

THE OTHER

I am not your fetishized
commodity Your otherness
personified
Eroticized, homogenized
to obscurity

I am not the East to your
West The Turkish in your
coffee
The Arabian in your Nights
Conquered in your bed

I am not your simplified symbology
of pyramids and camels
Mummified bodies
History's relics

I am not your oriental
fantasy a colonized culture
the submission to your dominance

I am not the margin
defined by your superiority
I am not your pity
I am not your piece of the middle east

I am not a utility
Validated by your expense

I am not your Cleopatra
Your Nefertiti
Your harem queen
I am not the Jasmin to your Aladdin

I am not your white enough to pass
I am not your dark enough to

justify I am not an exotic bird of
paradise

I am: migrant

I am a dichotomy

In botany that means a branch splitting into two equal
parts I hold memories of being whole

of knowing what the answer was when asked 'where are you from?' before
that question became dismantled to accent and hair and complexion

Deconstructed to belonging and becoming

Two answers

One for my voice

Another for my body

The silence before my response

as I grapple with severance and connection

I ask you what you mean by the question

You see, the voice you hear now doesn't speak of
migration modified beyond recognition
alone

it raises no questions beyond British dialect

but then the phone rings

it's my mum

and I answer

we bacalemha bel arabi 3ashan di loghatna

wa saalha heya 3amla eh

we sa3at bansa kalma bel 3arabi wa olha bel englisi

and I slip into this Arabic English accent that I cannot will or
control a remnant of language on my tongue

(Speaks Arabic)

fading

to nothing more

than an extra syllable at the end of my words

I remember the first time I had it pointed out to me

after any trace of accent had been erased
'why do you say...at the end of every word?'
it wasn't a big deal
just something everyone seemed to notice
everyone other than me
til it became all I could hear
in the space where silence should be
is an echo
of a language I rarely speak
but the muscles of my mouth remember
can you hear it? Can you hear it?

I am learning
I am unlearning
I am absorbing
I am adjusting
I am change
I am multiplicity
I am organic
I am synthesized
I am not a fixed point
I am not a singularity
I am not a binary
I am not a colour
I am not a body
I am not a voice

I am not home

Because home became birthplace
a mosaic of fading memories
home became
sensory
a feeling like an exhale
a changing image,
smog filled skylines and treacle traffic
blend with moors and dales
a fleeting sound

uttered by accident
connected by severed ties that still conduct from time to time

Home tells me how much I've changed
asks me where I'm from
although I speak the language, the words don't sound the same
and meaning gets lost in swerved conversations
slips through the gap
between what's said and what's felt
what's known and what remains
Untold

It's easier to tell you who I am
By telling you the things I'm not
I am not inherited belief
I am not my insecurities
I am not habits and needs
I'm not who I was last week
and that's okay

I don't know which box to tick
Ethnicity. Egypt doesn't identify as African, even if I do
And there's no box for Arab or Middle East
so 'other' is the only box I fit into
Other.

I am still coming to terms with a culture I concealed
for the sake of conformity
I am still coming to terms with a culture I embraced without questioning whether or not
it embraced me.
I am still
trying to compose myself
(mix of Arabic and 80's synth music starts)
with melodies of Egypt
and synths of Britain
To build a home from my duality

and live in it (music ends)