

When Two Southerners Meet on a Tram in Gothenburg, Sweden

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Abstract

This text navigates the tensions, contradictions and common ground around the question of justice and violence read through the respective practices of two PhD candidates at HDK-Valand. Their work is rooted in the geographical specificities of South Africa and India and explores the theme of violence, emanating from the “contact points” of their situatedness, which resist immediate “common ground” and yet function as an intervention in how common rhetorical strategies around creative regimes are engaged in the formulation of aesthetic experiences.

Disclaimer: All copyrighted materials in this text (videos and citations) are solely for educational and research purposes. Reference and use to these materials in this context are part of the research and towards expanding the practice of citations.

Note To the Reader

This proposed text emanates from and builds on an ongoing conversation between two southerners Nkule from South Africa and Ram from India. A version of this conversation, along with a video work, was publicly performed during the PARSE conference on Violence in 2021. Through the text we attempt to foreground the experiential over the argumentative register in order to further develop the ideas explored in the video.

By exploring some of the theoretical and aesthetic complications that arise from the layering of multiple intersecting thematics, oscillating between caste and race, the text negotiates several tensions. These are rooted in the geographical specificities of South Africa and India but allow an exploration of the “contact points” of embodied situatedness that generate new rhetorical and aesthetic registers.

The conversation in this text is neither animated by pathologies engendered by geography, nor directly negotiates bio- and narcopolitics as placeholders for relating. Rather, the conversation is the moment of encounter in a third location, Gothenburg, Sweden. The tram ride becomes the critical temporal space and contact zone of the South and “southernness”, in an attempt to articulate solidarity beyond histories of negation.

Structurally, the text is not intended to be an illustration of the elements that precede it, instead it performs a

cross-citational negotiation around multiple layers of personal influences and multidisciplinary media to critically engage with urgencies that emerge when complex subjectivities meet around the question “How do we make us known to each other?” Like the video work that accompanies this text, we pursue a shared methodological and aesthetic interest in breaking away from established academic constructs. To this end we mobilise images, text, music, quotations, poetry, speculations, artworks, songs, speeches, theory and stories in a fragmentary, opaque and non-linear way. These multiple nodes are collated, curated and presented in such a way that they enable us to negotiate the predicaments, contradictions and possibilities inherent in the thematic interests of the paper.

Scene 1: Are We Synced?

EXT. DAY. GOTHENBURG. TRAM NO. 4.

Nkule: Are we synced?

Ram: I think we are synced.

Nkule: You think so?

Ram: If not, we can try to fix it later.

(silence)

Ram: How do you feel?

Nkule: I think we will be able to put something together.

Ram: Do you want to make it super accessible? Or do what we want and see how much of it is legible?

PARSE

Nkule: Since our approach is not to be fully transparent, it will appear in layers anyway. [REDACTED]

Ram: That makes me think about [REDACTED] And that also makes me think about opacity and obscurity. The two southerners that we are... how do we navigate an ethics of solidarity while acknowledging difference?

Nkule: Without eating each other whole. In any case, there really is this impossibility of being transparent.

Ram: But we want to be generous, right?

Nkule: [REDACTED]

Ram: My context can never be fully legible for you and your context can never be fully legible for me. But we are being generous to each other. Should we not be generous to our readers and viewers?

Nkule: [REDACTED] but we can't keep translating ourselves.

Ram: Then what about the risk of being translated?

Nkule: More than anything else, what is at stake here is the poetics of this conversation and the intimacy that we are trying to generate through this mode of praxis.

(silence)

Ram: We can only hope that these poetics and intimacy extend beyond us.

Scene 2: The Last Question

INT. DAY. ZOOM. PARSE CONFERENCE.

Jyoti Mistry: What is striking in the way you've functioned in terms of taking us on a journey with you, taking the tram ride, feeling the intimacy of the conversation through citation. [REDACTED] I'm wondering about the relationship between situatedness and citational practice, and how you are exploring the reveal of an ontological and an epistemological move between these various historical and political registers, mostly through what I would say is a citation and a situation. What is striking even more, in terms of the vignettes and the way you've carved them, is that they move in parallel with each other, almost like the tram tracks of your journey. They are in conversation with each other and at times diverge and at other converge. Do you want to talk about situations and citations?

Nkule and Ram: This conversation realises both a deep commitment to decolonial ethics and epistemic justice; it also performs an epistemological disturbance, both in the logic of the text as well as its formal construction. And this is why it was very important for us to choose the references very carefully. They range from Winnie Mandela to Angela Davis, Katherine McKittrick to Ruth Manorama and they are the punctuation points through which we encounter the personal and grand politics of intimate and grotesque violences. The main part that points back to situational and geographic specificity is the prompt of having to respond to the Southern framing, while remaining cognisant that that is a very specific political framework of marginality.

The use of repetition as a compositional strategy between the written, spoken and filmic elements are a method of nuancing and layering, as each rehearsal of the repeated terms makes visible the obscure elements of citation within citation and the relationship between the source material to speak and to create new encounters...

Through the navigation of this conversation, what becomes clear is how much of the experiences of marginality of blackness are mediated through the understanding of blackness as articulated through transatlantic blackness. In this instance, Édouard Glissant and the poetics of encounter become a centring thesis for possible ways of meeting each other... for navigating the African and Indian diasporic experience through multiple moments of temporal displacement and the parallel lines of historic development punctuated by moments of encounter. When we gift each other references, we are in essence translating trajectories of what being from the Global South is or what it entails in the context of violence we are navigating knowability.

Scene 3: Exchanging Gifts (Ram to Nkule)

INT. DAY. PHD OFFICE.

But difference itself can still contrive to reduce things to the Transparent.

If we examine the process of “understanding” people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce.

Accepting differences does, of course, upset the hierarchy of this scale. I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh. But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction.

Agree not merely to the right to difference, but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the

texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures. There would be something great and noble about initiating such a movement, referring not to Humanity but to the exultant divergence of humanities. Thought of self and thought of other here become obsolete in their duality. Every Other is a citizen and no longer a barbarian. What is here is open, as much as this there. I would be incapable of projecting from one to the other. This here is the weave and it weaves no boundaries.

We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone.

Citation

Glissant, É. (1997). *Poetics of Relation* (B. Wing, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan. pp. 189–190, 194.

Scene 4: Exchanging Gifts (Nkule to Ram)

EXT. EVENING. [REDACTED]

As noted, my methodology is a black methodology, indebted to both anti-colonial thought and black studies. My methodological premise, or assumption, is that black people have always used interdisciplinary methodologies to explain, explore, and story the world, because thinking and writing and imagining across a range of texts, disciplines, histories, and genres unsettles dismal and insular racial logics. By employing interdisciplinary methodologies, and living interdisciplinary worlds, black people bring together various sources and texts and narratives to challenge racism. Put differently, one of the many ways race and racism are manifested is through colonial and imperial knowledge systems that express and normalise discipline-based and place-based classifications that hierarchically organise (according to race, place) our epistemologies. Within black studies and anti-colonial studies, one can observe an ongoing method of gathering multifariously textured tales, narratives, fictions, whispers, songs, grooves; these narratives push up against and subvert prevailing colonial and imperial knowledge systems by centring and legitimising other (black) ways of knowing. What is meaningful, then, are the ways in which black people are interdisciplinary actors, continually entangling and disentangling varying narratives and tempos and hues that, together, invent and reinvent knowledge.

Black knowledge is a method, which means it is an activity. Black knowledges are spirited, energetic and operational, rather than discursive flattened artefacts that we study

Black methodologies do not follow a trajectory of seeking, finding, and making an analytical site knowable; black methodologies are articulations of wonder, curiosity, and sharing. For this reason, I

observe that black methodologies are wavering knowledge processes that move in and out of clarity.

Citation

McKittrick, K. (2021). Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea. *Antipode*, 54(1), 3-18. pp. 5, 6.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12773>.

Scene 5: The Geography of Encounter

EXT. INT. 24X7. SWEDEN.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Citation

Ranjan, R.K. (2018, February 7). *Sweden could have been paradise* [Video]. Vimeo. Retrieved March 15, 2022, from <https://vimeo.com/154163755>

Scene 6: You Ask Me Whether I Approve of Violence

INT. EXT. DIFFERENT TIMES AND SPACES.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Angela Davis:

You ask me!

That makes no sense.

(anger)

You ask me?

That makes no sense.

(exasperation)

You ask me!?

That makes no sense.

(incredulous)

You ask me!?

That makes no sense.



Nkule: Can we practise an aesthetic that is beyond the weight of evidencing, visibilising the violence, and moreover, beyond the weight of casteism and racism?

Ram: Maybe... Maybe when two southerners meet on a tram in Gothenburg, Sweden.

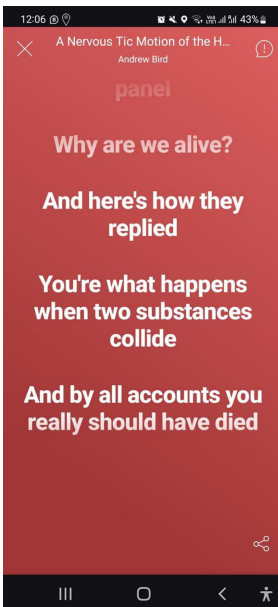
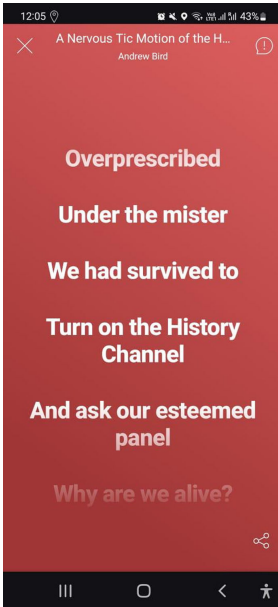
Citation

[MusicGusto]. (2008, June 30). *Andrew Bird – A Nervous Tic Motion of the Head to the Left (with lyrics)*. YouTube. Retrieved October 6, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1Aha3JjELY>

[MrLaurencelaph]. (2012, January 28). *Angela Davis On Violence*. YouTube. Retrieved October 6, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIDgDFvyeS8>

Scene 7: When Two Substances Collide

EXT. INT. A MOVING SHIP.



Citation

[MusicGusto]. (2008, June 30). *Andrew Bird – A Nervous Tic Motion of the Head to the Left (with lyrics)*. YouTube. Retrieved October 6, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1Aha3JjELY>

Notation



Screenshot of lyrics of Andrew Bird's song is employed for its sonic registers.

Screenshot of the cover page from Édouard Glissant's book *Poetics of Relation* (1997) showing lines of connection and encounter, the image is overlaid with text from Andrew Bird song, which also reveal our intervention to apply survivance in the face of obliterating forces.

Scene 8: The Bind

EXT. INT. 24x7. PLANET.

Nkule: Did you see the video I sent you? The one in which Alok Sharma, President of the COP 26 climate summit, is on the verge of tears...

Ram: I don't think we were interested in including climate in our discussion. Right? But then... 


Nkule: He offered an emotional apology as an agreement was reached with last-minute changes to its wording on coal. A commitment to "phase out" coal, which was included in earlier drafts, was changed to "phase down" after China and India led opposition to it. Sharma said he was "deeply sorry" for how the negotiations had ended.

Ram: I kept thinking about why it invoked the kind of interest and response that it did... Look at the situation... From the name it seems obvious to me that the president has South Asian (maybe even Indian) ancestry and he is disappointed because India and China refuse to phase out coal.

You destroy AND CONTINUE TO DESTROY the world for years, and now that we are in a huge crisis the responsibility to fix it is equal. I call this THE VIOLENCE OF CONSTANTLY BEING IN A BIND... a bind that is not of our making. Of course we have to fix the world... we live in it too... but if we accept the premise that the responsibility has to be shared equally... Isn't that violence too? Maybe this world needs to end so that we can be liberated from this bind. A bind that is not of our making.

Citation

[Guardian News]. (2021, November 14). *'I am deeply sorry': Alok Sharma fights back tears as watered-down Cop26 deal agreed*. YouTube. Retrieved October 8, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLmaumUTqVE&ab_channel=GuardianNews

Notation

Screenshot of lyrics of Andrew Bird's song *A Nervous Tic Motion of the Head to the Left* taken from the app Deezer.

Scene 9: The Violence of Constantly Being in A Bind

EXT. INT. 24x7. PLANET WITH CASTE AND RACE.

Ram: Violence of Transparency

we and i have to be(come) knowable; you have to know; we are now locked in this configuration; we want to insert the stories of our existence; we tell you in a way that you understand; you testify of our existence; now we both exist; you as the knower and we as the knowable; i think it's a double bind indispensable that our stories are included, infuriating that i am reduced, we are reduced; you make us transparent; what are you made of?

Nkule: Violence of Urgency

We know it's urgent. But when you create a sense of urgency, it mostly serves you. It dehistoricises and decontextualises your doings of the past, present and future. It gives you the moral authority to compel us and therefore perpetuate the power differential again. We know it's urgent, but we are very suspicious when you create a sense of urgency.

Ram: Violence of Specificity

Both you and we know the pitfalls of grand narratives. You teach that in y/our universities. Then why is it that the bulk of specificity is performed by people coming from outside of the Western world? Why can't we partake in abstraction? Abstracted philosophies? We can but we can't. Who will do the micro work if we abandon it too? We know when we do the micro it mitigates the risk of complete collapse of y/our universities. It sustains the macro. What if we decide to phase out the micro, will you then express your disappointment? Will you cajole us to go for phasing down as opposed to completely phasing out.

Nkule: Violence of Evidencing

If the burden of evidencing is on us, then here is the evidence:

[REDACTED]

Ram: Violence of Reacting/Denial of Creating

How do we create new objects and aesthetics that articulate our individual positions without having these positions become provincialised... this is the bind and the double bind that we dance between in order to be very clear, even to ourselves, precisely when we are responding/reacting or creating and finding the methods that move us beyond this "tension", for lack of a better word, of visualities that are tethered to violent regimes and towards articulating a different mode of living, expressing imaginations of the world.

Nkule: Violence of Solidarity

Who sets the terms and conditions? Who does it benefit?

[REDACTED]

Ram: Violence of Representation

Representation is speaking on someone's behalf; speaking on someone's behalf is produced within the system of the speaker, the speaker is driven by making it intelligible for itself; I feel the pressure to make it intelligible to you; intelligibility is needed for visibility; visibility can lead to inclusion; inclusion is urgent; but urgent produces a bind necessary but reductive.

Scene 10: These Black Women Are So Strong

EXT. INT. 24X7. PLANET WITH GENDER, CASTE AND RACE.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Citation

Michaelis Galleries, (2022, August 18). *You Must be Exhausted (2014), by Bonolo Kavula*. Vimeo. Retrieved October 6, 2022, from <https://vimeo.com/454483659>

Notation

Thumbnail image for the video is taken from Bonolo Kavula's work *You must be Exhausted*.

Screenshot cover image from E—douard Glissant's book *Poetics of Relation* (1997) showing lines of connection and encounter. The image is overlaid with text from Andrew Bird song, which also reveal our intervention to apply survivance in the face of obliterating forces.

Scene 11: Jahaji Caribbean Music on The Tram

EXT. INT. A MOVING SHIP.

Citation

[Caribbean Hindustani]. (2020, May 6). *Jahaji Music: India in the Caribbean by Surabhi Sharma*. YouTube. Retrieved October 8, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTQ4cv1W-IA>

[ThirdWorldNewsreel]. (2011, August 29). *Edouard Glissant: One World in Relation – Trailer – TWN*. YouTube. Retrieved October 8, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBfSKmo0mPQ>

Notation

We have pulled screenshots from the videos and recommend that the reader watch the full clip in order to gain the full significance.

Scene 12: Relationship of Violence

EXT. INT. APARTHEID ZA. IN.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

The Question Paper

Why are there no doors to the house that birds may knock upon or wind push open?

Why are there no beds to wet at night or to fall off with a thump?

Why is the first page of the first lesson missing?

Why is the sky visible through the corner of the slate?

While sharpening the pencil to a point why are my fingers the only ones to be cut?

Why are the button-less clothes and bottom-torn knickers not cut to my size?

Why did fingers crinkle in shame when they dipped into the pocket?

Why does my mother cry smoothing soiled notes?

Wiping sadness off why does father smile?

Why does elder sister, coconut husk in hand, go to the neighbour to borrow fire, stumbling in the dark?

Why does grandma extinguish the oil-lamp when there is moonlight?

Why does mother say that there will be answers to all sorts of questions once one grows up?

Citation

[TAMIL MOVIE TRENDING CLIPS]. (2021, May 15). *KARNAN MOVIE # FIGHT SCENE #* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved November 13, 2021, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD66TiJ_qU

[Kolamavu Kokila]. (2021, May 28). *KARNAN Bus damage scene in HD* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pguDgYzCwFO>

[Lamin Salim Sankoh]. (n.d) *Sarafina* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfl5h4OaRk0>

[IndiaCivilWatch ICW]. (2020, October 27). *Statement by Dr. Angela Davis* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved November 13, 2021, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv_W7AFdbuM

Muthukkaruppan. P. (2017). Critique of Caste Violence: Explorations in Theory. *Social Scientist*, 45(1-2), 49-71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26380329>.

Notation

Thumbnail image for the video is from the film *Karnan* and the image is overlaid with selected texts from Parthasarathi Muthukkaruppan's article *Critique of Caste Violence: Explorations in Theory*.

The poem *The Question Paper* is written by M R. Renukumar. We first came across the poem in Parthasarathi Muthukkaruppan's article *Critique of Caste Violence: Explorations in Theory*, page 57.

Scene 13: Solid Solidarities

EXT. INT. IN URGENT TIMES.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Citation

[IndiaCivilWatch ICW]. (2020, October 27). *Statement by Dr. Angela Davis*. YouTube. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv_W7AFdbuM

Sumit Samos, 2020. CASTE 101. (2020, August 9). *YouTube*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hUTKnINnYk>

[IndiaCivilWatch ICW]. (2020b, October 27). *Statement by Dr. Ruth Manorama*. YouTube. Retrieved October 10,

2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKaPPE2-Wpc>

Scene 14: Emergency

EXT. INT. IN URGENT TIMES.

Citation

Sanyal, S. (2016, April 16). Delhi: Where Black Lives Don't Matter. *NewsLaundry*.
<https://www.newsLaundry.com/2016/04/07/delhi-black-lives-dont-matter>

Scene 15: Exchanging Gifts: Ram to Nkule to Ram

EXT. DAY. GOTHENBURG. TRAM NO. 4.

Nkule: Let me read back a poem to you that you shared with me:

Running manual

Trains of images run

Quick on their toes

The window frames

The planned telecast

Of instructions

To assimilate at times

To annihilate at times

The shadow of a bridge

Appears in the distance

Much like a lighthouse

But the course of your boat

Has been charted for you

To clear any doubts

Look out of your window

And read the manual

Citation

Ranjan, R.K. (2016). *The tram tells me where I am going*.

Notation

This poem was originally written in Hindi by Ram Krishna Ranjan and translated in English by Srilata Sircar for the multi-channel video exhibition titled *The Tram tells me where I am going*. The work was exhibited at the Medical History Museum, Gothenburg, in 2016.

Scene 16: now i know i can

INT. INT. BANISHMENT. BRANDFORT.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Winnie Madikizela Mandela:

Now

(anger)

now

i know

(exasperation)

now

i know

i can

(incredulous)

now

i know

i can

now, i know i can



Citation

Lui, N. (2021). *She Who struggles:Winnie Mandela*. Breaking the Chains. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from <https://www.breakingthechainsmag.org/she-who-struggles-winnie-mandela/>

Scene 17: Do You Reach for The Gun?

INT. INT. 24x7. INTERIORITY.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Do you reach for the gun when the state is pointing a gun at you?

Do you reach for the gun when “violence (is) at a crucial remove from the state and yet is not exactly non-state violence”?

Do you reach for the gun when postcolonial states, depending on ongoing mobilisations of oppressions and social divisions, choose when to assume monopoly of violence, when to commit violence through quasi-state actors and when to express inability to control violence?

Do you reach for the gun when violence is “legitimately unleashed against dissidents today while maintaining the liberal-democratic representational form of rule”?

Have we not occasionally wished!?! alas, only if... only if the state, through a constitutional, legal, secular and democratic framework, had a monopoly on violence and exercised its monopoly in a fair and judicious way!?

(anger) (exasperation)

(incredulous)



Citation

[Lamin Salim Sankoh]. (n.d) Sarafina [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfl5h4OaRk0>

Banerjee.P. (n.d.). *State (and) violence*. Retrieved November 13, 2021, from https://www.india-seminar.com/2017/691/691_prathama_banerjee.htm

Scene 18: Feelings: Gift Exchange Between Southerners

INT. DAY. ZOOM. PARSE CONFERENCE.

Jyoti Mistry: Before we end this, perhaps you would like a gift. Southerner to southerners. Nkule: We would like to know the terms and conditions of the gift.

Ram: I was not thinking about it. Thank you, Nkule, for this. What are the conditions, Jyoti?

Jyoti: From the South, we have understood that gifts are dangerous. Because trinkets and baubles have seduced

us into giving away our land. So, you are right, Nkule, in asking for the terms and conditions of the gift. At this point, I have no condition. It's a gesture of hospitality without hostility, to quote Derrida. This is my gift to you without any tease and sleaze.

Videos can not be displayed in PDF documents. Follow the link to see the source.

[Link to source](#)

Citation

Mathias Lacroix. (2016, June 6). *"Freedom is a feeling! Freedom is No Fear!" – Nina Simone – New York, 1968 – by Peter Rodis* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved October 6, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPD8f2m8WGI>

Scene 19: Fully Redacted

INT. EXT. EVERYTHING. EVERYTIME. EVERYWHERE.