



# Carol Sansour

Carol Sansour is an agitator, social-provoker, and campaigner who has an interest in post-national, post-gender, and post-religion identities. A proud mother and partner, she works and resides in Abu Dhabi. She can be reached at [sansourcarol@gmail.com](mailto:sansourcarol@gmail.com).

If the free-verse tradition represented by Mahmoud Darwish created a *national* poetry of Palestine – which remains an abstracted, ideational country, indistinguishable from the Palestinian cause – in stark and provocative contrast, Carol Sansour writes poetry that literally asserts: Palestine is not a cause.

In the acclaimed sequence of image-intense texts presented in *In the Time of the Apricots*, Carol Sansour makes no distinction between verse and prose or literary and vernacular registers of the language. She uses what is at her disposal, including Darwish's legacy, to present the picture of a self, a human being, a woman who happens to be Palestinian. And in the process, she conflates two distinct concepts – the nation and the homeland – underlines the conflict between them (which her free-verse style glosses over), and thus evokes a gritty and credible place where people live unhindered by ideology or angst.

"It may be that the idea of Arab nationalism precisely is the idea of the state of Israel..."

Sansour's Palestine is a place of nature and of intimacies, small things performing on small stages: the household, the church, "the swing on our high

balcony"... Hers is a post-national discourse of belonging by necessity that, in its aesthetics of truth, speaks as eloquently to the human condition as the best free verse. Here, for real, is writing about love and flowers.

*Based on a review by Youssef Rakha*

## In the Time of the Apricots (extracts)

(1)

Way in  
Traffic lights  
Posters  
Separation wall  
Jacir Palace  
Amal Butchery  
Azza Camp  
Bread  
United Nations Relief and Works  
Agency rubbish  
New street  
Building stones  
Pebbles Sand Bulldozer  
Graffiti  
Cars cars cars  
Restaurants restaurants restaurants  
Monastery monks  
Nativity guards  
Tourist police  
Violence  
Security  
Presidential palace  
Bank  
Sun  
Lemon  
Home

(6)

In the beginning were the apricots  
The first home  
Earth sizzling  
Beetle crackles  
In the time of the apricots  
Early summer's stories  
of Platonic love

The alleyway: tired dogs  
and annoying neighbours  
In the time of the apricots  
The mornings green, yellow  
and honey hued  
The itinerant ice cream vendor  
calling out in the afternoon  
The smell of burning sugar  
Children playing in the dust  
while my mother makes coffee  
and milk and tea  
My mother  
Always my mother  
The greatest infidelities  
and the harshest losses  
and the longest exile  
In the time of the apricots

(12)

It may be that the idea of Arab nationalism precisely is the idea of the state of Israel

Artifice and project

It may be that the breakdowns we are witnessing are an occasion to reformulate who we are and what we are here to defend

But to be using those breakdowns to settle vengeful, tribal, nationalist scores  
It may be that this is justification enough for all that is happening and will happen to us in the Arab world

You could gauge the magnitude of the topic from the size of the hillocks of pumpkin seed shells on the kitchen table and the rate of the shelling

The job: an ounce

The family: two ounces

Love: a kilo + chocolate bars

We would play "My Princess"

And I'd take your picture

(17)

We are all aware of the possibilities

His girlfriends consecrate their chests

Young men complaining of love

Satiety

Vomit

Redness in the eye

A pain that strikes the leg

Backside muscle convulsion

Tongue knot

Calling an emergency room that is asleep

A slutty virgin

A flower on abandoned land

Faeces in artesian wells

(20)

I sold my soul to twenty merchants  
who traded it for a rocket  
locally manufactured  
I sold it in return for pictures of a school  
being bombed  
and mothers losing their minds  
I sold my soul and saw only  
repetitive copies of verses and sayings  
that the devil would be ashamed of  
chanting  
I sold it and I cursed all the applause  
and the wailing



(13)

As if since forever  
we'd play "My Princess"  
I make you up  
and dress you in flowers and beads  
then I take your picture  
We'd sit on the swing on our high balcony  
you holding the binoculars  
I drunk on the view  
We'd watch the roof of an imaginary lover named "His Arse is the Moon"  
Pick anemones and yellow roses  
You'd be barefoot  
and in the grass we'd hide secrets  
We'd go on talking until the cock, fed up of us, crowed  
and the sun rose from the Dead Sea  
Humidity moistened our blankets

and their thighs for life should he appear  
"My mother will be the most beautiful of refugees if we are forced to leave"  
he reminded them

The screens get smaller, the absurdity bigger

Down with the tyrant

(18)

An old hairdo  
A mummy with garish nails  
Verses in the same tone  
Chairs that pay no attention to the size of the sitter  
Weather likely to rain heavily  
Broken traffic lights  
A funnel of cigarettes  
A book bored of stopping at the same page

Tearing through a drum

Prostitute power

Religious bias

A search for a bedroom for a fille de joie

Bathing in a sea without waves

Drinking a cheap shot of whiskey on the sixty-third floor

Smiling at a reception

Arguing with a fool

It's all prattle

(19)

Thus is the homeland at the dawn of every morning

The revolution will never start

while they were buying a rocket  
to aim at my chest once I proclaim  
that Palestine is not a cause

(21)

The mornings green, yellow  
and honey hued  
In the time of the apricots  
The smell of burning sugar  
Children playing in the dust  
while my mother makes coffee  
and milk and tea  
My mother  
In the time of the apricots  
Always my mother

*Artwork by Majed Shala, courtesy of Filistin Ashabab.*