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

On a bus going from Jamia Nagar to Old Delhi December 7 1992 (part 1)

We are drowsy afternoon

sliding without shadows. Bars cut the window in horizontal lines

& the doors are mouths gasped open A man's voice floats reedy through currents on the bus

he is singing.

Around his voice

a grey cottondry silence
He sings softly not gently
a knife inside a plastic serenade

I press my palms damp on rough denim thighs
Our fear twanging the air
filling it with water
Air sharpening outside as our bus carried on slick and slow waves

a concentric set of circles a bull's-eye on its back

П

songs

december 2019, when they crash into the library at jamia millia islamia first they smash the cyclops security cameras, then they take out the eye of mohammed minhajauddin reading in the library, an eye for an eye. they round up protesting students, beat them to the ground and

make them sing

i am too young to understand when someone comes home with a cassette recording of idbal bano singing a banned poem by faiz. i listen more to the sound of the 50,000 people in the audience, they are so loud that the tabla player changes their tempo to the crowd shouting revolution i don't understand but its timbre onomatopoeia enough we shall see & shake the earth/ crackle lightning/turn mountains of oppression into dry cotton

february 2020. mobs shouting/ shoot the traitors/ throw petrol bombs into homes in ashok nagar/ knocking men to the ground making them sing/ again

#4
"The hours pass. The sun beats down. The great white herons The nours pass. The sun beats down. The great white herons spread their wings like the swan enrapturing Leda as we float downstream through the floating verdure. He sings of the paramilitaries and the terror they create, chopping up bodies and heaving them into the river we are floating on with its vivid flowers."

There is litter in the foreground. The crane is red. Its long arm draws an arc around a black shore around it. Water ripples in a white sheen reflecting the grey sky and the halo of a suggested sun behind the clouds. Cars pass by behind. Ordinary. Brick buildings line the road behind the cars. The camera follows the crane moving in circles, pulling its matter to shore.

a half life of singing

singing lying on the ground blood trickle soldiers above ready boots smash a cctv camera (eye number 1) and then the eye of a man (eye number 2) singing on a river full of bodies & flowers cranes humming through sewers for bodies disappeared singing faiz under tents with old women sitting vigil singing on a cassette tape worn old and through

songs slick leaving time span the space between grains of air scale lush trade winds angry gust retribution waiting

seablood as a spinning of air-plus-water flood-plus-famine twine past into future a half-life of vibrations water-into-air bodies-into-song tremble the undertow of the in-between

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

#3
a teenager and an older man. the boy has his hand on the handlebar of a twisted bicycle frame. there is no second handlebar, 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

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 pushing 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 Vaļhu Rabbika" (1981) (more popularly known as "Hum Dekhenge") performed by Iqbal Bano in 1986, the transliteration is my own. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom/watch?youtube.gom

'song #4' is a quotation from pages 512-13 of Michael T Taussig's "Excelente Zona Sociale" 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 's ongs for pretaid's 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. in, March 01, 2020 https://scroll.indiractic/945a9/3/munthati-roy-on-del-hi-violence-this-is-our-version-of-the-coronavirus-we-are-sick

Sa'illemanu Lilomalava-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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