



Source: Haler Jaber, 'I'm sorry for anguish caused by beheading report', *The Sunday Times* in *The Australian online*, 29/05/06.

Tags: death, incarceration, child/parent, music, violence
Writer/s: Brent Clough

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Drawn outside, the refugee's two daughters are playing in the yard with our guide, the film-maker. Motorcycle taxis edge past the compound; dust floats up into the hot air. A radio plays wonderful music.

The position of the sun makes them shade their eyes. The girls wear tee-shirts with slogans in English that call for an inquiry into the death of their mother. We are told the family is in a safe place now.

Only a few months ago, in a province further south, their mother was killed by unknown assailants, who nonetheless are identified by the refugees as men under the command of a notorious general, one whose name they repeat over and over in the interview and in conversations before we begin recording. The hatred for this man is like an odour that pervades the room, clings to clothes, sours food.

The mother—a human rights activist and union organiser—remains present as a series of photos, tacked on walls and blown up onto placards. She has also become a statue carved by the film-maker—to be given away as an award for other human rights workers who fight for justice and perhaps die for it.

What else do I recall about this meeting? I remember how my throat grew tight speaking to the dead woman's husband. I looked into his brown eyes and thought of oblivion and its closeness, as close as conversation. I remember seeing in his eyes the brown eyes of my own dear one, so recently disappeared into the ground.

I spent only an afternoon in a compound with this refugee, his two girls and the memories of the activist wife and mother. Voices and sounds of our encounter remain on a tape on a shelf in my office.

And that's it more or less. I could use this account as the seed of a 'story', the necessary image to start a tale about the 'struggle'. But death is everywhere and according to many, banal. The real trouble is that my memory is just worth a few lines on death's big network, available everywhere, 24/7. It flies about, directionless, a many-to-many broadcast—everyone, everywhere, united not by money or language, but by death.

I am reading a book, the story of a life of a musician, a composer who never accepted death. He was a visitor from somewhere else, a sun man, charged by nature to be sceptical about the whole death deal.

He said earth now stands in the shadow of the valley of death, but that nobody's really dead—they're just over there in captivity. The spirit can never die...the spirit is pure energy, a kind of electricity and as old as the Creator of which it is a part. 'Death was talked into existence and can be talked out of it'.

The sun man is impossible, but he glows with unstoppable energy, reminds me that the very best form of news is music. I look at an image of him playing a sleek machine designed to banish death—sine waves and light pouring out of his head, a room bursting with music.

Just this morning, I'm assaulted by news of another murder—of a man who was at the compound with us that afternoon. His death is made vivid by an email and some photos. He was the interpreter. His voice is in my head now, the memory of his handshake is firm on my hand. There's a story of course:

'N was shot to death on May 27, 2006 between 5.30 and 6.00 p.m. while driving his jeep. Two unidentified bonnet-wearing men on motorcycles ambushed him in front of St. John Hospital. He suffered four gunshot wounds. N was very vocal against pro-imperialist policies of the government particularly on mining. He was a delegate of the International League of People's Struggle in a rally against the World Trade Organization. He was the 136th victim of extrajudicial killings'.

I feel bad that I have stripped him of his identity in order to acknowledge him and perhaps keep someone safe. I am rushing to render him as text. But this can't be a tribute, I didn't know him. Here he exists as nothing more than words.

In the future he may be recalled as a book or a statue or a building but right now, I just hear his voice, swapping languages. A man who is more voice than body.

He is real.

He is not a story.

He is just one more reported death.

Like her, he is electricity.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Brent Clough.