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## Claims Poetry

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## Lisa Suhair Majaj - Claims

I am not soft, hennaed hands,  
a seduction of coral lips;  
not the enticement of jasmine musk  
through a tent flap at night;  
not a swirl of sequined hips,  
a glint of eyes unveiled.  
I am neither harem's promise  
nor desire's fulfillment.  
I am not a shapeless peasant  
trailing children like flies;  
not a second wife, concubine,  
kitchen drudge, house slave;  
not foul-smelling, moth-eaten, primitive,  
tent-dweller, grass-eater, rag-wearer.  
I am neither a victim  
nor an anachronism.  
I am not a camel jockey, sand nigger, terrorist,  
oil-rich, bloodthirsty, fiendish;  
not a pawn of politicians,  
nor a fanatic seeking violent heaven.  
I am neither the mirror of your hatred and fear,  
nor the reflection of your pity and scorn.  
I have learned the world's histories,  
and mine are among them.  
My hands are open and empty:  
the weapon you place in them is your own.

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I am the woman remembering jasmine,  
bougainvillea against chipped white stone.  
I am the laboring farmwife  
whose cracked hands claim this soil.  
I am the writer whose blacked-out words  
are birds' wings, razored and shorn.  
I am the lost one who flees,  
and the lost one returning;  
I am the dream, and the stillness,  
and the keen of mourning.  
I am the wheat stalk, and I am  
the olive. I am plowed fields young  
with the music of crickets,

I am ancient earth struggling  
to bear history's fruit.  
I am the shift of soil  
where green thrusts through,  
and I am the furrow  
embracing the seed again.  
I am many rivulets watering  
a tree, and I am the tree.  
I am opposite banks of a river,  
and I am the bridge.  
I am light shimmering  
off water at night,  
and I am the dark sheen  
that swallows the moon whole.  
I am neither the end of the world  
nor the beginning.

*Published in Food For Our Grandmothers:  
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and in Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women  
ed. Carol Camper; (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1994)*