

The Road to Nicosia: Fragments, Quotations, Potholes

Louise Saldanha and Aruna Srivastava

- On the space of the borderland: *At some point on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes.* (Gloria Anzaldúa)
- On the space of diaspora: *Resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional and analytical cultural spaces.* (Chandra Mohanty)
- On the space of home: *home is no longer just one place. It is locations.*(bell hooks)
- On the space of the postcolonial: *The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulations as repetition and difference.* (Homi Bhabha)
- On the space of the Sacred: Because within the archaeologies of dominance resides the will to divide and separate. . . [there are]reciprocal investments we must make to cross over into a metaphysics of interdependence. . . Pedagogies that are derived from the Crossing . . . disturb and reassemble the inherited divides of Sacred and secular, the embodied and the disembodied, for instance, pushing us to take seriously the dimensions of spiritual labour that make the sacred and the disembodied palpably tangible and, therefore, constitutive of the lived experience of millions of women and men in different parts of the world. (Jacqui Alexander)

Fragments from a performance-in-progress:

- In order to get there, we want to move through a series of sites here. As moments, they are discrete, incommensurable, colliding, and disparate, but they are, at the same time, all part of the same moment. In doing so, our hope is that, in the fissures and gaps existing betwixt and between these tellings, some possibilities, and limits of border crossings might take shape. *[this avoids the whole problem, of “flow”—which, as you read this, you may find to be an*

issue. As my students tell me, “all the connections are there but in my head”! Anyway, I suspect that some of the bumpiness will be smoothed over by our difference voices]

- At the site of the border dividing here from there, near from far, home from away, outside from inside, there are always many more sides than “both.” Dictionarily defined, “borders” find meaning as “that which forms the outer edge of something,” as “lines or frontier areas separating political divisions or geographic regions or parts,” as “decorative strips around the edge of something, such as fabric,” and, finally, as “strips of ground, as at the edge of a garden or walk, in which ornamental plants or shrubs are planted.” The definitions here obscuring the relations of labour, of gender, of race, of culture, of nation enabling these borders—be they political, geographical, or ornamental—to appear in the first place. That tending of plants and shrubs of the last definition perhaps being the work Bush said, last year, Americans won’t do so poignantly (in)articulated in the news which is too full of the number of people dying in motion crossing borders from Mexico into the US, from Aboriginal reserves into Canadian urban centres. And, all this in times where efforts of worldwide flexible accumulation of capital endeavour to signify borders of little matter at all.
- The world may indeed be a smaller place, where the movement of capital and bodies occurs at rates once perhaps unimaginable. But, increased and diversified practices and processes of segregation ensure this proximity does not necessarily equate to familiarity and equity. Globalising operations bind destinations to points of origins through foreign policies and labour restructuring. Migrations do not just happen. They are produced, and they are structured. “Diasporic,” “immigrant,” “minority,” “ethnic,” “multicultural” performatively utter not just the Other, but the Self as well. While, ostensibly, the goal is to be, at home here, the interpellations hailing us return us always to that point of arrival. For, to be really at home dreams us no longer requiring Western “hospitalities” and the power relations it entails between hosts and guests, inhabitants and visitors that keep us, necessarily, in our place, out of place, not of this place.
- And so, perhaps, back to here, a tale also unravelling in the telling: In contemporary evocations of contact zones, borderlands, margins, peripheries, academic poststructural imaginaries, importantly and critically, need be always burdened as well with the material work of borders as they unevenly divide mobility, control, and agency. For, from where is it

that border crossings are free? From where is it that they do not cost money or time? From where is it that they are safe? From where is it that their dangers can be fetishised? From where is it that they become oppositional and transgressive? From where is it that they can be free ranging? From where is it that they are seen to be in crisis? From where is it that they have two sides? From where is it that they are metaphor?

- I think of something Rinaldo has written, the importance of a “practice of care” and how our push for community and identity, comfort and like-mindedness, a kind of border-policing that marked the underside of our social justice efforts in the 80s and 90s (even now) undermined that practice of care, across difference, perceived difference, constructed difference (because we knew these were constructed). What are the ethics we bring to bear on the need for comfort, community, tradition, friendship, solidarity, the demands of coalition building (by nature built on difference, across boundaries), the sincere and thoughtful request of the other for a hand across the bridge, a bridge that is stolid and immovable now, may be ephemeral, disappear, break down, tear away, in another context? What are the ethics of suspicion in a practice of care?
- I am drawn in and harshly critical at once, find myself thinking about the United States and guns as a north of the border and very holy Canadian, pondering the vicissitudes of naming (Cho first or last, as he preferred to call himself or as is “correct”?), bristling academically at the simplistic attribution of autobiography to artistic creation, horrified by the perpetuation of inaccuracy, the wilfulness of misreading and unmemory, moved to tears by stories of professorial heroism, to rage by stories of childhood racism, to puzzlement and understanding at student and university inaction, to further research about SSRIs and depression, and mental illness as motive, to Michael Moore, to reflections on adolescent bravado in a digital age, and on memories of so many silences and shuttered faces in my classrooms, where neither students nor teacher traversed a middle ground of connection or community at all. *It isn't my job*. And then, a man goes mad, or berserk, or whatever narrative makes sense to us afterwards, kills many many human souls, eye to eye, and, what? “we are the Hokie Nation”. What were they and we *before* those moments of shooting? I feel perilous, defiant, and wonder, during all of these years of Dec. 6 memorials why I have not given the same kind of thought to Marc Lepine and to the feminist politics of what we are doing as I have to Seung-Hui Cho, Nikki Giovanni, George Bush, Facebook, IanMcFarlane,

CBC, CNN, Wikipedia, and numerous blogs in the last many days. In this event, as with 9/11, something of its implications, something of its complexity and porousness is more evident to me. Or perhaps, I am simply infected with so much work on crossing, on what Jacqui Alexander calls the “metaphysics of independence” or the “tensions of intersubjectivity”:

We are all inhabitants of this world. The question we must pose is how do we inhabit this new world order. The processes...constitute and ensemble. We all have a relationship to them although we are not similarly positioned within them. Yet we are all implicated in them. How do we contest these contradictions, even as we live and reproduce them, we who are neither its creators nor its passive inheritors? . . . There are no innocent spaces; thus all spaces are fraught with interests, both conflicting and contradictory. (Alexander 107-8)

It is these “potholes”, the contradictions of embodiment, if you will, that mark, scar, and enable the work that Louise and I have done together, and separately, over that past fifteen years.