

THIS IS NOT A HUMANIZING POEM

By Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan

Some poems force you to write them
the way sirens force their way through window panes in the night
and you can't shut out the news even when you try

“write a humanising poem”
my pen and paper goad me
show them how *wrong* their preconceptions are

Be relatable,
write something upbeat for a change, crack a smile
tell them how you also cry at the end of Toy Story 3
and you're just as capable of bantering about the weather in the post office queue
like everyone, you have no idea how to make the perfect amount of pasta, still.

Feed them stories of stoic humour,
make a reference to childhood,
tell an anecdote about being frugal
mention the X factor

Be domestic,
successful
add layers

Tell them you know brown boys who cry
about the sides of Asad's, Amir's and Hassan's they don't know
the complex inner worlds of Summayyah's and Ayesha's
tell them comedies, as well as tragedies
how full of *life* we are
how full of *love*

But no

I put my pen down
I will not let this poem force me to write it
because it is not the poem I want to write
It is the poem I have been reduced to

Reduced to proving my life is human because it is relatable
valuable because it is recognisable
but good GCSEs, family and childhood memories are not the only things that count
as a life,
living is.



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POEMS

So this will not be a 'Muslims *are* like us' poem
I refuse to be respectable

Instead

Love us when we're lazy

Love us when we're poor

Love us in our back-to-backs, council estates, depressed, unwashed and weeping,

Love us high as kites, unemployed, joy-riding, time-wasting, failing at school,

Love us filthy, without the right colour passports, without the right sounding English,

Love us silent, unapologizing, shopping in Poundland,
skiving off school, homeless, unsure, sometimes violent

Love us when we aren't athletes, when we don't bake cakes

when we don't offer our homes, or free taxi rides after the event,

When we're wretched, suicidal, naked and contributing *nothing*

Love us then

Because if you need me to prove my humanity

I'm not the one that's not human.

When my mother texts me *too* after BBC news alerts

'Are you safe? Let me know you're home okay?'

She means safe from the incident, yes,

but also safe from the after-affects

So sometimes I wonder

which days of the week might I count as liberal

and which moments of forehead to the ground am I conservative?

I wonder if when you buy bombs

there's a clear difference between the deadly ones that kill

and the heroic ones that scatter democracy?

I wonder if it should rather be 'guilty, until proven innocent'?

how come we *kill* in the name of saving lives?

how come we illegally detain in the name of maintaining the law

I put my pen away

I can't write it

I can't write

I won't write it

Is this radical?

Am I radical?

Cos there is nowhere else left to exist now.