

# Unsewing My Lips, Breathing My Voice: The Spoken and Unspoken Truth of Transnational Violence

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Omeima Sukkarieh

*I am the tears so fragile,  
they fall from the sky.  
My lips sewn together  
with the thread of life.  
My hands like leaves,  
they shake when it blows.  
And my heart it hurts  
when there is nowhere to go.  
I am the tap that will not stop dripping,  
I am the air that cannot be cleared.  
I feel the fire that will rage on endlessly.  
Is there anything in the world  
that will allow me to be real?<sup>1</sup>*

I approached transnational violence recently after noticing it was walking around like a zombie and asked it what it was doing. It told me that it was combating stress and its negative effects through tactical breathing and that in law enforcement and military training over the years it was taught controlled breathing, combat breathing, to the point where it feels like it's on auto pilot, doing it without thinking. When I asked why it told me that they were combat breathing all the time and only sometimes because it felt like dangerous criminals who were heavily armed were trying to kill it and they wanted to be able to

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be calm and rational when killing someone or imposing terror on them and that being in combat breathing was not only safe for them but safe for the world and that when they are feeling stress, anxiety or panic this is what they do but they have no choice. When I asked who was trying to kill it, they simply said the walking dead and peace activists.<sup>2</sup>

Breathe in through your nose for a count of four; hold your breath for a count of four (one bomb, two bomb, three bomb, four); exhale through your mouth for a count of four; hold your breath for a count of four (one bullet, two bullet, three bullet, four), and then restart the cycle. Breathe deeply and methodically – completely filling and emptying your lungs during each cycle.

Funnily enough transnational violence told me that when taking a deep breath and when exhaling, I should picture a leaf, slowly, slowly, floating down, lower, and lower until it gently stops and floats and just softly hovers at the height of my belly button. The gentle floating image is intended to enhance the relaxation effects of the deep breath and that since this is usually done initially with your eyes closed, it should only be done in a safe environment. However, *with practice and mastery* it can be done quickly, with your eyes open and while maintaining situational awareness.<sup>3</sup>

Who is the perpetrator? Who is victim? Who is combat breathing and who is not?

Are you dying?

*I think I am.*

How do you know?

*I don't know.*

Well, do you feel?

*Only in my sleep.*

Do you cry?

*Only with my eyes.*

Do you laugh?

*Only with my mouth.*

Do you breathe?

*Only without my will.*

Do you love?

*With all my heart.*

Then why do you think you're dying?

*Because I hate feeling and crying and laughing and breathing and loving.*

How do you hate?

*Only with my mind.*

Then your mind is still working?

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*Only to whisper in my ears to kiss death.*

And do you?

*I have this bitter sweet taste in my mouth sometimes, but I don't know.*

Could that be life?

*Perhaps.*

Could that be love?

*Perhaps.*

But it could be death?

*Yes.*<sup>4</sup>

Israel, Palestine, the Gaza Flotilla, forged passports, Right of Return, Lebanon, cluster bombs, people smuggling, boat people, terrorism, Australia, Afghanistan, Iraq, one breath, two breaths, three breaths, four.

Transnational state violence effortlessly crosses borders. It is disguised and camouflaged in the blood of propaganda and enslavement of the human soul through nationalist music, development of penal and legal institutions dividing people into the free and imprisoned, the citizen, the asylum seeker, the stateless and the refugee. Detention centres, prison cells, surveillance streets, all fill up with wasted human potential.

What are we breathing when the air is thick with the stench of blood and hate? Whose hands are dirty and who gets to wash them? I ask Transnational Violence who does he think he is and I get only silence!

Then it tells me in a calm voice. . .

*I could swear someone buried me alive the other day.*

*"Oumi! Oumi!"*

*I cried as hard as I could —*

*"Mother! Help me Mother! It is getting dark and the sun is fading along with the beats of my heart! Oumi!"*

*As it got darker I could feel my ribs dislodge slowly from my spine.*

*It was so painful that my voiceless cries became almost as extinct as the colourful corroborees and rituals of past times.*

*I am being tortured by the stains of my own flesh and blood.*

*I am being suffocated in this dark deep hole by the conversations my sweat and tears are having with my tortured soul.*

*I can't breathe!*

*Why are you laughing up there — you who carry the spades and shovels?*

*Are you laughing at me because I handed them to you?*

*Why are you holding part of my heart?*

*Is that the only part that still works?*

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*“Oumi! Oumi!”*

*I cried as hard as I could —*

*“Mother! They stole my good heart! They stole the stars in the sky and hid them behind the disappearing moon and then they stole my heart! Oumi! Oumi!”*

*Silence!*

*I must be going mad\_\_am I dead?*

*Is that why no-one can hear me?*

*“Tell me before I lay my head to rest while my soul begins its new journey. . .*

*Tell me please!”*

*“Are we all just dispensable human beings just waiting for the day when we cease to be. . .?”<sup>5</sup>*

I am the state of Israel who has no respect for international borders and states. I am the state of Israel who can go into international waters in the Mediterranean Sea and kill people with environmentally friendly code names like **Operation Sea Breeze** and **Operation Sky Winds**.<sup>6</sup> I am threatened by humanitarian aid, medical supplies and women and children who get in my way.

What about the 718 people from 37 countries on board the Flotilla and the 9 people you killed and the many more injured on the Mavi Marmara?<sup>7</sup>

What about the Australian 20-year-old Ahmed Talib who you shot in the leg and forced him to follow his own trail of blood?<sup>8</sup>

An Australian with a name like that? Who cares?

‘I looked down and my legs were drowning in blood. I was getting weaker; it was difficult to breathe.’<sup>9</sup>

Unmask yourself, Transnational State Violence, so we can see your face?

I am the state of Israel who couldn’t care less if a man like Anwar Khalil Balusha suffers from mental health problems after having killed his five young daughters during a routine midnight bombing.<sup>10</sup>

Remember, I am the same Israel who laughed at how he and neighbours desperately tried to rescue those five girls with their hands from the rubble of their destroyed home until the sound of their terrifying screams got lower and eventually stopped.

I can counterfeit your passports and the passports of your German, Irish, and French friends, and have them cleared at airports while you wait in line randomly searched for bombs like a common Arab and by the time you leave the airport I have already used your passport to assassinate who I deem an enemy.<sup>11</sup>

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I can enter your homeland and the homeland of your ancestors and in the name of defending myself against terrorism, for 34 days I can kill unabated.<sup>12</sup> Your family, your friends, your neighbours and your hopes and dreams for a better future for your children and theirs are now dead and there is nothing you can do about it because I am transnational violence.

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*.. If you had contemplated the victim's face  
And thought it through, you would have remembered your mother in the  
Gas chamber, you would have been freed from the reason for your rifle  
And you would have changed your mind: this is not the way  
To find one's identity again.*<sup>13</sup>

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It is four years to this day, 14 August 2006 that the UN brokered a ceasefire<sup>14</sup> but after killing almost 1500 people and making over a million displaced and planting the seeds of cluster bombs to kill Lebanon's future growth and fill the Lebanese body with cancerous diseases, torment and despair, the seeds of fear and hate keep me going. Transnational violence loves the sound of mothers mourning over their children's nameless body bags.

Did you not learn from your ancestor's horrors and the imposed transnational violence that exterminated them and left scarred generations to come? Are you combat breathing and wanting others to combat breathe also so you don't walk dead alone?

"I have travelled far" it whispers in my ear.

"Where?"

"Almost to the end of the world."

The White Paper, titled 'Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia', was publicly launched by the Minister for Foreign Affairs just over 6 years ago. The paper outlined the intention of the Australian Government to keep the Australian public fully informed of significant changes to Australia's security environment and the measures being taken by the Government to protect Australia's interests arguing that Australia faces a serious threat from transnational extremist-Muslim terrorism. We are asked to consult the Government's online travel advisory service for specific travel advice called **smartraveller** but noting that Australia is at the forefront of international efforts to combat the new terrorist threat with the

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White Paper providing details of what Australia is doing internationally in our name.<sup>15</sup>

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*Our losses: between two and eight martyrs each day.*

*And ten wounded.*

*And twenty homes.*

*And fifty olive trees. . .*

*Added to this the structural flaw that*

*Will arrive at the poem, the play, and the unfinished canvas.<sup>16</sup>*

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Isn't it time we are informed of the truth of what you are doing in our name? How can you name me the terrorist and then say my name in the name of naming the terrorists in my name? How many martyrs are being killed in my name in the name of naming the terrorists by someone else's name? How many homes have you helped destroy or others have destroyed in your name? Australia, are you TSV? Are you still counting your soldiers dead in my name? Are they still counting theirs in yours?

Don't throw your responsibilities to the world! Don't throw it on me!

Just travel smart!

"You mean like you do TSV?"

"Yes, only better!"

"How?"

"Combat breathing, just go in, shoot to kill, kill but do it while you are combat breathing. Even if you don't use bullets, use words, use fear campaigns."

"Really? Like what?"

"Like 'Stop the Boats'."<sup>17</sup>

But if you stop the boats we can't hear the stories of refugees and of people you have helped leave their homeland. We can't hear the stories of the status of refugees and displaced peoples who die when legally stateless and who die on boats coming in search of a new homeland. If we stop the boats we will only hear the screams of 353 women, children and men who drowned almost ten years ago.<sup>18</sup>

They are still screaming. What provoked people was the fact that there were no expressions of sympathy about that tragedy. What of others who have died since the Australian Border Protection laws came in? What about the cries of the baby who was born on the first boat you stopped in the name of the Australian Navy who died because you

stopped the boat for 7 days? Why was this baby's cry silenced by you and your media army? Why was this baby not allowed even to breathe, let alone to combat breathe!

I don't know how long I can last. I used to think I was a dead woman walking, but I don't think that the walking dead cry.

I belong to nowhere, nothing, no-one. No home, no heart, no...no. Perhaps my friend was right. Perhaps it is best to belong to nowhere and no-one, but rather to not belong is to be free.

Accept you for who you are.

But what if I don't know who I am?

*Find yourself.*

Where?

*Deep in your soul.*

But where do I find that?

*Just start looking and your Self will find you.*

But what if I don't like my Self when I find it or it finds me?

*Then it's not you.*<sup>19</sup>

An amazing young Afghan man, a role model for Australia and for Afghanistan, asks me questions in your name that I cannot answer.

If there are more guns in Afghanistan than we can think of, then why go with more? Why not go with doctors? Where is there time for peace with more warfare? What have you done in the 3,231 days of the so-called war that has been running? The war on Afghanistan has been running for 8 years 10 months 5 days.<sup>20</sup> Did anyone win? How are my grandparents? Did you see my cousins playing in the streets singing happy songs with smiles on their faces? Why don't you spend your billions on imposing less violence on them and better health care on us?

Do you care how much this war has cost in dollars and limbs and litres of blood or are you too busy patting the back of your TSV brothers because this all sounds like B.S to M.E? Why isn't there a 'stop the TSV's' campaign because if you stop TSV's you could 'stop the boats' with no screaming crying babies wishing they were combat breathing instead of being in combat?

Why are you there? Have you ever considered leaving it to see how it survived on its own without the combat breathing?

Why are you crying so much?

*Because I have lost happiness.*

Where?

*Across the sea somewhere.*

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Then why don't you go find it?

*Because I can't swim.*

Does happiness know that you're looking for it?

*I don't know, but it threw me in the water in the first place and left me to drown.*

Then why do you want to find it?

*Because my sorrow is lonely without it.*<sup>21</sup>

If you want me to be a smart traveller then stop travelling with me. Let me come back from my own travels narrating the stories of courage and hope of the smiling people who want to give you everything they have left with their smiling faces not to come here combat breathing like a young Afghan girl, a victim of state violence and transnational state violence and in a state of combat breathing herself, writing a poem of her journey to Australia finding herself combat breathing here in a country she was prepared to call home whilst you were overstaying your welcome in hers.

*Faces walk by like models changing clothes*

*faces appear like time ticking off. . .*

*Seconds pass like years and nights*

*My body is pilling like a potato on a grill*

*My heart is dripping like a sponge on a dish. . .*

*This was a place I called home*

*A place where I belonged*

*I begin my journey with pride*

*I made an oath for a new beginning*

*To learn to live like anybody else  
been positive and thought of a wish. . .*

*I've been shocked from my dream*

*I've waken and driven like a river*

*I feel nothing but pain*

*I don't feel my soul nor do I feel if am alive or am dead*

*I can walk on streets, I can smile*

*My fear for people my fear for hope has made*

*My mind burn with oil. . .*

*Has made my soul be used to the daily torture like a daily routine*

*I'm not in pieces and nor do I belong here again*

*Am sure I am lost between soul and dreams*

*Why do words play around*

*Why do faces seem to change like a serial on my daily shows*

*Judged by looks, judged by culture*

*Oh boy, help me through my journey*

*Don't let me shed a tear today*

*Don't let me finish my breath with tears of pain*

*Don't let it burn me  
I want to reach my destination; I want to make a wish.*<sup>22</sup>

Habiba, like me, writes poetry not to speak on behalf of Palestinians or Tamils or Afghans or Lebanese, or anybody, but to make meaning out of the brutalising effects of the racialised politics so rampant in the world today.

Habiba makes wishes every day. She makes wishes like I make wishes. Wishes that we will not see or hear of a baby executed with single bullets by snipers while still in the arms of their mothers and parents gunned down as they break a curfew just to go and collect their children's remains, and of families who have to dig through piles of rubble and the stench of hell to find peace in death, to live in a country where not only are we not being affected by you, transnational violence, but that nobody is affected and that one day you and us, us and them, start breathing again, without combat.

*Laughter smiles  
at despair like a clown with no colour. . .  
Tears whisper  
soft words of love  
while drowning the heaven  
where it has crept from.*<sup>23</sup>

We wish that we could change Azmi Bishara's 'inequitable distribution of sorrow' where compassion is not contingent on the colour of people's skins where compassion has become a racialising and racialised concept as a result of transnational violence.<sup>24</sup>

In 2006, with a group of helpers in less than three days we made 450 body bags and lined them up in Martin Place with a message that death is not about national identity but about humanity and the desperate cry in a city of the walking dead for people breathe long enough to have compassion for the sake of having compassion.<sup>25</sup>

14 August 2010

#### Notes

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