

ABOUT REEM ASSIL

Reem Assil is a Palestinian-Syrian chef and activist, based in Oakland, CA, working at the intersection of food, community, and social justice. She is the founder of nationally-acclaimed Reem's California, an Arab bakery and restaurant that builds community across cultures and experiences through the warmth of Arab bread and hospitality. Reem has garnered an array of top accolades in the culinary world, including James Beard finalist for Outstanding Chef (2022) back to back semifinalist for Best Chef: West (2018-19). Before dedicating herself to a culinary career, Reem spent over a decade as a community and labor organizer, building leadership to have a voice in their jobs and their neighborhoods. Reem is the author of IACP award-winning cookbook *Arabiyya: Recipes from the Life of an Arab in Diaspora* (2022).

ABOUT 18MR

Our Mission: Harnessing the power of the internet, cultural work, and movement building, 18MR grows Asian American political power by educating, mobilizing, and organizing Asian Americans towards taking collective action online and offline.

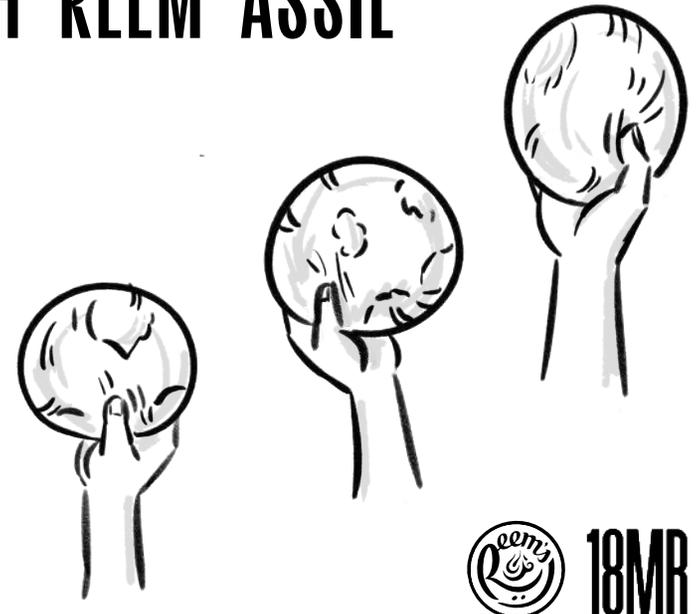
Our Vision: We work within movements for racial justice, abolition, and democracy towards a liberated future for Asian Americans and all marginalized peoples.

Learn more at 18mr.org

ABOUT BRENDA CHI (18MR's Communications Designer)

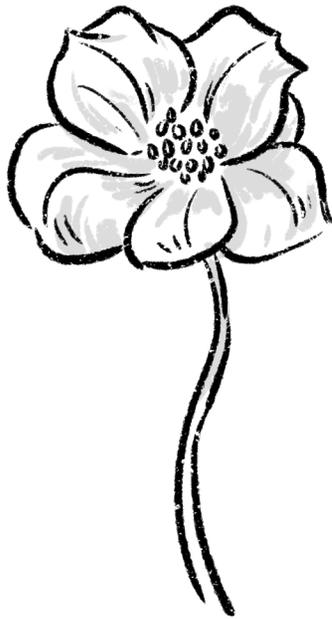
Brenda Chi (she/her) is a queer Chinese-American artist from Los Angeles (Tongva Land), CA. She joined 18MR in 2022 bringing in her decade of experience in entertainment art, apparel, comics and illustration. She hopes to make art that builds community and inspires folks to be part of our fight for liberation.

FOOD IS RESISTANCE: FOR THE LOVE OF BREAD WITH REEM ASSIL



Thank you Reem, for sharing your story with us.

*Written and edited by Reem Assil.
Illustrated and edited by Brenda Chi.*



AS A BAKER,
IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS
THAT I LOVE BREAD.

*our flour and
water in a bowl*



BUT I DIDN'T START OUT AS A BAKER.

→2001←



IN MY FIRST WEEK OF COLLEGE,
9/11 HAPPENED AND THE ANTI-ARAB
FERVOR GREW RAPIDLY.

I FEARED FOR
THE SAFETY OF ARABS
BOTH IN AMERICA AND
IN OUR HOMELANDS.

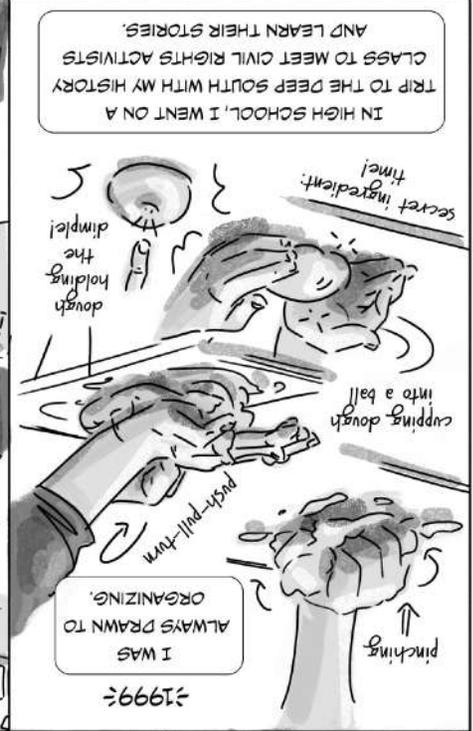
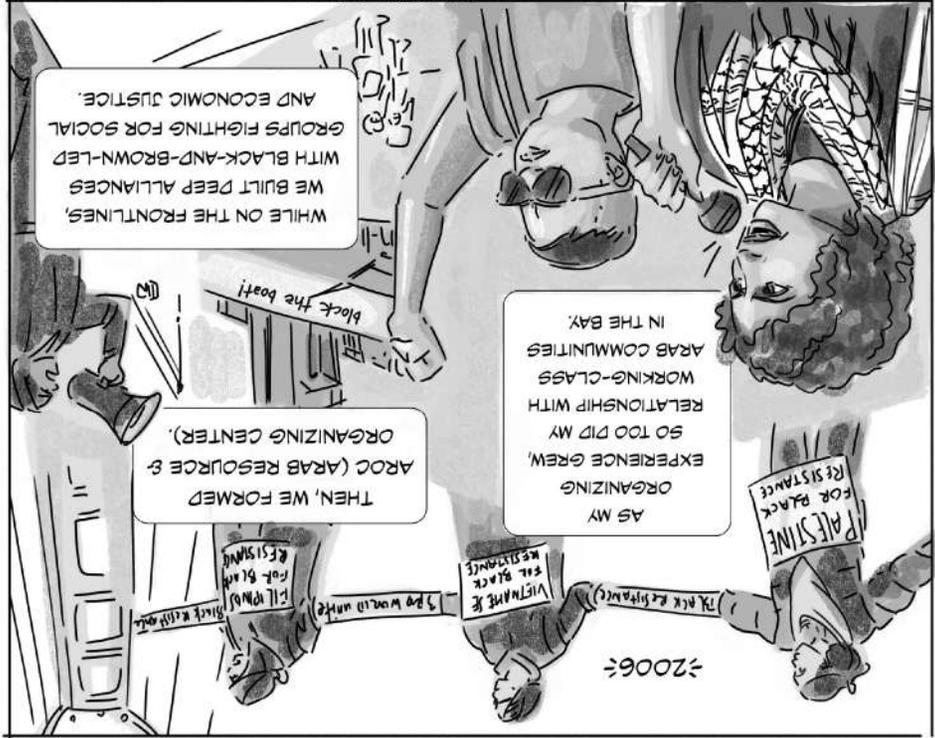


FEELING HELPLESS,
I GREW DEPRESSED
AND DROPPED OUT OF
COLLEGE AND FOUND
MY WAY TO CALIFORNIA.

*mixing to make
that gluten!*



I ENDED UP BUILDING MY OWN
COMMUNITY IN THE BAY AREA OF
ORGANIZERS, CULTURAL WORKERS AND
EDUCATORS CALLING FOR AN END TO
MILITARISM IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND THE
US-LED WAR AND OCCUPATION OF IRAQ.



Divide the prepared risen dough into 10 pieces (about 137 grams each). Shape the pieces into rounds (see page 62), cover with a dry dish towel (or brush the dough with a bit of oil and cover gently with plastic wrap), and let rest for 20 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 550°F. Arrange the oven racks on the upper and lower thirds of the oven; if you are using a baking stone, remove the lower rack from the oven, place the stone on the floor of the oven, and preheat the oven for at least 45 minutes.

Place the dough rounds on a lightly floured work surface, sprinkle them with flour, and pat each round into a 4-inch disk. Working your way around the rim of each disk, use your thumb and index finger to pinch the edges and stretch out the dough. (If the dough is resistant, allow the round to rest, covered with plastic wrap or a dish towel, for another 5 to 10 minutes.) Once you have pinched around the whole circle, sprinkle with a light dusting of flour. Continue the process for the remaining disks.

Using a rolling pin, roll out each round, up and then down once, shift a quarter turn and repeat the process, dusting with flour as needed, until you have an 8-inch disk. Continue the process for the remaining disks. Let the disks rest for another 5 minutes. If space is limited, stagger your disks on top of each other and dust with an ample amount of flour.

Sprinkle a thin layer of flour over two inverted sheet trays and place two or three disks on each one. To give the pita room to rise, remove the top rack of the oven. Place one of the sheet trays on the lower rack for 2 to 3 minutes or until the pita rise into a bubble and you see pleasing spots of brown.

Remove the sheet tray from the oven and transfer the pita in a single layer to a wire rack so they keep their shape. Place your next prepared sheet tray in the oven while your first sheet tray cools. Repeat the process, rotating between the two sheet trays, until all of your pita breads have been baked.

REEM'S ARAB BREAD (KHOBOZ ARABI / PITA) RECIPE

From Reem's cookbook *Arabiyya: Recipes from the Life of an Arab in Diaspora* (2022).

- 5½ cups/770g bread flour
- 2½ cups/590ml warm water (about 100°F)
- 1½ teaspoons/6g sugar
- 1 tablespoon/9g active dry yeast
- 1 cup/140g all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon/9g kosher salt
- ¼ cup/60ml extra-virgin olive oil,
- plus more for greasing the bowl
- Semolina flour for dusting



BASIC YEASTED DOUGH

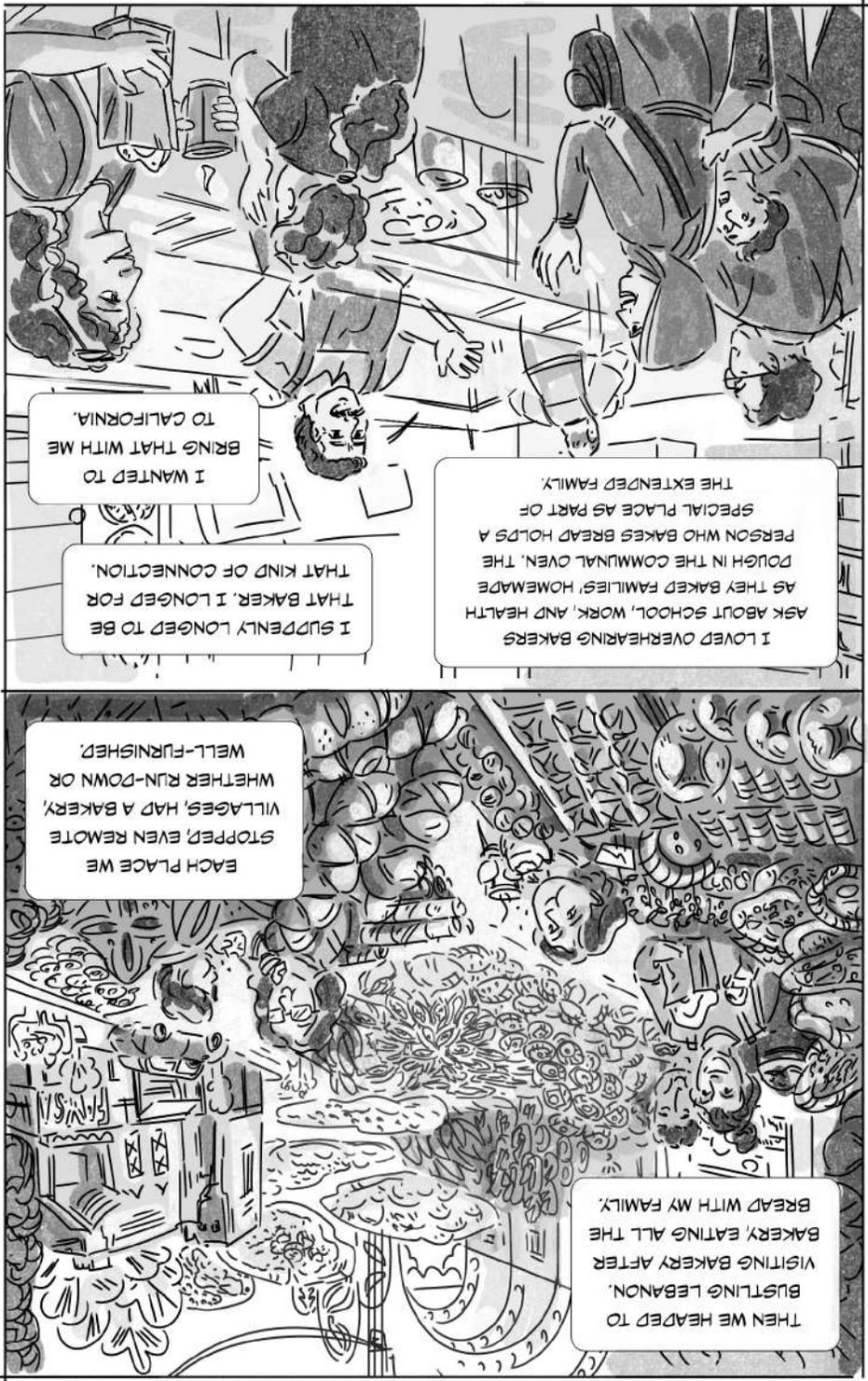
In the bowl of a stand mixer or in a large bowl, add the bread flour and then stir in 2¼ cups/530ml of the water. With the paddle attachment on low speed or using a sturdy spoon, mix until it resembles a sticky dough. Set aside for 20 minutes. While the flour and water mixture rests, stir together the remaining ¼ Cup/60ml water, sugar, and yeast in a small bowl. Set aside until foamy, about 10 minutes. At this point, the yeast mix should give off a sweet fragrance and show a bubbly bloom.

To mix by hand: Use your hand to incorporate the yeast mixture, all-purpose flour, salt, and oil into the dough. Squeeze the dough between your thumb and fingers with one hand while holding the bowl with the other hand, until it forms a rough and shaggy ball. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead until the dough is smooth, springs back when dimpled, and stretches like a windowpane. This usually takes up to 10 minutes of kneading.

To mix in a stand mixer: Add the yeast mixture, all-purpose flour, salt, and oil to the bowl and use the dough hook to mix the dough on low speed until everything comes together, scraping the bowl if needed. Turn up the speed to medium and mix until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl, 8 to 10 minutes, or until the dough is smooth, springs back when dimpled, and stretches like a windowpane.

Form the dough into a ball. Then coat a large bowl with oil and transfer the dough into the bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp dish towel and let it rise in a warm draft-free place for 1½ hours or until doubled in size. If you are not planning to use the dough right away, refrigerate for up to 12 hours until doubled in size.





THEN WE HEADED TO
BUSYING BAKERY AFTER
VISITING BAKERY AFTER
BAKERY; EATING ALL THE
BREAD WITH MY FAMILY.

EACH PLACE WE
STOPPED, EVEN REMOTE
VILLAGES, HAD A BAKERY,
WHETHER RUN-DOWN OR
WELL-FURNISHED.

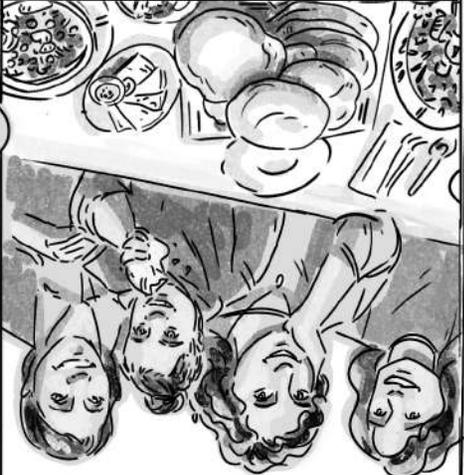
I LOVED OVERHEARING BAKERS
ASK ABOUT SCHOOL, WORK, AND HEALTH
AS THEY BAKED FAMILIES' HOME MADE
DOUGH IN THE COMMUNAL OVEN, THE
PERSON WHO BAKES BREAD HOLDS A
SPECIAL PLACE AS PART OF
THE EXTENDED FAMILY.

I SUDDENLY LONGED TO BE
THAT BAKER. I LONGED FOR
THAT KIND OF CONNECTION.

I WANTED TO
BRING THAT WITH ME
TO CALIFORNIA.



FROM THE TABLES OF
THE DIASPORA TO THE TABLES IN
PALESTINE, FOOD IS A DOCUMENTATION
OF A CULTURE, OF A PEOPLE, OF THE
LAND, WE ALL DESERVE HEALTHY
FOOD AND WE ALL DESERVE TO BE
CONNECTED TO OUR ROOTS.



PALESTINIANS SPARKED
THE FIRE OF A GLOBAL
COMMUNITY FIGHTING FOR
FREEDOM TO GROW AT AN
UNPRECEDENTED RATE.



WHEN I SEE PEOPLE WEARING
THEIR KUFFIYAS EVERYWHERE
I GO, I FEEL JOY.
I AM PART OF A
COMMUNITY BIGGER
AND STRONGER THAN
EVER BEFORE.

EVEN ON THE
RUBBLE OF THEIR
HOMES, PALESTINIANS
HAVE A RENEWED
SENSE OF HOPE
AND REBUILDING.
THEY ARE NOT ALONE.



AFTER
SO MUCH
DESTRUCTION
AND PAIN, MANY
PALESTINIANS
RETURNED TO
THEIR LAND.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO CONNECT
THE POTS BETWEEN OUR STRUGGLES. WE
WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD OUR OWN RESILIENCE
THROUGH SYSTEMS OF CARE, MUTUAL AID,
AND SELF-DEFENSE.

AS WE FIGHT BACK AGAINST
SYSTEMS THAT PIT AND DIVIDE US, WE
MUST USE OUR CULTURE AND FOOD TO LIFT
OUR SPIRITS AND REMIND OURSELVES OF
OUR RESILIENT LEGACY.



THROUGH IT
ALL, I WILL
CONTINUE TO
FEED MY PEOPLE
AND CHAMPION
THEIR INCREDIBLE
HUNGER FOR
FREEDOM.



AND THEY WILL NOT ERASE MY PEOPLE!

FUEL THE MOVEMENT.

FEED THE MOVEMENT.

I MUST KEEP FIGHTING!

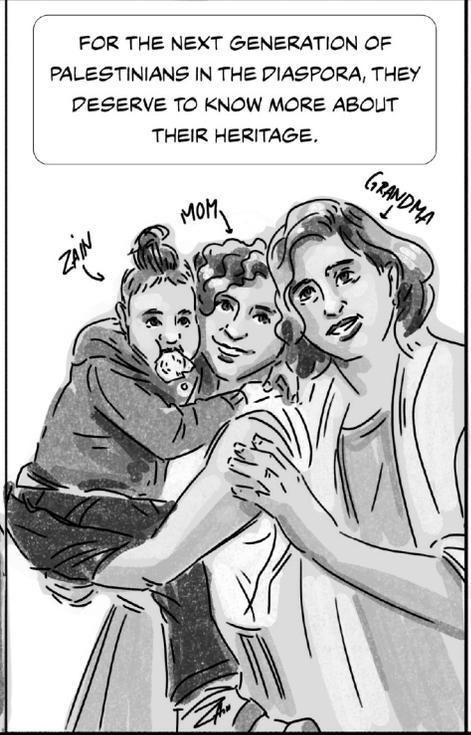
I MUST HAVE HOPE.



MOMMY, CAN I GET BREAD? I'M HUNGRY.

ZAIN IS PALIPINO!

FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF PALESTINIANS IN THE DIASPORA, THEY DESERVE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THEIR HERITAGE.



MOM GRANDMA ZAIN



I REMEMBER THE REVELATION THAT A BAKERY CAN SPARK LIFE EVEN IN PLACES WHERE LIFE HAS BEEN MOST DEPLETED.

~2023~
ISRAELI MILITARY HAVE BEEN COMMITTING GENOCIDE IN GAZA--ONE OF THE WAYS THROUGH FAMINE. BUT, WE PALESTINIANS ARE STEADFAST.



PEOPLE MAY THINK PROTESTING IS THE WAY TO RESIST, BUT IT IS ONLY ONE WAY TO RESIST.



EVEN WHEN BAKERIES BECAME TARGETS OF MILITARY BOMBARDMENT, PEOPLE WERE WILLING TO FACE ROCKETS JUST TO GET THEIR FIX OF DAILY BREAD.





AMONG ALL THE BOMBS DROPPING, GAZANS WERE STILL MAKING BREAD.



WHEN EVERYONE RAN OUT OF GAS, THE RUBBLE AND MADE THEIR OWN FIREWOOD OVENS TO MAKE BREAD.



THE SHARING OF RECIPES AND PRESERVATION OF CULTURE THROUGH BEING ALIVE AND EXISTING IS RESISTANCE.

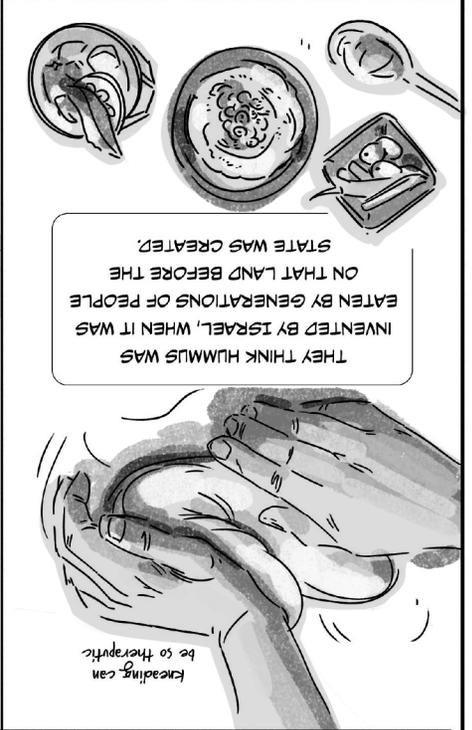
WE KEEP FIGHTING.



THEY ALREADY WHITE WASH INDIGENOUS AND AFRICAN FOOD WAYS BROUGHT OVER IN THE SLAVE TRADE CALLING IT "AMERICAN", TO COVER UP THE TRUTH OF GENOCIDE AND SETTLER COLONIALISM RIGHT HERE ON TURTLE ISLAND.

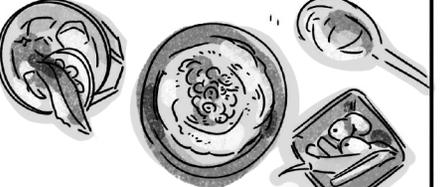
WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO SAY ABOUT PALESTINIANS?

THAT WE LEFT PEACEFULLY?!



kneading can be so therapeutic

THEY THINK HUMMUS WAS INVENTED BY ISRAEL, WHEN IT WAS EATEN BY GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE ON THAT LAND BEFORE THE STATE WAS CREATED.



THE PE-ETHNICIZATION AND REBRANDING OF MY PEOPLE'S FOOD AS "ISRAELI" OR "MEDITERRANEAN" MAKES ME SO MAD, IT TAKES PALESTINIANS OUT OF OUR OWN STORY.

OUR FOOD IS AN ASSERTION OF OUR EXISTENCE AND OUR CONNECTION TO THE LAND.

OUR VERY RIGHT TO EXIST IS IN DANGER BECAUSE OUR LAND IS BEING STOLEN FROM US.

FOOD IS ONE OF OUR LAST FRONTIERS TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH OF WHAT WE FACED AND HOW WE STAYED RESILIENT.



WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO NEXT? WHAT WILL THEY APPROPRIATE NEXT?

IN 10 YEARS, HOW ARE THEY GOING TO TALK ABOUT PALESTINIAN FOOD? ARAB FOOD?

OR WILL THEY CALL EVERYTHING ISRAELI?



FOOD TELLS A STORY OF COLONIZATION. TELLS A STORY OF GENOCIDE.

BUT IT ALSO TELLS THE STORY OF OUR CULTURE OF HOSPITALITY. TELLS A STORY OF OUR RESISTANCE. WHEN WE SHARE OUR FOOD, WE REMEMBER THOSE STORIES.

PART OF MY WORK IS TO ENSURE WE NEVER FORGET SO THAT WE CONTINUE TO FIGHT.

JUST LIKE IN ISRAEL!

UGH.



THE REMOVAL OF OUR LAND TAKES US AWAY FROM OUR FOOD, TAKING AWAY OUR HISTORY AND STORIES. IT'S AN ACT OF GENOCIDE.



...TO BE FREE IS TO BE CONNECTED TO OUR ROOTS, NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

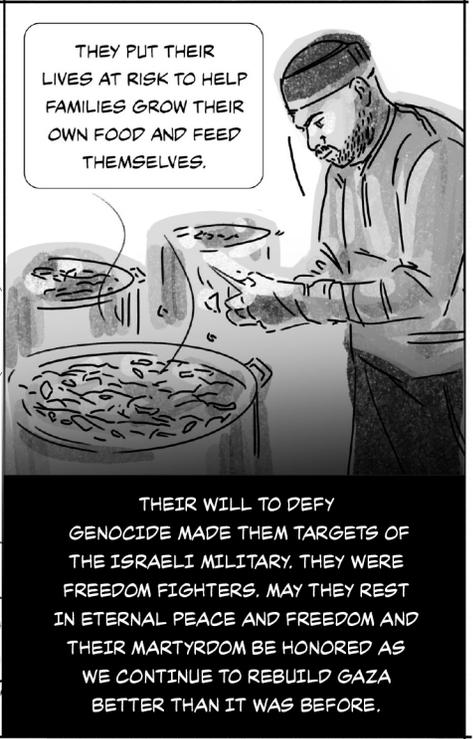


[BEIT LAHIA, NORTHERN GAZA] FROM THE SOUP KITCHENS TO THE ROOFTOP GARDENS, PALESTINIANS LIKE MY BELOVED COMRADES YUSEF ABU RABEA (THAMRA) AND MAHMOUD ALMADHOUN (GAZA SOUP KITCHEN) WERE HOLDING DOWN THE NORTH.

"IF WE DON'T TAKE CARE OF OUR AGRICULTURAL LAND, WE WILL LITERALLY DIE OF HUNGER." --YUSEF ABU RABEA



THEY PUT THEIR LIVES AT RISK TO HELP FAMILIES GROW THEIR OWN FOOD AND FEED THEMSELVES.



THEIR WILL TO DEFY GENOCIDE MADE THEM TARGETS OF THE ISRAELI MILITARY. THEY WERE FREEDOM FIGHTERS. MAY THEY REST IN ETERNAL PEACE AND FREEDOM AND THEIR MARTYRDOM BE HONORED AS WE CONTINUE TO REBUILD GAZA BETTER THAN IT WAS BEFORE.



MY ORGANIZING FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY WOULD GATHER OVER WARM BREAD, FOOD, AND MANY LAUGHS.

THE CONSTANT BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN GRIEF AND HOPE IS A SOBERING REALITY FOR ALL PALESTINIANS.



I'VE LOST SO MANY FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN GAZA.



A FEW WEEKS AFTER OPENING MOST VIOLENT ATTACKS I'D EVER EXPERIENCED,

I FINALLY HAD MY OWN BAKERY IN OAKLAND, CALLED "REEM'S CALIFORNIA". I BECAME THE BAKER IN THE COMMUNITY THAT I DREAMED OF BEING.



OKAY, BACK TO MY STORY.



RIGHT-WING FORCES BEGAN TO PROTEST MY BAKERY ACCUSING ME OF BEING A TERRORIST. ZIONISTS FELT THREATENED BY ANY ASSERTION OF PALESTINIAN PRIDE IN OUR CULTURE AND RESISTANCE AND THEY VOWED TO SILENCE ME.

MY BAKERY HAD A COLORFUL MURAL OF PALESTINIAN MATRIARCH OF THE MOVEMENT, RASMEA ODEH. SHE WAS KNOWN FOR LEADING THE ARAB AMERICAN ACTION NETWORK IN CHICAGO AND BUILDING LEADERSHIP OF HUNDREDS OF DISENFRANCHISED IMMIGRANT ARAB WOMEN. SHE HAD SUFFERED INJUSTICE AND ABUSE AFTER YEARS IN ISRAELI PRISONS AS A YOUNG POLITICAL PRISONER.



MY FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND CUSTOMERS WERE THERE TO PROTECT ME, AND AFTER MY COMMUNITY'S EFFORTS IN RAPID RESPONSE, THE ZIONISTS GAVE UP.

BUT RASMEA'S SMILE ON THE WALL REMINDED ME NOT TO BE SCARED AND STAY TRUE TO MY VOICE. SHE HELPED STRENGTHEN MY RESOLVE AND THE RESILIENCE OF SO MANY ARAB WOMEN HERE IN THE US.

