

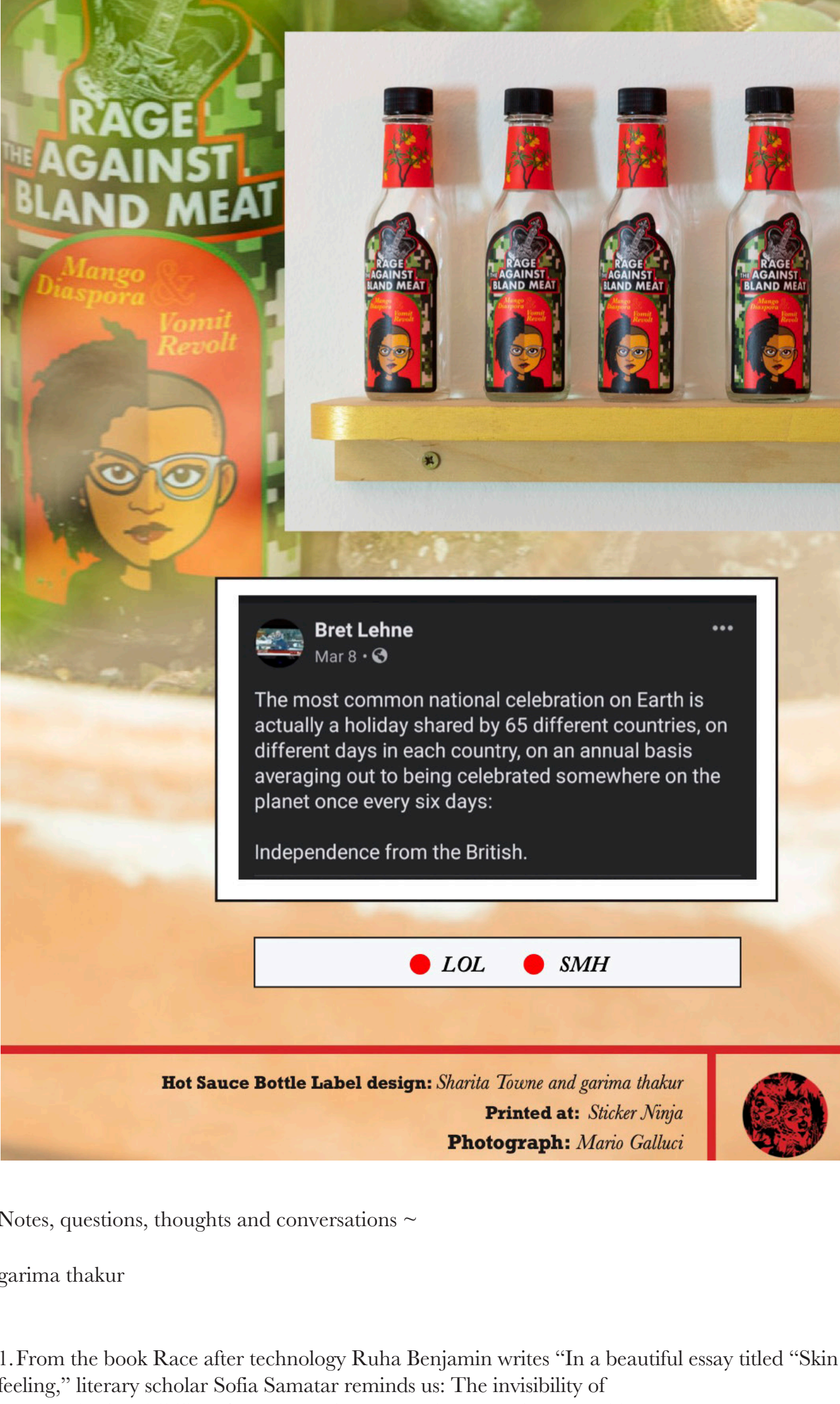
CFAR's *Papers on Power* is a series of commissioned essays for which artists, writers, activists, and cultural producers have been asked to respond to the question “What is power?” in whatever form best relates to their work and thinking.

WE'RE OUT OF CONTROL

GARIMA THAKUR & SHARITA TOWNE



Website design and concept: Sharita Towne and garima thakur
Web developer : Tim Combs
Poem excerpts: *I am New York City and Artists On The Cutting Edge*, Jayne Cortez
Song excerpts: *We're out of control*, Jayne Cortez



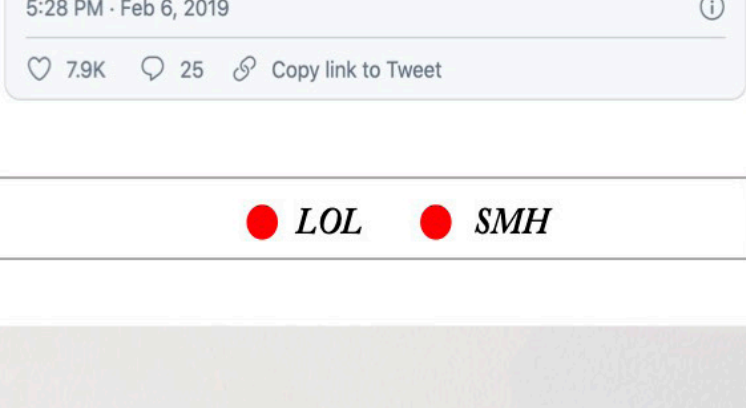
Hot Sauce Bottle Label design: Sharita Towne and garima thakur
Printed at: Sticker Ninja
Photograph: Mario Galluci



Notes, questions, thoughts and conversations ~

garima thakur

1. From the book *Race after technology* Ruha Benjamin writes “In a beautiful essay titled “Skin feeling,” literary scholar Sofia Samatar reminds us: The invisibility of a person is also visibility of a race... to be constantly exposed as something you are not.”...Whether we are talking about the widespread surveillance systems built into urban landscapes or the green light sitting above your laptop screen, detection and recognition are easily conflate when the default settings are distorted by racist logics.”
2. In July of 2019 I was traveling back from Delhi, India, landing into Seattle. It was the very first time I was not asked to stand in the line of USCIS immigration visa entry, as I had received my Green Card in October 2018. It was the first time I did not have to fill up a form on the USCIS website (that’s another story for another day). I was directed to an area containing 5 rows (4 machines per row) of biometric machines twice my size. The machine collected my fingerprints, took my photo, scanned my passport and my green card. It printed a receipt with my photograph and alien number to present at the next counter for further identification. After standing in line and presenting my receipt I got stamped! and was directed to get my luggage to get one more stamp from the officer sitting at the counter for customs. As soon as I left the line after receiving all the necessary receipts and stamps from the customs officer, I took myself in the corner. Without any control over my own system I started to cry, weep and bawl. I actually could not believe it. I couldn’t first recognise if I was crying because the process was so much easier or faster than I could have ever imagined or because it was the first time in 14 years I felt the knot of pain in my stomach ease up. Even though in the back of my mind I was aware of course it is a false easy, it is a mirage. I called him up still in shock and of course started to cry out of relief on the phone in the not so hidden corner of a federal building. I still don’t believe it. It took 14 years of invisible yet felt fear and stress to soften its grip over my body. I didn’t even know it was sedimenting in my body. I started to return to a state of current reality and my body was putting away the real yet imaginary sacks of stones, 30 kgs each sitting on my shoulders. It literally felt like a weight lifted. I felt angry, disillusioned, privileged, in rage, sad, confused, joyous, sweaty, viscous, unclear, at the violence, absurdity, and the creation of the systems of forced and voluntary migration laws built by people currently in power. These (spatial, migratory, technological, geographical, racialised) systems of power circulate through my body, screen, mind, past and present generations, epigenetics, universe, blood, sweat, time and my everyday life. My visibility in these systems provides me access for “easier” movement to the United States. I ask who is afforded the agency of invisibility? My movement and sense of possibility can easily be interrupted and rejected by the person sitting on the other side of the counter/screen at the USCIS office? Does the recognition of your identity mean you have more agency or freedom? Oh! personally, of course, I don’t think so. For people who are not afforded the anaconda of immigration paperwork, invisibility has a huge cost. When I look around, of course the structures of whiteness keep the anaconda hidden yet known, vaulted under the marble and concrete floors of the institutions we walk onto. Similar to immigration networks of power and gatekeeping, the networks of power are weaved and circulated into everything we do, feel or experience. These networks of power operate and run our daily lives at its core from the food we eat to the person we love.
3. Within the oppressive, individualistic, white, capitalist and repressive structures of power how can we decenter whiteness?, collectivistic, see ,utilise and muster the power of solidarity to feel held, cared for, loved and nourished with/by each other? What is our personal responsibility towards each other?
4. What has the ongoing pandemic (2020 - present) taught us about power and mass death? How do we hold space for ourselves and others in mourning, collective loss, grief, personal loss, the utter chaos of injustice and poverty? How do we annihilate systems of power that place us against each other, in which I feel feelings of helplessness and powerlessness at most moments, in which I feel small or in competition with each other? When injustice lies at the heart of power, how do we together destroy and rebuild a system that does not harm one another?
5. When your imagination is policed by the people in power within a country that is stuck in a state of colonial hangover while aspiring whiteness and englishness, yet crushed and depleted due to the impacts of British Imperialism with no end in sight, how do you find power of collective joy and humour that transcends and translate the absurdity of current reality to find moments of joy?
6. “The price of wealth, historically, has been blood, annihilation, death and despair. “--Toni Morrison.
7. How can we make room for messy conversations with each other that asks us to acknowledge how we have let each other down (historically, collectively and individually) and listen to the other about what we need to do to support one another?
8. What action is required of us to craft in solidarity? What does it mean to write our collective chronicles and tales ?
9. Wherever we are within “this” system, what can we do at our individual level to make the lives of others around us rooted in care and respect? If systems are vital to us, how do we build systems keeping the collective wellbeing, dignity, vitality and love for the people it is built for at the very core of it’s being?
10. Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Print.
11. Morrison, Toni. *The Source of Self-regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*. First edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019. Print.
12. Benjamin, Ruha. *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Polity, 2019.
13. Cortez, Jayne. *On the Imperial Highway: New and Selected Poems*. Brooklyn, N.Y: Hanging Loose Press, 2009. Print.
14. Cortez, Jayne. *Coagulations: New and Selected Poems*. New York, NY: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1990. Print.



LOL SMH



Photograph: Mario Galluci



Biographies:

garima thakur is an interdisciplinary artist born and raised in New Delhi. With an interest in the multitudinous nature of reality, history and narrative, she creates works that address assimilation, alienation, and collectivism. She is currently stationed in Portland,OR, and works as an assistant professor in Graphic Design with a focus of Emerging Creative Technologies at Portland State University.

Sharita Towne is a multidisciplinary artist and educator based in Portland, OR, born and raised on the west coast of the U.S. along Interstate 5—from Salem, OR, to Tacoma, WA and down to Sacramento, CA—a true grandchild of the Great Migration. She is interested in engaging local and global Black geographies, histories, and possibilities.