

Story of the Unknown Woman

Huma B. Dar

My name is Farah.
I am the one pierced by a dozen bullets
on my mother's orders
in my lawyer's office
My sin: I had dared to ask for a divorce.¹

My name is Gauhar.
I am the one almost run over
by a truck or is it okay to blame the truck driver?
My crime: my "Otherness" exposed in the land of the free
wearing a *shalwar-qameez*
for every one to see.²

My name is Sultani.
I am the one who lost count after the rapist number three
or was it number thirty?
Faizan, my months old baby, kept on crying
for hunger
at the sight of my breast cut off
My crime: I am a Muslim
being cleansed,
ethnically.³

My name is Simurgh.
I am the one whose stomach was kicked
child abused and kidnapped by a husband
while his sisters cheered him on
My sin: possession of a voice.
Are voices contraband?

My name is Kausar Bano.
I am the one – nine months pregnant
raped, belly cut open, foetus on trident
both burnt to ashes
My sin: being a Muslim in Gujarat.⁴

My name is Fatimah.
I am the one whose name and its shadows
Melted and evaporated into oblivion
in the alchemy of fire on nine-eleven
when Hawwa's strong bones
at the foundation of it all
cried out to be excavated
as once she herself had
through the darkness of the Middle Passage
Our crime: lithe bodies
deemed capable of labor
enslaved and indentured, undocumented, uncounted
marked unmournable.⁵

My name is Sherbat Gula.
I am the one whose three babies didn't make it
to age five
in the land of the land-mines
while my *burqah* was the talk of the town
and my eyes green were labeled "ferocious"
My crime: born close to warm waters
and black gold
I am told.⁶

My name is Unknown
I am the one whose burnt face, cut at the nape,
droned, white phosphoresced, or raped
couldn't tell my charred story
whose name, face or story didn't make the headlines
in the conspiracy of silence
My crime: they say we are "terrorists"
or too close to some, and thus
"Collaterally" damaged!

I am Unknown, I am Sherbat Gula,
I am Kausar Bano, I am Hawwa and Fatimah,
I am Simurgh, I am Sultani, I am Gauhar, I am Farah.

I am your mother, your aunt, your sister,
I am your neighbor, your friend, your lover,
I am you

Stand with me as I fight for justice
Hold me Embrace me
Reclaim me Honor me
Love me Kiss me

for I am you.

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First published with the poet's permission, 2011.

¹This case happened, albeit to a victim with another name, in the renowned Pakistani lawyer, Hina Jilani's office, in Lahore, Pakistan.

²From an actual hate-crime in Texas, post 9/11. Name changed.

³From "The Survivors Speak" – a report of the Gujarat pogrom by the Citizen's Initiative, April 2002.

⁴Ibid.

⁵A homage to the undocumented people killed on 9/11 and to the unmarked slave graveyard found beneath the erstwhile Twin Towers.

⁶The woman whose face made it twice to the cover of National Geographic, surrounded by sensational journalism.