

October 30, 2013 September 15, 2021

June Jordan's "Moving towards Home"



(<https://20thcenturyprotestpoetry.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/800px-sabrashatilamemorial.jpg>)

June Jordan wrote the poem "Moving towards Home" upon reading a quote in the New York Times shortly after the September 16-18, 1982 Phalangist/Israeli massacre of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila outside of Beirut, Lebanon. Though the exact number of victims is disputed depending on the source, it is believed that 1700-2000 Palestinians were killed in the massacre. The attack was officially declared an act of genocide by the United Nations General Assembly, and Osama bin Laden later cited the Sabra and Shatila massacre as one of the motivations for the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing, in which al-Qaeda attacked an American Air Force housing complex in Saudi Arabia.

*I do not wish to speak about the bulldozer and the
red dirt
not quite covering all of the arms and legs...*

Jordan uses some familiar literary devices (anaphora, lack of punctuation, etc.) to create a fluid, accelerating tone which is also carefully restrained by her use of the phrase "I do not wish to speak about..." Her mention of the "living room" towards the end of the poem takes on deep resonance as

it is also the title of the poetry collection from which this poem is taken. Note to students: this poem includes graphic, matter-of-fact descriptions of the horror of war.

Moving towards Home

I do not wish to speak about the bulldozer and the
red dirt
not quite covering all of the arms and legs
Nor do I wish to speak about the nightlong screams
that reached
the observation posts where soldiers lounged about
Nor do I wish to speak about the woman who shoved her baby
into the stranger's hands before she was led away
Nor do I wish to speak about the father whose sons
were shot
through the head while they slit his own throat before
the eyes
of his wife
Nor do I wish to speak about the army that lit continuous
flares into the darkness so that others could see
the backs of their victims lined against the wall
Nor do I wish to speak about the piled up bodies and
the stench
that will not float
Nor do I wish to speak about the nurse again and
again raped
before they murdered her on the hospital floor
Nor do I wish to speak about the rattling bullets that
did not
halt on that keening trajectory
Nor do I wish to speak about the pounding on the
doors and
the breaking of windows and the hauling of families into
the world of the dead
I do not wish to speak about the bulldozer and the
red dirt
not quite covering all of the arms and legs
because I do not wish to speak about unspeakable events
that must follow from those who dare
"to purify" a people
those who dare
"to exterminate" a people
those who dare
to describe human beings as "beasts with two legs"

those who dare
"to mop up"
"to tighten the noose"
"to step up the military pressure"
"to ring around" civilian streets with tanks
those who dare
to close the universities
to abolish the press
to kill the elected representatives
of the people who refuse to be purified
those are the ones from whom we must redeem
the words of our beginning

because I need to speak about home
I need to speak about living room
where the land is not bullied and beaten into
a tombstone
I need to speak about living room
where the talk will take place in my language
I need to speak about living room
where my children will grow without horror
I need to speak about living room where the men
of my family between the ages of six and sixty-five
are not
marched into a roundup that leads to the grave
I need to talk about living room
where I can sit without grief without wailing aloud
for my loved ones
where I must not ask where is Abu Fadi
because he will be there beside me
I need to talk about living room
because I need to talk about home

I was born a Black woman
and now
I am become a Palestinian
against the relentless laughter of evil
there is less and less living room
and where are my loved ones?

It is time to make our way home.

