

songs for petals

Part of Austerity and Utopia, Climate: Our Right to Breathe

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For the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens in India



I

October 31 1984

I pull myself up
 eyes at the horizon of the back seat window
Watch cars slick on rubber band roads
 through graphite clouds of night
Grey white buildings swing round an older one
 fuzzy and broken and old.
Kristallnacht broken glass sure
 sparkling stars on the asphalt
Rings on the Ring Road there are broken
 Olympic Os scattered on the street
Rings of fire
 burning tires
And our Ambassador two Sikhs inside
 boomerangs fast and slow
Passing men quietly smashing car windows
Standing contemplative around thickening fires
 oozing black rubber
 graphite into the night

26 000 1833

the half-life for salt to disintegrate into the sea is 260 million
years. this is a measure of how sea meets salt in bodies
crushed into the water from slavers on ships. a half-life as
margin of witness. what else. the sea is in our blood and the
sea is our blood and we are exiled from the sea and so we
staccato attack with anchovy machine-gun fire what is not
us in the sea, but we are the sea and this is our obsolescence.
what else. there is blood in the breeze. what else

III

26 000 2020

we share the sea but this brings to us our annihilation. fascism:
to multiply the self and destroy the other. to destroy the self so
that the sea can return. but we can't return. when we bleed it is
(a) minute in the archaic immensity of the sea.

*

imago

#1

taken from above. a parking lot full of burned cars covered
in white dust. there are no windows or tires. twelve men and
a women are walking in between. a shed at the back painted a
pale pink. in the front what looks like a cart is also burned. the
cars arranged in a tidy grid.

#2

smashed cars piled on one another over a layer of rubble. the
bottom car a bright emerald. another folded like an accordion.
a boy stands to the right of the pile, leaning on the pile with
one hand, a stripe on his tracksuit leg, his other hand on his
hip. two women look to the right, off camera, wearing red,
yellow, orange. someone's turquoise knapsack and a bit of
sun. most of the photo is of the cars that everyone has their
backs to.

#3

a teenager and an older man. the boy has his hand on the
handlebar of a twisted bicycle frame. there is no second han-
dlebar. white rubble at his feet. boy looks to the right, man
looks to the left, arms crossed in front of him. he is wearing a
sky blue shirt. the boy is wearing an army shirt. both in rubber
slippers. leaning. behind them shredded cables radiate up the
wall.

#4

grey cement. the textured paint print of a hand. white, with
long fingers, their outlines wavy. the thumb is thin, its tip
round like a comma. four lines radiate away from the palm
from left to right. is this print on the wall or ground? why was
paint on someone's hand. what happened. sedimentation of
haste of a body no longer there. what happened

*

*On a bus going from Jamia Nagar to Old Delhi
December 7 1992 (part 2)*

the bus stops at the terminal
ok so 20 minutes more to walk
the light is purple and black
there's blood in the breeze and we both know it.
just say: we're almost safe
steady now, i'm far from home and it's dark.
my shadow hidden by the black

ok so we are at the house
porch light on cyclops beacon
safe haven hurrah no mob this time suck it.
inside steel eyes on us
without looking at me r introduces me by
another name.

a desert full of silence and not safe
& shit we better get out of here soon

utopia

what shakes the earth shakes the sky
sure but then
the air between is thick with
what

potential is a stupid word
but so are words in general
and you can't point to the tip of language
without falling back in.
let me try again
utopia could be the trembling of a grain. maybe just one
between the continents
or you and me
or the idea of movement
or something falling
or as ocean never anywhere
or particles of seablood
or bits of nightmare left tarnished
and soldered into refusing form
and itself

or let me split this atom between you and me
and count the difference
or count my blessings
or count how many times I forgot to see
or stupidly cried instead of looking
forgot the snakes tumbling out of lightning bolts
or ships tipped like lightning in lava seas
and time on a loop looking straight at me
and tried instead to find a shiver
in the decay of a song
we sang once
and remembered.

IV

one. we walk in lodhi gardens after meeting for a cup of tea.
 december's late afternoon stretched out. the grass dug up
 brown and turned over. we pass two men arguing while push-
 ing carts full of roasting nuts. the light gets more oblique.
 the ruins more inscrutable. swans and ducks fluttering in the
 ponds. the air a chalky zigzag in our throats. the brown arms
 of the smog settle around our shoulders. under a tree a man
 sits contemplative on a bench wearing a mask over his nose
 and mouth.

two. under a rose gold tent that stretches back without end.
 a bright winter sun hovers at its margins. it draws a neat line
 across the thousands of women sitting underneath, their faces
 painted fuchsia by the light. hundreds of men and women
 standing crowded around them. outside there is the law. inside
 the old women sit on the ground and hold it. this is day fifty.
 flying across the tent in every direction are millions of rose
 coloured petals. thousands of voices shouting
they will fight with bullets, we will reply with flowers

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

songs for petals refers to:

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "Va Yabqā Vajhu Rabbika" (1981) (more popularly known as "Hum Dekhenge") performed by Iqbal Bano in 1986, the transliteration is my own. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlqgs5oWYd4>

'song #4' is a quotation from pages 512-13 of Michael T. Taussig's "Excelente Zona Social" in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 27, Issue 3, pp. 498-517.

Chandan Gomes' Facebook videos posted 2 March 2020 and 2 February 2020. The final line of 'songs for petals' is a quotation from the caption for Chandan Gomes' video posted 2 February 2020 of the 50th day of the sit in by women in Shaheen Bagh, New Delhi, protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens in India.

Ram Rahman's Facebook pictures posted 29 February 2020. The reference to Kristallnacht is inspired by his description of photographs posted on March 1 2020 of the destruction of two schools during riots in Delhi in the preceding days.

Christina Sharpe's description of the disintegration of sodium from the bodies of the enslaved in the middle passage in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016

Italo Calvino's "Blood, Sea" in *Cosmicomics* NY: Penguin Classics, 2010, pp.190-202.

Arundhati Roy's speech at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, published as "This is our version of the coronavirus. We are sick" in *scroll*, 11 March 01, 2020 <https://scroll.in/article/954805/arundhati-roy-on-delhi-violence-this-is-our-version-of-the-coronavirus-we-are-sick>

Sa'ilemanu Liliomalava-Doktor's description of Vā in "Beyond 'Migration': Samoan Population Movement (Malaga) and the Geography of Social Space (Vā)." *The Contemporary Pacific* 21, no. 1 (2009): 1-32.

Images of utopia in Amar Kanwar's *The Sovereign Forest* ed Daniela Zyman. Berlin: Vienna: Sternberg Press, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2015.

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confederation and its members.

