world and myself,
My friend who flies me through the purple skies of friendship,
My friend that I never wanted to say goodbye to,
My friend that I never wanted to lose.

But, I lost my friend between strangers,
I lost my friend between wars,
I lost my friend between the sound of bombs and hopelessness,
I lost my friend between rules and traditions.

My friend, I miss her more than before,
My friend, my eyes are looking for her more than before,
My friend, my tears are looking for her more than before,
My friend, my heart is saying "PLEASE COME BACK" more than before,
My friend, I never wanted to say goodbye to,
My friend, I never wanted to lose.

My Time, Ada Safi

Ada's note: This is a conversation between me and my cousins. I am talking about how I grew up. And my cousins, Shikab Safi and Muhammad Safi, are talking about their best childhood memories. Their words are in italics.

I am from a kingdom that has no limits, Afghanistan,
I am from a clever king and a benevolent queen who honor me like a princess.

*I can't forget those days of mine in a playground with my friends - a life full of joy,
I can't forget the first bicycle of mine,
which my papa bought with love, not money.*

I am from flying through the blue skies of Kunar
with nothing but freedom in front of me.

*I remember being a king and finding treasures in my home,
treasures that answer my deepest problems.*

My family raised me with love,
not with money.

*I still remember smiling at my childhood,
my memories are the only things from my childhood I could keep.*

I am from the gifts my family gave me, faith and attitude,
a faith that holds every human together,
an attitude that withholds cruelty and spreads kindness.
I am from the gifts my family gave me, traditions and rules
a tradition that dresses you with royalty,
rules that protect you from suffering,
I am a person of free mind,
I am a person of free will.

-Ada Safi

چي هيڅ محدوديت ن لري، افغانه سلطنتان يېم څخه زه د هغه سلطنت
زه د يو هوبنيار پاچا او مهربانه ملکي څخه يم چي ما ته د
شهزادگي په څير درناوی کوي.

زه نشم کولی زما هغه ورځي له خپلو ملگرو سره د لوبې په ډگر کې هيري کړم - له خوښيو ډک
ژوند

زه نشم کولی خپل لومړی بايسکل هير کړم، چي زما پلار په مينه اخیستی و، نه په پیسو

زه د کنړ په نیلي اسمان کې پرواز کوم چي زما په مخ کې له ازادۍ پرته بل څه نشته.

زما په یاد دي چې یو پاچا وم او په خپل کور کې خزاني پیدا کوم
هغه خزاني چې زما ژورې ستونزې ځوابوي.

زما کورنۍ زه په مینه لوی کړم
نه په پیسو.

زه اوس هم د خپل ماشومتوب موسکا یادوم
زما یادونه زما د ماشومتوب څخه یوازینی شیان دي چې زه یې ساتلی شم.

زه د هغو ډالیو څخه یم چې زما کورنۍ ماته راکړې، باور او چلند
داسې عقیده چې هر انسان سره یوځای کوي
داسې چلند چې ظلم لري او مهربانۍ خپروي
زه د هغو ډالیو څخه یم چې زما کورنۍ ماته راکړې، دودونه او قواعد
یو دود چې تاسو د شاهییت سره جامې کوي
هغه قواعد چې تاسو د رنځ څخه ساتي
زه یو ازاد ذهن انجلی یم
زه د آزادي ارادي انجلی یم.