

Club London has a Bouncer

Act One

Scene 1

ACAB: All Cops Are Bouncers

At the Charing cross police station. It is around 8:30PM in the evening, three South Asian women in their twenties frantically enter the station, one of them visibly shaken and on the verge of a breakdown.

Officer Karen, a white, blonde and tall woman in uniform, stands behind the complaints counter, frustrated by the non-english speaking civilian desperately trying to tell her something. She stands with both her hands on the counter, screams at the man to leave and refuses to help him. She waves for the next people to come up to her, and the three women rush to the counter.

Officer Karen, loudly:

Well? Go on then, what do you ladies want?

[Shiyamali pushes Rukmini to the counter, and the latter starts stuttering something illegible.]

Officer Karen, interrupting:

Yeah you're going to have to be louder and clearer or leave.

[Rukmini looks lost and Arundhati steps up beside her.]

Arundhati:

Our friend here, *pointing to Rukmini*, was just mugged an-

Officer Karen, interrupting again and looking directly at Rukmini:

Did you see his face? Yeah? Did you?

Rukmini:

No, it happened so fas-

Officer Karen:

Yeah sorry, we won't be investigating this. How old are you? What did you have in your bag? *Looking around across the three of them without waiting for a response.* Some responsibility, ladies. SOME responsibility?

Rukmini:

My bag was on my person, there was even a CCTV where it happened. It belongs to a shop, you could ask them for the footage. It had my residence permit in it.

Officer Karen, *impatiently and very loudly.*

This is LONDON, yeah? This is LONDON, not your home.

Blackout.

Act Two

Scene 1

If no one else will be, then YOU can be the Bouncer!

Rukmini enters Ealing Broadway tube station and walks down to where the Elizabeth line has now opened up, connecting West and East London directly. The schedule screen shows that the train to Abbey Wood is delayed by a few minutes. Rukmini takes their earphones out of their ears, and listens to the station announcements. They catch the familiar refrain: SEE IT. SAY IT. SORTED. Rukmini looks around the station, as though something terrible has struck them. There is a big poster in the colour blue that shows a "suspicious" man, deliberately shaded, and a vigilant civilian, drawn in light, and text in bold that reiterates what the voice reverberating through the station keeps saying to the different people accessing the space everyday: SEE IT. SAY IT. SORTED.

Rukmini unlocks their phone screen and looks at the news article they had been reading a few minutes ago. The headline reads: South Asian Women account for the most deaths in Southall tube stop. They take two steps back from the yellow line that has written on the other side of it "Mind the Gap."

Blackout.

Act Three

The Revolution too has bouncers, I'm afraid

Scene 1

A meeting at the Marchmont Community Center. There are many small posters in different colours- some showing silhouettes of women leading a revolution, others with drawings of Marx. All of the posters have 'Socialist Marxist Collective' written on them in bold black and red. The room is populated by 10 white men, 4 white women and 3 women of colour (two South Asian and one East Asian). There is a white man sitting and lecturing the crowd, there is occasional hooting and clapping especially when the words "working class" and "solidarity" are said by the speaker.

Scene 2

The meeting is over, and the crowd disperses. The three women of colour, along with one white man and three white women assemble outside to smoke.

Laura, passing the lighter to Rukmini:

Damn that was so powerful. I am so ready to ride this strike wave, I cannot believe RMT leadership finally got their shit together.

Sara, nodding thoughtfully:

Although, I do think they should coordinate strike dates because otherwise what's the goddamn point. I mean these union bosses are basically sellouts, they will screw the workers over at the negotiating table anyway. *Turning to Rukmini and Anandi*, What did you both think?

Rukmini and Anandi uncomfortably stare at each other for a minute, shooting knowing glances. Rukmini ashes their cigarette before speaking.

Rukmini:

What about migrant workers on precarious contracts? What does the collective think about the uneven ways in which strike action impacts them? Like, I am aware I have not been in this country for long, but how does no one say the word racism in these meetings?

Some people hum in agreement, suddenly looking pensive.

Laura:

I agree with you, I do, but don't you think that that line of conversation is extremely divisive? The working class is a solid group of people who are in solidarity with each other, including the cleaners, right?

More hums, emphatic nods.

Rukmini:

Exactly my point here, you know- you don't even have to say it but you know exactly who the cleaners are. That being working class itself means to be racialized in different ways. The room today, man, it was all white people.

Dan:

Okay but that really is not how London works. I don't know if you know about the Grenfell fire, but it was and is a working class issue. And that's what the resistance has been all about!

Rukmini, laughs curtly:

Yes Dan, I am aware of Grenfell. And it's actually incredibly fucked up that you think that it wasn't one of the most public displays of racist structural violence ever. I don't know what you're getting at, seriously.

Dan, agitated:

You're being too emotional-

Laura, stepping in:

Guys, guys, remember we're here because we support the SAME cause. Let's be CIVIL!

Anandi laughs, and Rukmini joins in.

Blackout.

Act Four: **Your Community? Which one?**

Scene 1

In a queue outside Leicester Square Theatre. Rukmini and Swati, buried in coats and giggling animatedly stand a little removed from the line. The queue is full of queer and trans people with their friends, lovers, partners and family. Most of the people are white, dressed androgynously and have coloured hair. Rukmini and Swati wear sweaters, scarves with distinct South Asian patterns, and Rukmini has on *Jhumkas*.

Swati:

Dude, queer people. Finally! I feel so happy just looking at them.

Rukmini:

I missed this community so much, I miss my friends back home. It really is so nice.

They stand in silence for a while, looking around and listening in on conversations.

Swati, hesitantly:

Do you think it's a bit?

Rukmini, raising an eyebrow:

White?

Swati, laughing:

Yes man, I thought my being queer was like being Shahrukh Khan.

Rukmini, animatedly:

You ARE Sharukh Khan, look at your damn muffler *yaar*.

They link their arms and walk towards the back to join the queue, laughing loudly and chatting all the way.

Scene 2

Stage directions: Rukmini is seated on a chair in the middle of the stage. The setting is supposed to betray their commute back home. A white spotlight ensures the focus is on them.

Rukmini is on a phone call on their way back, the audience cannot see who they are talking to.

Rukmini:

I mean, don't even ask me about dysphoria, Soumya. I don't think the queer people here would ever think I'm queer anyway. Sometimes, I don't think I'm queer honestly. Sometimes, I just think I'm brown, and do you remember what I had promised to not become once I moved? *Pauses, laughs sadly* Exactly! The brown migrant, flattened identity and all that jazz. But what am I doing wrong? Why am I so angry? I used to want to wear a binder all the time, but now I obsess over my *jhumkas*. God, I fear I'm a narcissist sometimes, but mostly I know I'm just lonely. [*Pause again, listening to something the voice in the earphones is saying.*] *Nahi yaar, samjhana mushkil hain.* This isn't home, this is London. I had a panic attack after two years last Monday

because I thought I wasn't interesting enough. Soumya, in 2019 I used to have panic attacks because ABVP could potentially beat us up. When did me being interesting start mattering? I don't even know if this is incredible privilege or mundane violence. I just know this isn't home, this is London.

Blackout.

Act Five

Scene 1

VIP Lounge: The Buckingham Palace

It is a tutorial in a university classroom. There are about ten people in the room, and a tutor. No one in the room is white. There is a mix of genders, and everyone is of different ethnicities. There is a projector and a screen, everyone is watching the BBC interview of Ngozi Fulani, where she talks about the racist encounter with Lady Susan Hussey in Buckingham Palace. When the part where Fulani recounts being asked "but where do you really come from, where do your people come from?", the entire classroom erupts in "wow"s and "oh hell"s. As the video ends, the class shuffles around to make a circle and begin a discussion.

Scene 2

Tutor:

So, how are we feeling about this? Does anyone want to take a minute, step out and come back?

Uncomfortable shuffling of feet and soft huffs are heard around the room.

Kiara:

This hits so close to home, you know. Just the other day someone asked me to "go back to China." It was so random and sudden, I didn't even know how to respond.

Collective sighs, someone mouths "jesus, i'm sorry".

Tutor:

Wow. I'm really sorry that happened Kiara.

Kiara:

No, but you would think I'm used to it by now wouldn't you? That it wouldn't stun me into silence, that I would have something to say. That I would do something other than walk away with my head down.

Rukmini:

Yeah but it never stops shocking you does it? Like, how does one respond to racism anyway? What do you want me to do, tear my skin off?

Tutor:

Yeah. It's such- It's such a private abuse. It's such a private, intimate moment of violence that one truly doesn't know how to respond to it in the moment, ever. Not the first time it happens, and not twenty years after. This question of going back to where you're from, it is vile. It really is. I put my labour and love in this place everyday, I have family here that has lived all their lives just as I intend to live all of mine here. So when, *pauses and looks around*, so when someone asks me where I am from, expecting an answer that is Africa-

Shireen:

Because of course they think Africa is one singular place.

Tutor, laughing:

Oh of course. But yeah, but that's the thing. I say Hackney! I say I'm from Hackney and that's never enough, is it?

Shireen:

But what if I am from Nigeria? What if I really did come here leaving some place behind? Where is the consciousness of a colonial legacy that has forced our hands? That it is in continuity? That I am still a colonised object every time someone comments on my hair, asks to touch it and then says I must keep it outside their place of work. Their place of work exists on the backs of our labour!

All students cheer her on- some snap their fingers, others say "damn right".

Reya:

The diaspora and migrant question- you really are right. Someone told me recently that being a diaspora child is being a perpetual migrant. And to a certain extent, I suppose that is right. It depends though, my sense of belonging is not entirely one of constant displacement. Ilford is home, and home is sometimes hard to be in.

Arun:

Yeah, I suppose this is something I have been thinking about. How my diasporic friends and I perceive encounters with racists differently, at times. I am constantly aware of my difference- I speak different, I think different. My accent betrays my non-belonging. When someone is racist to me in subtle ways, I can hear the racism. My friends? They respond to it as if it were just a disgruntled stranger being unreasonable.

Reya:

But it's also how the Global north alters our experiences of vulnerability in complicated ways. Beyond being diasporic, not only am I wary of being racialised here, I am also hyper-aware of the nature of the racialisation [*points to her hijab*]. Every South Asian brown person is not Muslim, but isn't their racialisation also contingent on their perceived proximity to Muslims and Islam?

Tutor:

Oh yes, absolutely.

Rukmini:

Reminds me of the *see it, say it, sorted* campaign. Such blatant racial profiling.

Shireen:

I mean, look at the poc representation in UK politics. Priti Patel, the migrant hater. Rishi Sunak who supports Hindu Supremacist politics in India. Really is shit, isn't it?

Tara:

Really is shit, but unsurprising because caste supremacy is not completely emancipated from white supremacy now, is it? It's the whiteness orientation and all that.

Tutor:

Tara! Lovely point- we can get to our discussion of Sara Ahmed's text then. I truly am glad that we started this hour by sharing our experiences. Let's all break out of the circle now then.

Feet shuffle, people break out of the circle. Blackout.

Act Six

Scene 1

In and Out: A Child's Game

Outside Russell Square park Rukmini stops and observes a group of children (between ages 10 and 12) playing a game of In and Out. There is not much else in sight- the setting betrays the sense of a dream, as though what is happening is only half real. Child one and two are white, Child three is racially ambiguous.

Child one, jumping when the chosen game moderator (child two) screams "IN" :
What do you want to be when you grow up? I want to be a COP! *Motions finger guns at child three.*

Child three, also jumping but is delayed due to the question's distraction and is declared "OUT" by the moderating friend: Daddy said I should want to be alive!

Blackout. End.

Notes:

1. *Yaar* is a Hindi slang for friend. (Refer to Act Four, Scene 1)
 2. "*Nahi yaar, samjhana mushkil hain.*" Translates to: No friend, it is difficult to explain (Act Four, Scene 2)
 3. Context for [ABVP](https://www.facebook.com/sfiaud/videos/video-evidence-of-abvp-goon-throwing-tables-on-vehicles-in-aud-which-according-t/1907920169311734/) in 2019:
<https://www.facebook.com/sfiaud/videos/video-evidence-of-abvp-goon-throwing-tables-on-vehicles-in-aud-which-according-t/1907920169311734/>
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Written Reflection Piece

Academic interrogations of the border regime, if and when decolonial, must produce knowledge in ways that transcend the borders of inaccessibility that institutionalised episteme often reinforces. As a queer migrant student of colour entering the borders of a nation that has colonially constructed this moment of my journey, I wanted to produce something autoethnographical in a manner that is interactive- as has been the border regime, in my limited time here. Theatre creates possibilities of resistance because the acting body is as engaged in the communication of its content, as are the bodies witnessing its potential. While listening to Luke de Noronha's podcast '*Deportation Discs*' (2017), I was deeply moved by the inventive potential of conversation, as I have always been by art. Through the recognition of the mutual in-exclusivity of both, I wanted to reflect on the mundanity of bordering, racialising and the intimacies it engenders by centering myself and my experiences as an international graduate student from India (the *third* world), in the UK (the *first* world).

The script aims to address three specific questions aligned with bordering. These questions are on the relationship between race and borders, on trying to gauge when the embodiment of migrant living ends (or if it is a perpetual state of existence, inherited intergenerationally), and the complications of gender, sexuality and race as a bordering practice. How I engage with these questions is, borrowing again from the infinite wisdom of de Noronha, by recognising that "racism is everyday" (Noronha, 2022) and as an inevitable extension, so is bordering. In this very blog post that I borrow the concept of mundane bordering from, de Noronha raises several important questions and articulates observations about the interconnectedness of seemingly individual racist behaviours and the border regime at large - all of which, I want to claim, are one large joint-family of white supremacy.

The first act of the play confronts one of the most banal border officials in the entire regime, the police officer. While I narrated an experience from my first month in London, the response that became a nagging refrain in all my internal monologues thereon (*This is London, not your home*) is one of the most common manifestations of anti-immigrant speech in the everyday lives of people of colour living in the West. Important to note in this encounter was the (material) loss of my Biometric Residence Permit - a document that illustrated (and approved of) the legality of my temporary "trespassing". This loss, for which I had to hurriedly pay 40£ to avoid being made deportable due to my possible illegality, is a reminder that "the material realities of the immigration system – the visa, the law, the threat of deportation – get internalised and reinscribed by the individual police officer. It offers a very clear example of how the everyday is structured by the institutional" (Noronha, 2022). For a while after this incident, I was unable to confront any authority figure without feeling bodily anxiety creep up on me. I want also for my class positionality to serve as a

reminder that my agency is significantly (in fact, incomparably) more than that of any undocumented migrant in this country. That I could even consider going to the police station, to cross that border to seek *assistance* knowing the risk of being racialized, is sadly, a privilege.

The treatment at the hands of a police official in a uniform was not something singular. Being a lone commuter in the city of London and accessing public spaces constantly has meant observing differences. These differences have overwhelmingly meant understanding how different bodies, geographies within the city, jobs and social circles are racialised differently. The first hypothesis I confirmed was the racial profiling (and policing) of *threat*. The *see it, say it, sorted* campaign (2016) that “positions rail passengers as active agents in the enactment of panoptic surveillance practices” (Chancellor, 2020), is an attempt at giving *threat* a body, a class, a religion, a race and, perhaps most importantly, a warning. When one looks at the huge billboards with illustrations of the threat(ening individual) and the law-abiding, rightfully belonging **citizen** that identifies and reports non-belonging (therefore becoming the police) to the *relevant authorities*, our imaginations will never insinuate a white person as being the former. The underlying implication is to build into everyday public consciousness and space that it is necessary to “make people visible and surveillable as racially out of place” (Noronha, 2022).

But what does this identification really translate to in the lives of “common” folk in the West? As illustrated in Act Three, the questions of labour and exploitation have, in my brief encounters with (largely white and self-identifying as socialists) activists and trade unionists in London, been central to the day-to-day developments of resistance to the State. The notion of the working class, a dimly flattened identity, appears to be another form of bordering informed by racist rhetoric and blanketed by socialist gibberish in this regard. It is crucial for young people who enthusiastically extend solidarity to union causes (as one should) to recognise the economic industry of the border regime and how “migrant workers are often at the sharpest end of exploitative work relations and deeming some of them illegal helps hide this exploitation” (Alldred, 2003). Often it is migrant academic staff, cleaners and other precarious contractual labourers who raise these issues that are conveniently swept under the rug using the excuse of time; it is hilarious how the *urgency* of solidarity is evoked repeatedly, as though one conveniently forgets the use of differing temporality in the marginalisation and exploitation of (especially, undocumented) migrants (Khosravi, 2019).

The focus then shifts, in Act Four, on experiencing queerness as a border that allows for a certain amount of passage after which your being queer also becomes a racial subject. What being queer in India taught me about urban-caste bordering (as a benefactor), being queer in London taught me (as being excluded) about race-class bordering. There is a racial eurocentric aesthetic to queer acceptability in the West.

That aesthetics are used repeatedly to remind us of and even introduce borders in everyday living (think of anti-homeless or hostile architecture as a state-funded project) is something that (white) queer subculture in London has profited off of. The trouble in finding non white, migrant or even diasporic queer communities in these geographies is that the communities itself lack the resources to collectivise, or they choose instead to collectivise over shared privileges (such as caste, religion or cis-ness) that become additionally risky and alienating for a lot of people. The aim of this act was to introduce a point of departure in conducting these discussions, especially because the concept of “safe spaces” has seemed to have made its way very high up in the queer-feminist lexicon. How does a migrant, especially an undocumented one, ever access a safe space? What does that even mean to them? It also made me think about the borders crossed for safe access to healthcare by queer people, or to even flee the possibility of State sanctioned murder given that multiple countries have laws that criminalise the existence of queer persons, forcing us to reimagine the borders of citizenship and il/legality yet again.

Given the constraints of scope in this reflection, I would like to conclude by focusing specifically on the fifth act (and allowing for the final act to speak for itself), and how a racist encounter can often be a deeply private act of abuse. How racist structures and the public space complicate this, especially in moments of incredible brutality - such as police violence - is allowing for the world to either become a voyeur to your dehumanising, or to view your predicament as a warning. In Parikh and Kwon's 'Crime Seen' (2020), we read that in the aftermath of Michael Brown Jr's death, “Videos caught voices of the crowd in confusion, disbelief, asking for answers... There was tension and grief” (p. 129). I often think about this response, this shared grief that is a defining part of a community's experience (not to be understood as the definition of the community). Am I conflating everyday racist microaggressions to systemic police brutality (often specifically targeting black male bodies)? Absolutely not. However, I am suggesting that we stop emancipating public displays of racist violence (often also seen at the borders of nation-states) from the mundane reproductions of the same logics. Through autoethnographies of migrant people, racialised people and illegal people, and through the resistive archival of the same, I hope that we are able to produce a lasting decolonising process. As a contribution to the non exhaustive questions around the relationship between race and border, the perpetuity of migrant living and how gender and sexuality complicates these relationships, I want this script to be a way to confront the regular irregularities of the border regime.

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