

Identity Card by Mahmoud Darkish (1964)

Write down:

I am Arab
my I.D. number, 50,000
my children, eight
and the ninth due next summer
- Does that anger you?

Write down:

Arab.
I work with my struggling friends in a quarry
and my children are eight.
I chip a loaf of bread for them,
clothes and notebooks
from the rocks.
I will not beg for a handout at your door
nor humble myself
on your threshold
- Does that anger you?

Write down:

Arab,
a name with no friendly diminutive
a patient man, in a country
brimming with anger.
My roots have gripped this soil
since time began,
before the opening of ages
before the cypress and the olive,
before the grasses flourished.
My father came from a line of plowmen,
and my grandfather was a peasant
who taught me about the sun's glory
before teaching me to read.
My home is a watchman's shack
made of reeds and sticks
- Does my condition anger you?

There is no gentle name,

write down:

Arab.
The color of my hair, jet black-
eyes, brown -
trademarks,
a headband over a keffiyeh
and a hand whose touch grates
rough as a rock.
My address is a weaponless village

with nameless streets.
All its men are in the field and quarry
- Does that anger you?

Write down, then
at the top Page One:
I do not hate
and do not steal
but starve me, and I will eat
my assailant's flesh.
Beware of my hunger
and of my anger.