

Performing collisional ethnic studies: an (un)expected and (im)possible archive

Mario Obando

I have arrived late to the scene. I have arrived at a car accident amidst several intersections and assemblages. The following documents are as real as a passport, an ID card or a marriage license is real. The documents have material consequences; not only is this archive's construction done as unpaid labour, but it is a material archive that assembles a variety of labours—newspaper writing; document creation; math; musical production; the writing of lyrics; sound mixing; poetic writing; careful note-taking in class; close listening; emotional labour; hours spent on social media; google searching; personal observation; lived experience; memory; love-making; and conversations with a roommate, multiple professors, family, friends, and fellow students.

The following is artistic work—an improvised jazz piece made out of thought space and the love of thinking through one's political components in new and inventive ways. The following is archival work; it is the gathering, labeling, archiving and organizational work that an archivist would do for an interested student.

The following is a scholarly answer to the following questions: How does one make the remote and distant *not* remote and distant? Moreover, what is lost and what is found if I do not use theoretical framing or historical specificity or periodization or prose as the way to structure the content I am presenting here? How does the act of academic narration occur rhetorically throughout this archival performance? How does the interpretation of the documents change? How does the archive have a life of its own? Most importantly, how does the archival performance provide a way to think about the following statement: if scholars critique normative narratives of modernity, then why do they do so using the very normative writerly formations that script those narratives of modernity (prose, etc.)?

The following essay (archival performance, what have you) is an effort to intervene critically in relational and comparative ethnic studies. I have a set of assumptions that accompany this intervention. The essay/archival performance is a meditation first and foremost. It hopes to ask more questions than it hopes to answer. It complicates more than it hopes to clarify. It is open-ended and desires few, if any, conclusions. It is an effort to reveal the border of academic writing and reading practices—challenging the very assumptions we carry as readers of academic texts. In other words, it asks you the question—what were you expecting in the first place out of an “academic” piece? How do you navigate trudging through this essay? The essay's labour in meaning making is thus an (un)even labour between curator and reader(s). The (un)even labour is a collective enterprise, one that I hope is just the beginning of a life/death-long conversation and/or silence. It forces us to make meaning together, which I think is an important political project in it of itself.

Returning to the intervention, I am suggesting an intervention into relational and comparative ethnic studies and propose an offshoot of these respective fields—what I call *collisional* ethnic studies. I use the word collisional for a variety of reasons: first, collisional means that the work creates a place for

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material bodies/spaces/ideas/conflicts to meet across time and space. Collision also implies the improvisational and the unpredictable. How do we link unexpected and purposely decontextualized communities, spaces, and, yes, even animals together? How does perceived empty and negative space (see items 9 through 11) construct collisions in the reading of this essay?

Collisional ethnic studies—an unpredictable, unstable, fluid, and explosive field—builds off the work of comparative ethnic studies. In a special issue of *American Quarterly* linking Palestinians and Chicana/os, David Lloyd and Laura Pulido ask critical questions about comparative analysis of these two groups of racialized communities (2010, 792): How does a boycott work, what is its status as an instrument of nonviolent struggle, and when and why should a boycott be pursued? Are there analogies between the wall being constructed along the U.S. border with Mexico and the separation wall that cuts through the occupied West Bank—both with the participation of the same Israeli firm, Elbit System? What is the impact of the security state that has emerged in the United States since 9/11 and in Israel in the wake of the Second Intifada? In particular, how have such changes affected how the movement of people is controlled, whether U.S. Latina/os or Palestinians and Arab Americans? Are there comparative dimensions to educational inequalities affecting both Chicana/os and Arab Israelis, both of whom form substantial minorities that suffer from discrimination against their cultures and languages and significant underrepresentation in the upper levels of education? Lloyd and Pulido define solidarity as “based not on absolute identification, but on differentiated experiences of oppression and struggle against universalizing systems of domination like imperialism and capitalism” (2010, 792). The works included in the special issue are comparative; the comparison occurs at the site of settler colonialism, which the editors define as the “practice of conquering land and then populating it with the victorious people, the settlers.” This results in the “dispossession and often the extermination of large parts of the native population and the subsequent cultural, economic, and political subordination of the remainder” (Lloyd and Pulido 2010, 792). The questions emerging in the conversations and dialogue of the issue resemble the work of Steven Salaita (2006) in comparing Palestinians and Native Americans.

In my assemblage of this archival performance/essay, I hope to expand the criteria for comparison and relation between communities, spaces, and ideas. That, however, is a much messier process.

In other words, as previously mentioned, this essay is an effort to create a continuous collective exchange in a rhetorical, trans-temporal, trans-spatial set of imaginations. It is also an effort to not compare one-to-one groups and extend this work across a multiplicity of communities. Throughout the essay, some unpredictable and what some would say impractical and even impossible questions become possible. These questions are just a starting point to understanding how a collisional ethnic studies is a project rooted in the meditative space of the unpredictable, the non-linear, and the unexpected. The questions are a place for these ideas to meet. Jasbir Puar (2009) calls this an ethics of conviviality; it is an ethics to create a place for the (im)materiality of bodies to meet, as well as a site for them to self-annihilate, leading to new questions and inquiries based on the previously impossible.

For instance, what are the connections between Japan, Madagascar, Korea, Mexico, Mesoamerica, and the many spaces situated throughout the archival performance? In what ways does this challenge comparative ethnic studies’ traditional exploration of just two groups, sometimes a few more, and move us into a collisional ethnic studies across borders, time and space? How might the project inform new ways of rendering meditative space for finding critical avenues to eradicate and abolish liberal humanism?

Item I

State of Minnesota

Case No.

OBTS No.

2014 XY 9111492

04191991562

-vs-

Bench Warrant

In the name of the State of Minnesota, to all and singular the Sheriffs of the State of California: YOU ARE HEREBY INSTRUCTED TO ARREST _____.

If he/she be found in your county, bring him/her before this Court forthwith to show cause why he/she was not present in Court on JANUARY 21, 2015.

Said _____ shall be admitted to bail in the sum of \$25,000.00. The bond set by the Bench Warrant shall supersede and take the place of all previous bonds set in this case.

DONE IN OPEN COURT this day JANUARY 21, 2015.



Judge

Received this order _____ day of _____ and executed same in Hennepin County, MN

On ___ day of _____

The within named and having his body Now before the Court,

By _____
(Deputy)

Item 2

Reader.

This is a cr h t
as s e
i

Not for you.

A limb.

deaths.

r
took place he
e

explosion.

galactic fiesta

!!!!!!!

...gold glitter remains...

in shreds, [redacted] dent center

9...8...7...6...
cinco... cuatro...
tres...
dos...

portodoloquesiguenhaciendosLOSsonofabiche.deportdroneNAFTAfamineUNICEFkuwaitIRAQadama
ndeveCHRISTIANwhiteJESUSbrownMUERTEyPORtodosenlacarcelALLENWOODatlantaATW
ATERbig sandyBEUMONTcanaanCOLEMANflorenceFLORENCEHIGHhazeltonLEEleavenwor
thLOMPOCmarionMCCREARYpollockTERREHAUTEtucsonVICTORVILLEoctoberTWELVE
1984reagan_+_his_gangsters_COMPREHENSIVECRIMECONTROLACTOF1984andtheocean
WATERFRONTbrigs,afloatbrigs,correccentionalcustodyunitsTHEBORDERPATROLthemustaches
andbreadsAREconnectedtoAIRMANwilliamOLIVERreeseRESTINPOWERyoshiesatoMEMORY
mayyourmemoryinciteinsurrectionAGAINSTTHE47,000USTROOPSstationedinJAPAN.

Item 3

Have you heard the story of the Galactic Fiesta?
 It begins with a swordsman.
 His name was Saul.
 God appeared to Saul in Tarsus.

[Damn, this was my high school mascot]

[Seventh Day Adventists lessons paid off]

Saul became Paul.
 The slayer of the other
 Become the saint of the self.
 His missionary work extended itself

He even sailed the ocean blue
 And arrived to rape and plunder
 The Taíno people
 He is Paul.

Myth has it
 Paul named his sword Colon
 Its steel, took its form,
 Its handle, took its content

[myth, what other word can I choose?]

So have you heard the story of the Galactic Fiesta?
 Paul had endless heads
 Joseph-François Lambert, solidified by the London
 Missionary Society, a means to ~~an~~ end [add "s"]

[Forgive me mom]

Adjacent to Lambert's head, is Commodore Perry
 Torso, round, "action and adventure" into Tabasco
 Perry and Paul, along with their insurance on humanity,
 Took their sword to open the veins of Japan

The Galactic Fiesta has last.ed.s too long
 Forged out of the need for silver to trade with China
 It wanted to decorate its halls with the primal
 The silk, the porcelain and the spices of the Orient

Shit, Saul Paul, even declared a new frontier
 Battling the hammer and sickle during the long winter
 He declared that he would eat and shit the cheese of the moon
 "Space" for Paul was and is what needs to be conquered

Have you ever heard the sounds of the Galactic Fiesta?
 In the background...
 In the foreground...
 On the television...

Iggy Azalea, Macklemore
 Elvis Presley
 barack H obama

Transgress, oppose and resist
 Spatial binaries, the Galactic Fiesta

Mario Obando

Shhh, shhh, don't call the cops on their party
The boys, girls in blue won't arrive anyway [fuck the pigs]
Let the drunkards poison themselves
As they enjoy the spoils of war
Action and adventure has given them the fountain of youth

Its waters, though, are a mirage
A perpetual VegasHavanaMacau [I won't book this time, I swear]
Camp Justice's soldiers will kill themselves
An eye that cannot see, itself, blinds itself

Our eyes are unborn, born, unborn, born
Needles, puncturing, penetrating, perpetrating
Rotting, at times, in between six feet under
And three and six feet wide

Jails, detention centers, classrooms
DMVs, the zip code you claim to rep [562, damn, not mine though]
Was never yours,
Only stars, only the cosmos, only the deadliving

Atacama Desert, the vanished take a telescope
They use astronomy to map an escape
Appalachian Mountains, the enslaved take their feet
They use their knowledge of the sky to flee

Black stars, listen
To fight the pale, rotting and disfigure imperial sith
Listen to the (audre) Lordes of the Force [Will they understand Sci Fi reference?]
From the crescent moon, the death star explodes

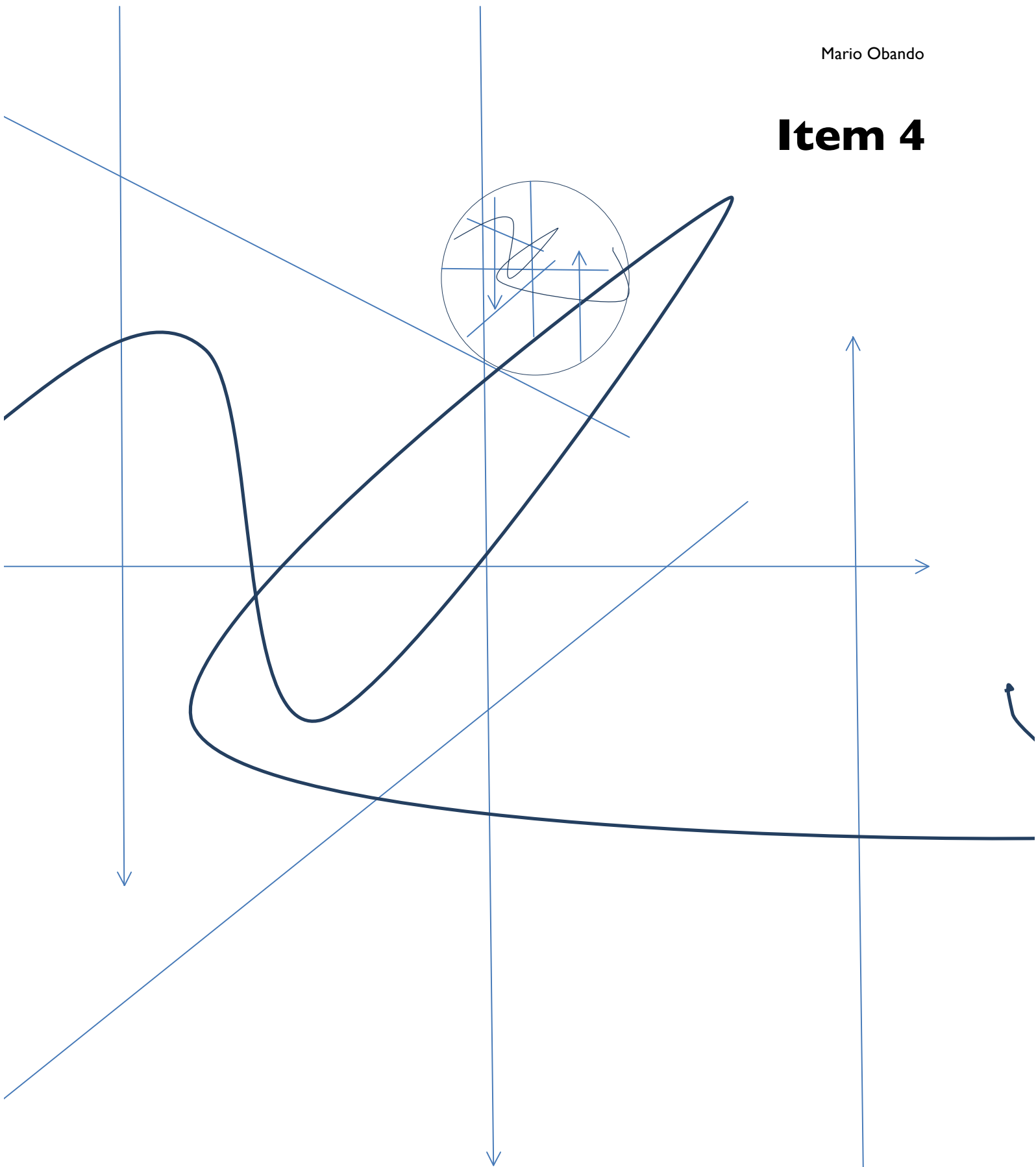
Have you heard the story of the Galactic Fiesta?
“¿Mijx? This is our war
Saul's sword is in my hands
Bloods stains keep it together, [y]our blood

Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa, Manchuria
Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Taíno,
Mexica, Nahua, Madagascar,
Pocomania, Voodoo

Servers at the Galactic Fiesta
Or
Moon *gente*
Who use imagination as the base [“we are all insecure, I'm just the first to admit it” -Yeezus]

What is (y)our story about the Galactic Fiesta?

Item 4



Item 5



“U.S. military starts curfew after rape claim”



“US: Trans woman burned to death in Florida”



“When Goldy Gopher Wore a Sombrero to a Galactic Fiesta”



“Hugo Chavez Is Gone, But His Support For Palestine Continues”

The U.S. currently has sanctions in place for a handful of countries, including North Korea, Cuba, Sudan, Syria, Myanmar and Libya. The extent of these sanctions varies by country.

Palestinians; free college education; Venezuela; solidarity; Latin America; Palestinians.

Item 6

Beat Juggling, Racial Grooving¹

It seems my prayer's weak I can't speak, not a linguist
To the question, this is symbolic of anguish
I feel regarding language and the obligation of revitalizing
Something sacred, failure to carry through is disgracing

To those who consume colonized bodies
I have you stressed out

Eating competitions while the worlds been starvin
Beat up communism with the help of Bin-Laden
Where would your war of terror be without that man
Every day you create more Nidal Hassans

Is it Obama's nation or an abomination? (x3)

Intravenously polite it was the walkie-talkies
That had knocked the pins down
As their shoes gripped the dirt floor
In the silhouette of dying
Dancing on corpses ashes

Is it Obama's nation or an abomination? (x3)

Natives kept in casinos and reservations
Displaced slaves never given reparations
Take everything from Native Americans
And wonder why I call it the racist experiment

Is it Obama's nation or an abomination? (x3)

The passing of time leaves empty lives
Waiting to be filled (the passing...)
The passing of time

Leaves empty lives

Waiting to be filled
I'm here with the cause
I'm holding the torch
In the corner of your room

Can you hear me?

Item 7

She opens the door to her yellow Toyota; her son holds the door with a close hanger so it doesn't fall out. In the back, her youngest son cries and complains. The material becomes a reality when the noise of the womb bears its constant grasp. Needing things, demanding things, crying for things, why don't we eat this, now! She is ready to explode but her husband is already good at that. She keeps her patience. Performs her role well. By the time she reaches the clean grass of brown suburbia, she realizes she does not remember the moment she dropped off her second son at school. She realizes that she does not remember how she got to the house, or the exact date her daughter moved back to the epicentro. Whose dream was she fulfilling? Her husband's or her employers'? Domination severs the boundary between the private and the public, between the domestic and the foreign: it does not discriminate. She enters the alarm code; greets the golden retriever. [¿Como les gusta este perro a los gringos?] Gets to work.

Domination severs the boundary between the private and the public, between the domestic and the foreign: it does not discriminate. She enters the alarm code; greets the golden retriever. [¿Como les gusta este perro a los gringos?] **He** gets to work. The door slams; he is angry again. His Armenian boss yelled at him for not having worked on his English during the “time off.” He yells at her. His blood and his forced blood hide in the closet. Her first son hugs her second son. His kicks to the furniture like bombs, bombs that slowly eat you, kill your dreams. It’s time for bed. They brush their teeth, not in circles as the teacher had said, but barely on the teeth, their hands shake. At any moment, he could come in, rush in, break down the door, invade (y)our space, find your saved up money, ruin (y)our goals, keep you from finding a way out. Destroy you.



“Women of Guatemala”

Illegal aliens – Arizona,
Illegal aliens –
Government policy –
United States, Political
Activists – United States

Female citizens of
Guatemala

Image, title and Library of
Congress subject headings
courtesy of *The Documented
Border: An Open Access
Archive* (see Gipe 2014).

Item 8



“The unprecedented historical symbolism of the first Black president has misled many if not most black people to downplay his substantial neoliberal policies and elevate his (and his family’s) brilliant and charismatic presence” (West 2014). Adjectives may be just conjured ghosts that accompany nouns of exception but they are nonetheless the best forms of exorcism. Drone. Wall Street. Mass Surveillance. Presidency, the noun. Detention. Deportation. Social Misery. Presidency, the noun. Somalia. Mexico. Yemen. El Salvador. Pakistan. Honduras. Afghanistan. Mexico. Iraq. Guatemala. Moor America. What would make it possible to see these sites as interconnected? Does the adjective Moor do the trick? Or would it require a bit of fiction, a suspension of truth? A suspension of truth which is rooted in empirical and imperial nationalism. Context. Periodization. Historical Specificity. All suspended. In their suspension, emerges conviviality. Self/other suicide. The other as a resource not as a risk. Temporal ruptures come in and come out. A circle within a plane; in the circle, the same subatomic structure shapes the next experimental step. Suspension is inherently part of the original structure but nonetheless can reconvene resistance by resisting norms of narration.

Item 9

Item 10

Item 11

Item 12

x

Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the historian cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/describing an event (2000, 106). The interpretation of historical evidence can anthropologize the very ways the people that we write about understand their lives. In other words, if one claims that the supernatural motivated one's activities, it is the job of the historian to assert that this claim is/was just a belief; this act of violence is the act of ascribing agency and by calling the claim belief it strips the claim of its possibility to teach us something we did not know before or could not see due to the constraints of the rationalized, trained and disciplined historian's efforts. The agent becomes the toy of the historian. This ensures that the historian has theorized a rational subject within the timeline the historian builds. Periodization, context, and historicity are the mechanisms under which history sweeps its fictive writing under the rug. Fictions are, as Avery Gordon writes, "what stand on the other side of the facts" (2008, 27). The possibility of life, writes Chakrabarty, is what we can learn; it is the subaltern.

z

Eric Hobsbawn once wrote: "when an innocent person is tried for murder and wishes to prove his or her innocence what is required is not the techniques of the postmodern theorist, but of the old-fashioned historian" (quoted in Chakrabarty 2000, 107). The law is the method of the historian. It is a colonial activity. Will its documenting, compartmentalizing, storytelling be enough? Or do we have to make fiction as well as find the border between the practical and the impractical? Making fiction and finding the border may conjure precisely the move away from history as the mechanism of proving one's humanity. How can we extend the humanities rendered by humanism and find other forms of living and being? Will rupturing the boundaries of history—nationalism, borders and difference—help us find the shared space, the intimacies of the four continents?

Item 13

Masirah, Oman [20°40'32"N 58°53'26"E]

This little piece of paradise is also home to the famous Wadi-Lizards. The Wadi-Lizards are not a ball club nor should they be confused with the lounge lizards of less certain character. These little brutes are chameleons of various sizes. They have oversized heads, large claws and a long tail to match their long, ultra quick sticky tongues. With these tongues they feast on insects and other airborne snacks which come within their range. This trait is particularly helpful when the lizards are near your feet, thus eliminating the need to carry a fly swatter. This may be the reason these creatures have adapted so keenly to the presence of certain individuals here at the Wadi.²



Item 14

The Negro is a toy in the white man's hands; so in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes.
- Frantz Fanon (1967, 107)

...Self-annihilation is the ultimate form of resistance, and ironically, it acts as self-preservation, the preservation of symbolic self enabled through the “highest cultural capital” of martyrdom, a giving of life to the future of political struggles—not at all a sign of “disinterest in living a meaningful life.”
- Jasbir Puar, on Ghassan Hage (2007, 216)

It may be necessary to overcome resistance in order to achieve resistance.
- Lisa Cacho (2012, 145)

Notes

1. Song lyrics referenced in this poem are as follows: Tall Paul, “Prayers in a Song” (stanza 1); Krudas Cubensi, “La Gorda” (stanza 2); Lowkey, “Obama Nation” (stanzas 3 and 7); At the Drive-In, “Relationship of Command” (stanza 5); The Smiths, “Rubber Ring” (stanzas 9-12).
2. Excerpted from GlobalSecurity.org’s entry on Misrah; see “Military” 2011.

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