

## ABOUT REEM ASSIL

Reem Assil is a Palestinian-Syrian chef and activist, based in Oakland, CA, working at the intersection of food, community, and social justice. She is the founder of nationally-acclaimed Reem's California, an Arab bakery and restaurant that builds community across cultures and experiences through the warmth of Arab bread and hospitality. Reem has garnered an array of top accolades in the culinary world, including James Beard finalist for Outstanding Chef (2022) back to back semifinalist for Best Chef: West (2018-19). Before dedicating herself to a culinary career, Reem spent over a decade as a community and labor organizer, building leadership to have a voice in their jobs and their neighborhoods. Reem is the author of IACP award-winning cookbook *Arabiyya: Recipes from the Life of an Arab in Diaspora* (2022).

## ABOUT 18MR

*Our Mission:* Harnessing the power of the internet, cultural work, and movement building, 18MR grows Asian American political power by educating, mobilizing, and organizing Asian Americans towards taking collective action online and offline.

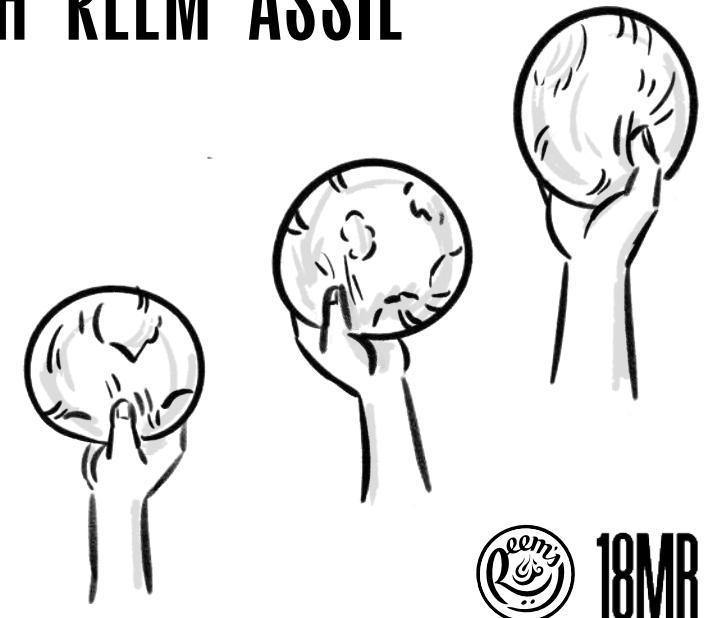
*Our Vision:* We work within movements for racial justice, abolition, and democracy towards a liberated future for Asian Americans and all marginalized peoples.

*Learn more at [18mr.org](https://18mr.org)*

## ABOUT BRENDA CHI (18MR's Communications Designer)

Brenda Chi (she/her) is a queer Chinese-American artist from Los Angeles (Tongva Land), CA. She joined 18MR in 2022 bringing in her decade of experience in entertainment art, apparel, comics and illustration. She hopes to make art that builds community and inspires folks to be part of our fight for liberation.

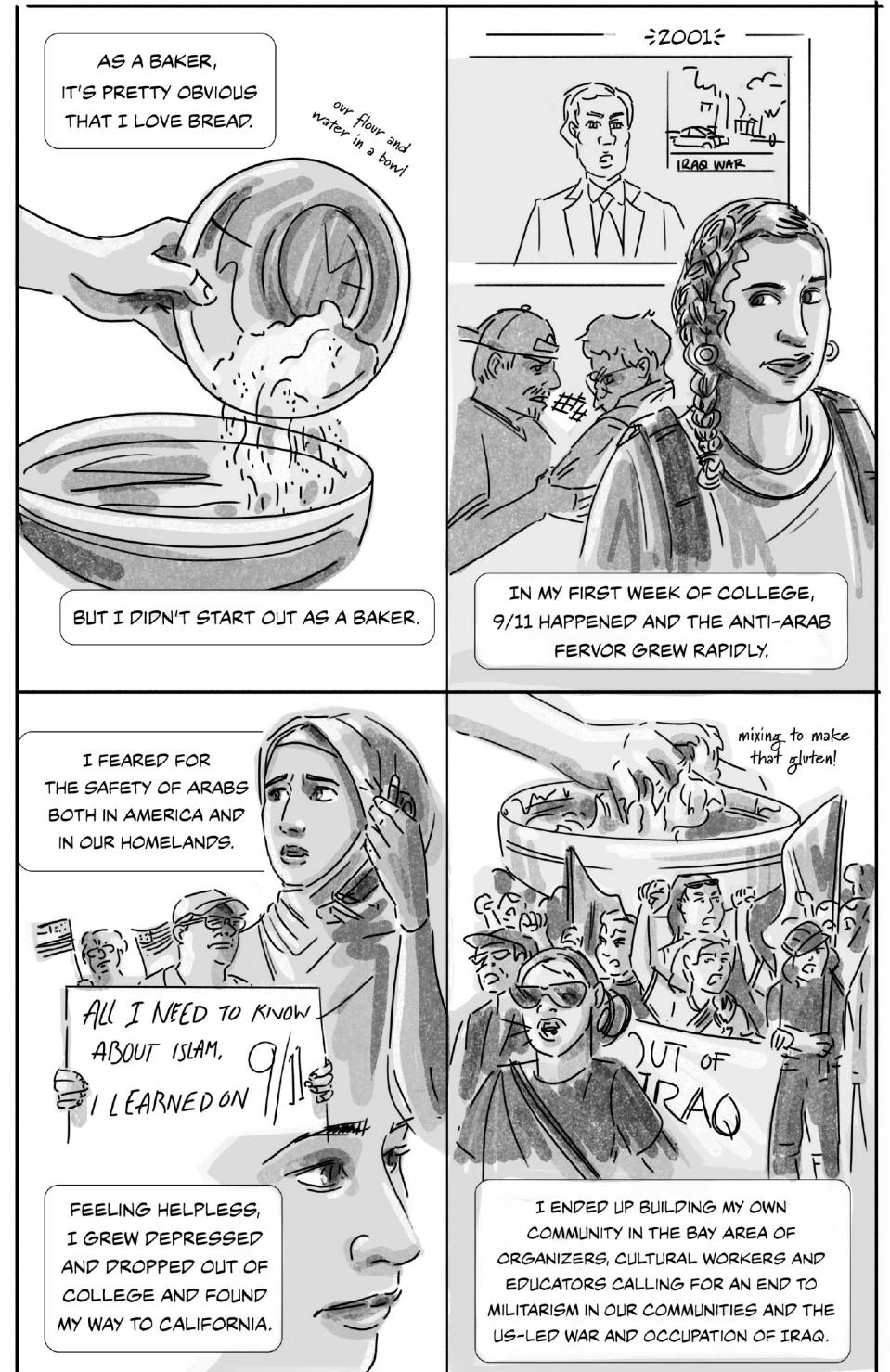
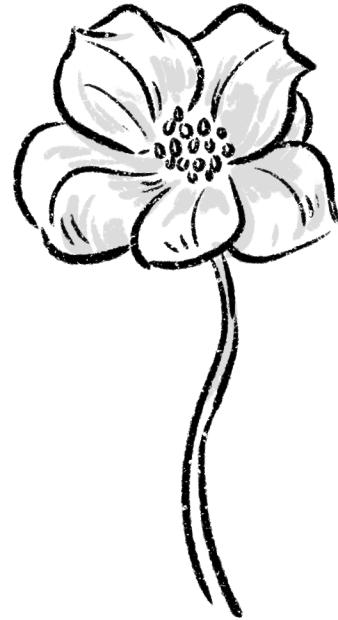
# FOOD IS RESISTANCE: FOR THE LOVE OF BREAD WITH REEM ASSIL



*Written and edited by Reem Assil.*

*Illustrated and edited by Brenda Chi.*

*Thank you Reem, for sharing your story with us.*





Divide the prepared risen dough into 10 pieces (about 137 grams each). Shape the pieces into rounds (see page 62), cover with a dry dish towel (or brush the dough with a bit of oil and cover gently with plastic wrap), and let rest for 20 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 550°F. Arrange the oven racks on the upper and lower thirds of the oven; if you are using a baking stone, remove the lower rack from the oven, place the stone on the floor of the oven, and preheat the oven for at least 45 minutes.

Place the dough rounds on a lightly floured work surface, sprinkle them with flour, and pat each round into a 4-inch disk. Working your way around the rim of each disk, use your thumb and index finger to pinch the edges and stretch out the dough. (If the dough is resistant, allow the round to rest, covered with plastic wrap or a dish towel, for another 5 to 10 minutes.) Once you have pinched around the whole circle, sprinkle with a light dusting of flour. Continue the process for the remaining disks.

Using a rolling pin, roll out each round, up and then down once, shift a quarter turn and repeat the process, dusting with flour as needed, until you have an 8-inch disk. Continue the process for the remaining disks. Let the disks rest for another 5 minutes. If space is limited, stagger your disks on top of each other and dust with an ample amount of flour.

Sprinkle a thin layer of flour over two inverted sheet trays and place two or three disks on each one. To give the pita room to rise, remove the top rack of the oven. Place one of the sheet trays on the lower rack for 2 to 3 minutes or until the pita rise into a bubble and you see pleasing spots of brown.

Remove the sheet tray from the oven and transfer the pita in a single layer to a wire rack so they keep their shape. Place your next prepared sheet tray in the oven while your first sheet tray cools. Repeat the process, rotating between the two sheet trays, until all of your pita breads have been baked.

# REEM'S ARAB BREAD ( KHOBOZ ARABI / PITA ) RECIPE

From Reem's cookbook *Arabiyya: Recipes from the Life of an Arab in Diaspora* (2022).

**5½ cups/770g bread flour**  
**2½ cups/590ml warm water (about 100°F)**  
**1½ teaspoons/6g sugar**  
**1 tablespoon/9g active dry yeast**  
**1 cup/140g all-purpose flour**  
**1 tablespoon/9g kosher salt**  
**¼ cup/60ml extra-virgin olive oil,**  
**plus more for greasing the bowl**  
**Semolina flour for dusting**

## BASIC YEASTED DOUGH

In the bowl of a stand mixer or in a large bowl, add the bread flour and then stir in 2½ cups/530ml of the water. With the paddle attachment on low speed or using a sturdy spoon, mix until it resembles a sticky dough. Set aside for 20 minutes. While the flour and water mixture rests, stir together the remaining ¼ Cup/60ml water, sugar, and yeast in a small bowl. Set aside until foamy, about 10 minutes. At this point, the yeast mix should give off a sweet fragrance and show a bubbly bloom.

**To mix by hand:** Use your hand to incorporate the yeast mixture, all-purpose flour, salt, and oil into the dough. Squeeze the dough between your thumb and fingers with one hand while holding the bowl with the other hand, until it forms a rough and shaggy ball. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead until the dough is smooth, springs back when dimpled, and stretches like a windowpane. This usually takes up to 10 minutes of kneading.

**To mix in a stand mixer:** Add the yeast mixture, all-purpose flour, salt, and oil to the bowl and use the dough hook to mix the dough on low speed until everything comes together, scraping the bowl if needed. Turn up the speed to medium and mix until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl, 8 to 10 minutes, or until the dough is smooth, springs back when dimpled, and stretches like a windowpane.

Form the dough into a ball. Then coat a large bowl with oil and transfer the dough into the bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp dish towel and let it rise in a warm draft-free place for 1½ hours or until doubled in size. If you are not planning to use the dough right away, refrigerate for up to 12 hours until doubled in size.



~1993~

AND WAY BEFORE THAT,  
I WAS LITTLE REEMO,  
LIVING IN BOSTON.



ONLY TO LEARN FROM MY UNCLE EYAD THAT THESE PILGRIMS ALSO GAVE THE LOCAL TRIBES "SMALL POX INFECTED BLANKETS" AS AN ACT OF GERM WARFARE...

I WAS SPEAKING ARABIC AT HOME AND CODESWITCHING TO THE WHITE KIDS AT SCHOOL, WHERE WE SANG "YANKEE DOODLE DANDY" AND HAD FIELDTRIPS TO CELEBRATE PILGRIMS AT PLYMOUTH ROCK.



...SEEDING AN EARLY AWARENESS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM."

~2010~

BUT AFTER YEARS OF ORGANIZING AND BURN OUT...

...IT WAS ON A FAMILY SUMMER TRIP TO SYRIA AND LEBANON, THAT I WAS REBIRTHED...

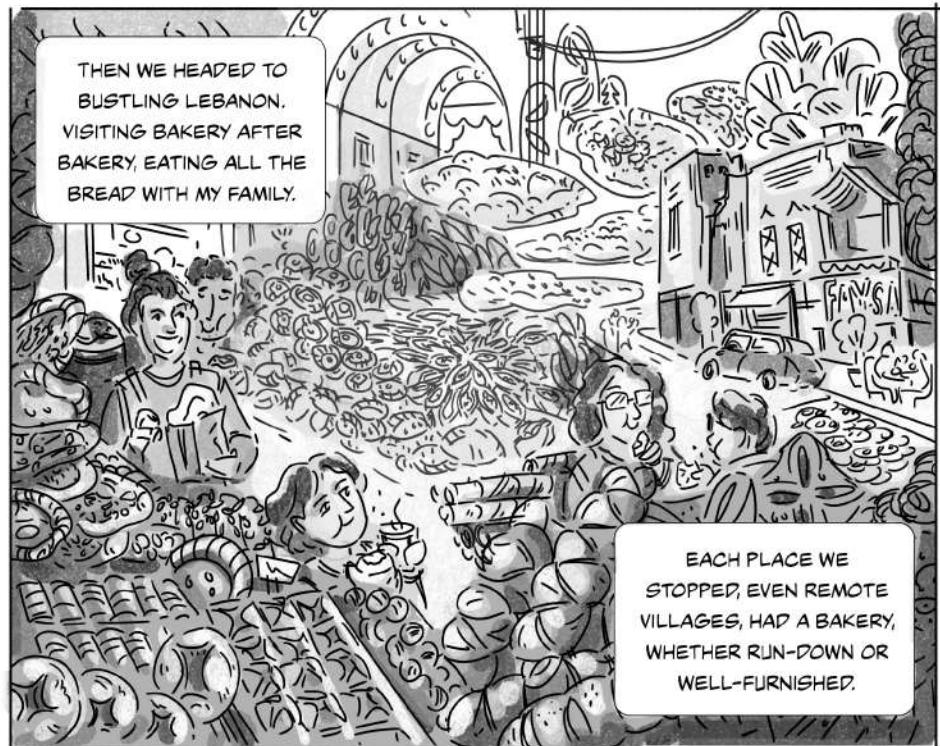
...THROUGH BREAD.



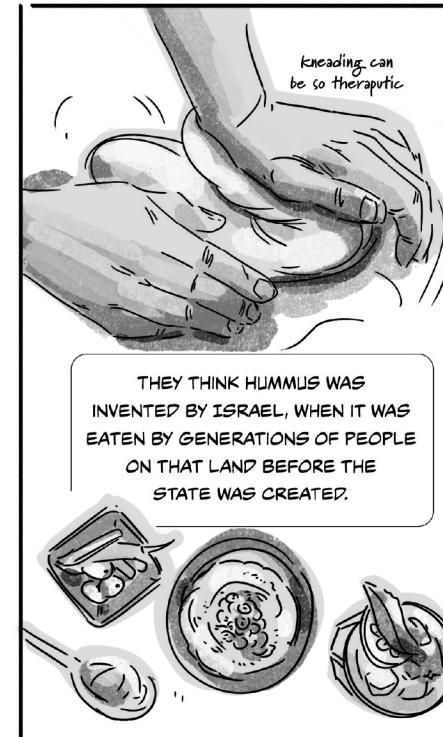
[SYRIA]

BREAD IS THE LIFELINE OF MY PEOPLE AND THE BAKERY IS KING.











I'VE LOST SO MANY  
FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN GAZA.



THE CONSTANT BACK AND FORTH  
BETWEEN GRIEF AND HOPE IS A SOBERING  
REALITY FOR ALL PALESTINIANS.

OKAY, BACK TO MY STORY.



I FINALLY HAD MY OWN  
BAKERY IN OAKLAND, CALLED  
"REEM'S CALIFORNIA". I BECAME  
THE BAKER IN THE COMMUNITY  
THAT I DREAMED OF BEING.

MY ORGANIZING FRIENDS  
AND COMMUNITY WOULD GATHER OVER  
WARM BREAD, FOOD, AND MANY LAUGHS.



A FEW WEEKS AFTER OPENING  
REEM'S, I WAS HIT WITH ONE OF THE  
MOST VIOLENT ATTACKS I'D EVER  
EXPERIENCED.



MY BAKERY HAD A COLORFUL  
MURAL OF PALESTINIAN Matriarch  
OF THE MOVEMENT, RASMEA ODEH.  
SHE WAS KNOWN FOR LEADING THE  
ARAB AMERICAN ACTION NETWORK IN  
CHICAGO AND BUILDING LEADERSHIP  
OF HUNDREDS OF DISENFRANCHISED  
IMMIGRANT ARAB WOMEN. SHE HAD  
SUFFERED INJUSTICE AND ABUSE  
AFTER YEARS IN ISRAELI PRISONS  
AS A YOUNG POLITICAL PRISONER.

RIGHT-WING FORCES BEGAN TO  
PROTEST MY BAKERY ACCUSING ME OF BEING  
A TERRORIST. ZIONISTS FELT THREATENED BY  
ANY ASSERTION OF PALESTINIAN PRIDE IN OUR  
CULTURE AND RESISTANCE AND THEY  
VOWED TO SILENCE ME.



MY EMAIL, VOICEMAIL, AND PERSONAL MAIL  
WAS BOMBARDED WITH RACIST AND SEXIST  
VITRIOL. TROLLS FROM AS FAR AS TEL AVIV  
HIT MY YELP PAGE SO HARD THAT YELP HAD  
TO SHUT MY PAGE DOWN FOR "CLEAN UP".

BUT RASMEA'S SMILE ON THE WALL  
REMINDED ME NOT TO BE SCARED AND  
STAY TRUE TO MY VOICE. SHE HELPED  
STRENGTHEN MY RESOLVE AND THE  
RESILIENCE OF SO MANY ARAB  
WOMEN HERE IN THE US.



MY FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND CUSTOMERS  
WERE THERE TO PROTECT ME, AND AFTER  
MY COMMUNITY'S EFFORTS IN RAPID RESPONSE,  
THE ZIONISTS GAVE UP.

THERE WERE TOO MANY OF US!