

FARGO TBAKHI

Zulum

part i: *gayla khaled and the pfp*

(lights dim. blue. low. sexy. on screen, that image of leila khaled. the one where she looks like a saint. umm kulthum playing, of course.

record scratch. umm kulthum switches to nancy ajram. enter GAYLA KHALED, descending from the top rung of a ladder, in a long coat, carrying a rifle. she finds her way down to the ground, stops underneath the screen, and tries to pose the way Leila Khaled is on screen. she fails. cursing, she takes off her wig and unbuttons her coat to reveal only a jockstrap. and lots of glitter.

GAYLA takes out Foucault's "History of Sexuality" and flips through it.)

GAYLA: Wait a second.

...I can't read.

Not this shit in English, anyway. Here, you have it.

(she throws the book to an audience member. she surveys the audience)

There is a certain kind of bird.

Do you think that he deserved this? Who deserves anything, after all? I don't think that you're listening. *(she pauses, considers.)* Sorry. I was responding to something you *(points to an audience member)* will say in 7 and a half minutes.

Time, you may notice, is ouuuuut of joint- yes, I quote Shakespearrrrrrre. Surprise!

My name is Gayla Khaled. I am an amateur plane hijacker, professional fool, personal queer terrorist. I wear a skin made out of tiny crushed lightbulbs. I have a tongue with a propensity for sneakiness. It sneaks around. I sneak around. I am here on behalf of the PFLP, the Popular Front for the

Liberation of Pleasure. We are in the art (and it is an art, habibi) of decolonizing, abolishing, liberating, postcolonizing, decommodifying revitalizing affecting effecting destabilizing- all those words and terms and jargonizing- pleasure. You know, the kind that's here (*touches ass*) or here (*cheek*) or here (*crotch*) or here (*scalp*.) That pleasure.

I was born in 2167, and I died in 1948. And in the middle I discovered glitter. And I remember, there was this one time- in the 70's, the 2070's, I am on this plane. Flying to Mars. It's carrying all of these white tech CEO's, all of them with their hair in buns, long beards, these little yoga pants. And I've hidden myself in the cargo bay, among all the little crates with their emotional support Alexas, and so I crawl my way out of the bay onto the side of the plane, I clamber onto the wing, like that little *Twilight Zone* creature but fuckable, and I crawl up to the window, you know, shatter it, leap inside, there's organic hummus flying out of the aircraft behind me, I have this gun and I'm waving it around, you know, "EVERYBODY SIT THE FUCK DOWN, I'M IN CHARGE NOW, BABY! POUR ME A MARRRRRRGARITA AND BUCKLE IN! NOW-" and just then one of those white men interrupts me! And he says "Where are you from?" So I say "Ramallah, shit-stain," and all of them in unison click their tongues and shake their heads and they all say, as if they practiced it, like second graders in a school play about Columbus, "It must be so hard there for people like you." So I shoot the roof of the plane and it flies away, and all the CEO's get sucked out into the sky and I sit in first class and order champagne and I watch Keira Knightley be a lovely and strong white lesbian in *Colette*.

That story went on longer than it did the last time. Or the next time. I forget. Anyway. So that's me- a queer terrorist who seems to inspire pity more than fear. But fear when I want pity. And both when I just want a kiss. And I just want to say to you all, I am not a victim nor a threat. I'm a verse.

(suddenly, sharply, cutting off any laughter)

The project of queerness has left my Palestinian siblings and I to die.

Sorry to be so blunt. But I'm not good at being subtle. All the ways you talk about us, our love, our pleasure, turns us into targets. For bullets. Missiles. You know. Those metal cocks too big for me to swallow. We are dying. Everyday. And the way we die becomes another way for us to die. You see? We are written into our stories by other pens. Felt-tipped. We suffer, and then we are written as those who suffer, and our pain becomes drag we can't take off and didn't choose. And I am going to fail in this performance. You won't get it. But I'm going to try and scare you into it. Little punks. Little yuppies. All you nice little Phoenix brunch queers out there afraid of a little extra beard, a little call to prayer interrupting the morning canoodling, a little hijacking and a little tire fire- you better learn to love the terrorist. Because we're not going away. And we're good at digging tunnels, if you catch my drift.

(as she saunters offstage)

God, I'm bad at metaphors. Fucking language. Miserable.

part ii: *the confession of mahmoud ishtiwi*

(on screen,

SCREENSHOT: "The death of Mahmoud Ishtiwi had all the trappings of a telenovela: sex, torture and embezzlement in Gaza's most venerated and secretive institution, the armed wing of Hamas.

Mr. Ishtiwi, 34, was a commander from a storied family of Hamas loyalists who, during the 2014 war with Israel, was responsible for 1,000 fighters and a network of attack tunnels. Last month, his former comrades executed him with three bullets to the chest.

Adding a layer of scandal to the story, he was accused of moral turpitude, by which Hamas meant homosexuality. And there were whispers that he had carved the word "zulum" — wronged — into his body in a desperate kind of last testament.

Qassam officials found a man who claimed he had had sex with Mr. Ishtiwi and provided dates and locations. They concluded that the missing money had been used either to pay for sex or to keep the man quiet. If Israeli intelligence officials knew Mr. Ishtiwi was gay, the officials surmised, perhaps he had given them information in exchange for keeping a secret that, if uncovered, would have made him an outcast in his society.” SCREENSHOT ENDS

in the light of the screen, fargo methodically takes off his gayla khaled finery, slowly stripping to just his underwear. he sits in a chair center stage, his hands behind his back, slumped over.

(lights up to dim wash.)

ISHTIWI: To them, I confess joyfully. I confess: on the third of the month, in my car on the outskirts of the city, it was late at night, we fucked, he and I. I remember al qamar, the moon, and how it spat down cold light onto his bare chest, in our car.

(as ishtiwi speaks this first confession, he gradually extricates himself from the chair, dances, struts, exercises his body in all its faded strength.)

Here, right here, on my thigh where they beat me, he placed his lips. I shuddered, closer to Allah than I have been. He drew his lips up and took me into his mouth. And I drew my keffiyeh over him, protecting him. Like the spider.

During the hijra, when the prophet was fleeing Makkah, he and Abu Bakr Siddiq hid from the Quraysh, just behind them, ready to murder them. The prophet lived on the edge of death. The prophet's body was subject to. And so the two of them, close friends, very close, they hid in a cave. Yet they would have been discovered had it not been for ankabut, for a spider. This spider spun a web over the entrance to the

cave, spun so much web that the Quraysh thought no one could have hidden in this cave, there is so much web- it must have been here for days. And so they move on. And the prophet and Abu Bakr Siddiq slumber in the cave, protected, warm, safe. Close.

I tell this story to my children, nights, when we none of us can sleep. And yes, I confess to my brothers in the revolution, I ran my fingers through his hair, through my own hair. And here, on my wrists, swollen from being suspended, his teeth, and mine too, danced, left little imprints in the skin, I confess I wrapped his hands around my throat while I came, I confess I have killed others, I do confess this all to them, my brothers, my friends in winning us our home back, in protecting him, protecting my wives, my three children, I confess I kissed his nipples and touched his cock. I confess felt as though an angel, I felt as though every village was once again ours in his arms, I felt as though our bodies resurrected from out of the oppressor's jaws. To them, my comrades, I confess this.

(ishitiwi stops moving, stands for a moment staring at the audience, completely still.)

And yet, to you, I confess nothing. To you I refuse my story. I refuse you another weapon against us. If I say to you, yes, I called him ya habibi, yes I called out his name as well as Allah's- if I say this to you, amrikii, terrorists all of you, I kill my people. The moment I tell you yes, I did fuck and was fucked by him, and my brothers, they beat me, they gently inserted three bullets into my chest, martyred me- in this moment I hand you the keys to the missile system, to the drones, to the tanks. You will say:

(ishitiwi stands on the chair, preaches madly.)

“Look at what they do to each other!!! Look at what they do to their queers!!! Do you think they should live??? Do you think they deserve place??? Space??? Movement, water?? Look at what they do to their queers!!! We do not do that to our queers!!! Their queers hide!! They are afraid!!! They

cannot be VISIBLE they ought to be VISIBLE!!! Look at what these things do to each other!! Look at these beasts, this martyr, little Arab monsters. Do you think they deserve life??”

(ishtiwi very slowly sinks back down on the chair. hundreds of scraps of paper advertising HaAguda fall from the ceiling)

My body. My death. My desire.
 My body. My death. My desire.

(lights dim.)

part iii: *fucking, fighting, surviving*

(lights to a warm wash. on screen,

SCREENSHOT: “Qassam officials found a man who claimed he had had sex with Mr. Ishtiwi and provided dates and locations. They concluded that the missing money had been used either to pay for sex or to keep the man quiet. If Israeli intelligence officials knew Mr. Ishtiwi was gay, the officials surmised, perhaps he had given them information in exchange for keeping a secret that, if uncovered, would have made him an outcast in his society.”

performer leaves the chair, puts on a modest outfit. pours a cup of coffee. sips it. quiet. umm kulthum plays, again.)

MAN: There's a certain kind of bird. The galah. Mostly in Australia. The galah bird, he- they are, have been seen, ah. You know. Being homosexual. With each other. These birds, you know, sometimes, they want to- to mount a male bird. And they're a male bird. So they do. And then they don't. Nothing bad happens.

(he pauses. drains the rest of his coffee.)

Yes. So, you know, it has been good the past few- months, few months to have had some more money, alhamdulillah. Hamas, they were generous to me. Did not look me in the eye, no, but gave me money, support. My mother, she is in the hospital now. Taken care of. I have had time to rest, not to get up in the middle of the night and make my way to, to the checkpoint into Israel for work. That is nice. I do not take it lightly. Alhamdulillah.

He was a- had, this- like a lion. Mahmoud. Very big. Loud. So loud, ya allah. I always liked the taste of him. Marlboros. Olives.

To turn him in- was, like a spider bite. Yes. In the hand. I remember his car, in the back alleys, pulling up to me, the window rolling down. His beard. He always paid me before.

When I- you know, I am here, in the apartment here, while my mother is in the hospital, and I scroll through my laptop. Browse, you know. And there is, so much.. so many words. Always, so many words. I do not like words so much.

Mahmoud used to ask me how it felt. How he felt. And I could never answer to his satisfaction. How to put- how to- what is the word for this?

(he caresses his own neck, shudders, takes in a breath. slowly settles back down.)

There is no language for that. No language for the things we do. The man, in Tel Aviv, the one with the organization, tells

me to “come out,” that I am “gay.” And I- to be a thing, this is not good. Be a thing always and forever. Be and not do. Not have. To be so loud. When things get named, get- get worded... then they are away from God. Then they are man-things. Less. Less beautiful.

Why turn in a man you touched? Could have loved?

Because we don't have water. Electricity. Food. Medicine. Because the fighting. Because he wanted me to, his eyes brown as pools of mud, the way he told me that in a world where we were all free, he would cook me meals and give me poppies. Because I have to survive to see that world. Because I touch many people. And I have many meals to cook. To eat. Poppies to find. Birds to envy.

Birds to envy. Yes.

(he coos softly. he has not moved from his seat this whole time. he closes his eyes. the sound of birds slowly begins to play, then more and more join in, and it rises in volume until it is cacophonous. over the bird noises GAYLA KHALED quotes Foucault and Schotten.

GAYLA KHALED (VO):

There is a certain kind of bird.

“And if I don't say what needs to be done, it isn't because I believe there is nothing to be done. On the contrary, I think there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist or escape them. Everything I do is done with the conviction that it may be of use.”

“Today, these queers are Muslims and Arabs; tomorrow it may be somebody else. But it will inevitably be someone. Let's declare that we, too, are queers, bent on the

annihilation of the social order and its ceaseless reproduction of specters of nihilism and death. We choose not to choose empire or the endless futurism of colonial domination. We choose to stand on the side of ‘terrorism.’”

sound abruptly cuts off. lights black out.)