

MUTE
POINTS:
WANDERING
REFLEC-
TIONS ON
AFRO-ASIAN
SOLIDARITY

Kandis
Williams





I feel increasingly at an impasse with the initiative for Afro-Asian Solidarity—not its historicity but its conceptual essence, as I see it; one shaped by tensions and frictions more weighted than ‘solidarity’ can coalesce, impasses to shared outcomes, mutual philosophies, shared materialities.

I want to call these impasses ‘mute points.’ Mute because the ability to tune or be attuned to that volume felt possible only through compartmentalisation—an unintended and unintentional deafening as a means of navigation. The deafening of many of the promises of solidarity—coalition, reciprocity, dignity, shared strategy were at every turn nestled in hyper-negotiated yet impossible geometries of racial colonial logic, seamless networks of travelled paths through racial sediments formed over centuries before the transatlantic phenomenologies. The impasses are visible like landscapes to me now, rills cut by gullies of moving water over sheer rock canyons, through narrowing ravines, drains of history pool in bottlenecks—the artifacts, narratives, impacts, or outputs of these impasses all limit the gaze on possible ways through; there’s a thick fog over the water—another obscuring force of proximity without recognition. What I could perceive

without speaking sat at a standstill, a turning kaleidoscope of centuries of partial knowledge, tensions in living memory, racial reiterations across mercantile logics that needed no translation. All that happened in front of this muteness, being filtered through what I thought I knew about a place, a scholarship, a potential unity—as mimic, witness, outsider, trader—yet, none of them could find *the desire or a rationale* to speak? And so, these mute points now fix my fascination.

A mute and, paradoxically, loud point: *fiction*.

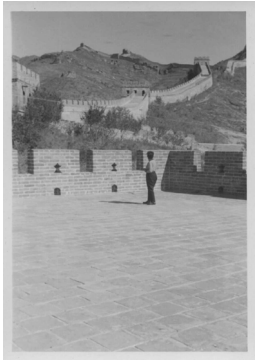
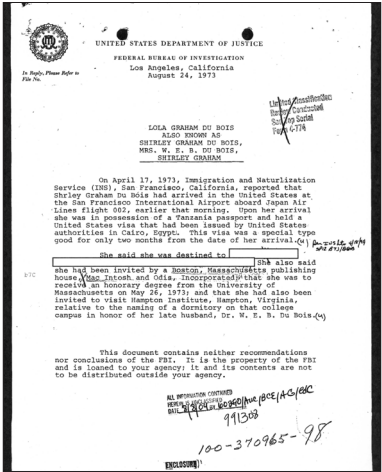
Revolutionary movements, solidarities, conferences, convenings, and political intimacies now survive only partially within the public record, as ephemera of movements and political parties and social groups that were systematically dismantled: extinguished through counterintelligence programs, overt state violence, and lasting surveillance.

The afterlives of these figures and movements have often been held together primarily through cinema, literature, rumor, myth, caricature, and fiction. Their innovation was annihilated by epistemic seizure. The specters of their radicality survive the public record through theatricalisation; a third place for a failed event—a tragedy, a drama, an opera,

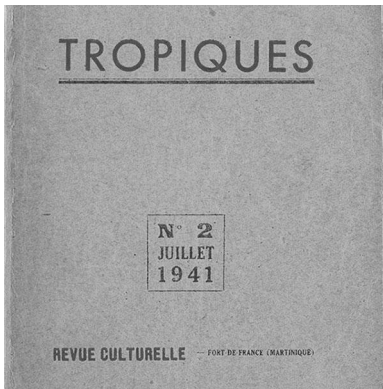


many poems. Fiction, as it troves historical wounds, plays out paradoxically, emotionally retentive, and weaponisable against its event-bearers—often using the palest leaning tropes of perverse on-screen transgression.

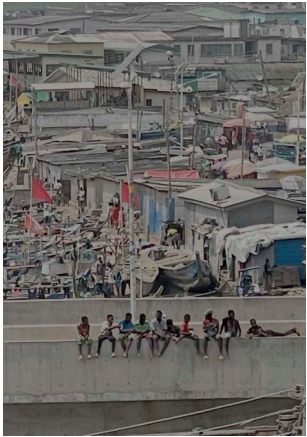
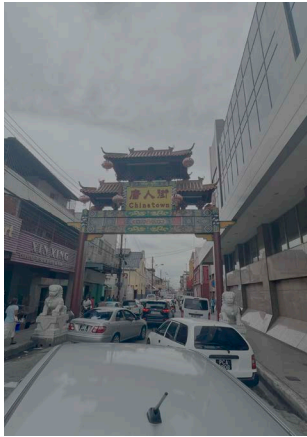
What remains difficult is distinguishing between solidarity as lived political relation and solidarity as spectacle. Between revolutionary memory and revolutionary branding. Between survival through fiction and containment through representation. And I think that distinction is becoming increasingly *mute* to me.



Top: Shirley DuBois Graham FBI file, immigration flag 1974
Bottom: Shirley Graham Du Bois at the Great Wall of China, ca. 1962



Top: Suzanne Césaire (née Jeanne Anna Marie Suzanne Roussi)
 Bottom: *Tropiques*, edited by Aimé Césaire and René Ménil. Published in Fort-de-France, Martinique, July 1941.



Top left: Trinidad, Port of Spain, Chinatown. 2024.
 Top right: Outside El-Mina Castle, Ghana, 2023.
 Bottom left: Mokola Market, Ghana, 2025.
 Bottom right: Afro Hair Net Vendor Advertisement, Yiwu, China 2025.





Top and Bottom: Jonah Batambuze / BlindianProject,
Instagram: @TheBlindianProject and @Southeast AsiansforBlackLives
Jonah Batambuze, BlindianProject, “Diagram Studies”,
<https://www.jonahbatambuze.com/the-archive/diagrammatic-series>

The term ‘anti-Blackness’: what are the nuances of how it circulates through non-Black scholars, artists, and academics globally?

How are terms like ‘Afro-pessimism’ or ‘anti-Blackness’ translated within Eastern contexts?

What of our experiences can we name, and who’s able to validate the claims of those terms?

Again, I return to thinkers like Tao Leigh Goffe and Joan Kee, whose work points toward geometries and laboratories where darkness, dark matter, obscured bonds, invisible labour, and invisible communities live. These hidden structures create another profound impasse around translation—especially around how to articulate experiences that felt distinctly racist, or degrading, within relation to Asianness, shared identities of indenture, differences in neocoloniality.

Gendered violence, the feelings of threat, surveillance, segregation, and censorship—these experiences felt familiar to me from the West. In my body, they produced similar contortions, similar tightness, similar nervous system responses. They placed me in familiar forms of institutional precarity, labour

precarity, and social vulnerability at the street level.¹ It is almost exact institutionally.

At the same time, there has also been a very personal fear of getting it wrong: of mistranslating, of imposing Western frameworks incorrectly, of failing solidarity or coalition-building within Afro-Asian contexts. I think there has been a painful shedding of naivety within that process, a learning curve to trust my own translation. I find a desire to stay in my own lane and move slower to the outcome of conversations in solidarity.

A kind of infantilisation² beyond the language barrier: an inability to speak authoritatively under so many other distinct and unknown surfaces of authority, all mediating the available terms of understanding, cognition, and historical truth. Beyond what can be said and heard, what is there to say when emotional weight shifts and avalanches³ the

1 Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography From Coon to Cool*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

2 Gómez, Jennifer M. *The cultural betrayal of Black Women and girls: A black feminist approach to healing from sexual abuse*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2023.

3 Tao Leigh Goffe, “‘Guano in Their Destiny’: Race, Geology, and a Philosophy of Indenture”, June 2019, *Amerasia Journal* 45(1): 27–49, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333698265_Guano_in_Their_Destiny_Race_Geology_and_a_Philosophy_of_Indenture

texture of an underdeveloped opinion? Silent and pervasive frameworks are deeply shaped by my presence as a Black person of the West, even from Afro-Asian experiences of the West, and specifically as a lower-class Black American of Caribbean descent—a heritage that contains Asian identities now too Black to be parseable into ethnic taxonomies. These frameworks become sharper in conversations on the overlay of concerns and divergences in Pan-Africanist legacies—questioning Blackness and its relationship to Africanity in multiple diasporic realities simultaneously.

A trans-Atlantic diasporic reality shaped after the ‘door of no return’ is a threshold that echoes many trans-Pacific, Afro-Asian diasporic realities; where Blackness is a measure of co-regulation through mercantilism, indenture, migration, and colonial logics of extraction and evisceration that maps routes of coercive colonial labour to industrial modernity. These histories are entangled, but not identical in the delayed present of the contemporary—this space hangs in hyper-interpretability,

they beg for cultural mutualism while ‘waiting for the other to withhold or confer recognition.’⁴

Trying to hold those experiences together has been extraordinarily difficult—a difficulty that has no clear shared terms and too many names—remains another mute point.

- 4 “Minor Music at the End of the World: Written by Saidiya Hartman, Directed by Sarah Benson – Hartwig Art Foundation.” Minor Music at the End of the World: Written by Saidiya Hartman, Directed by Sarah Benson, May 7, 2026. <https://www.hartwigartfoundation.nl/en/programmes/minor-music-venice/>.



Top: Garage Gate with painted ‘ChopSuey’ or ‘Wonton’ font. Trinidad and Tobago, 2023.

Bottom: The Door of No Return, Elmira Slave Castle, 2022.



Top and middle: 1970, Photographs of Headquarters of the Black Panther Party at Seventh Avenue, Harlem, New York City, with Mao's Portrait at the left and in office.
Bottom: holding up Mao's Little Red Book Black Panther / Power Rally to Free Huey Newton in San Francisco California in May 1969.
© Janine Wiedel



Top: 1968 Soviet anti-colonial propaganda poster by Viktor Koretsky titled Breaking Chains—That's an Echo of Our Revolution!
Center: civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, left, meets Chinese leader Mao Zedong in 1959.
Bottom: photograph of demonstrators in front of the White House protesting the jailing of the Scottsboro boys in 1933.

