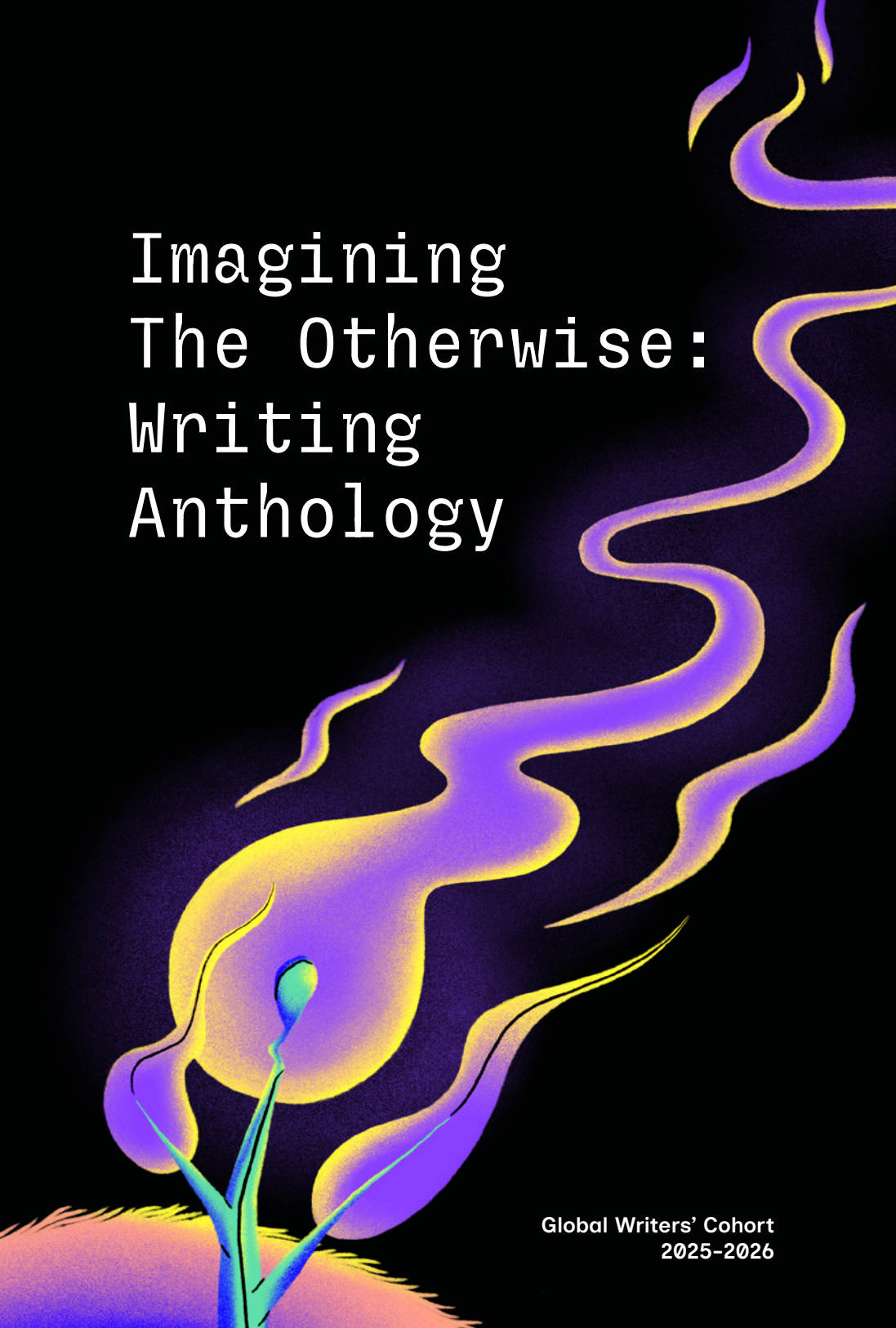




Imagining The Otherwise: Writing Anthology

Global Writers' Cohort
2025-2026



In late 2025, the Global Narrative Hive and Intrasentido launched an experiment in collective world-making. The Imagining the Otherwise Global Writers' Cohort was designed as a virtual space for organizers, cultural workers, and storytellers from across regions to collectively reflect on and try to answer this question:

What would
safety mean,
feel like
and look
like without
punishment,
borders,
and fear?

Five months later, having traveled through five modules together; reimagining safety as a practice of collective care and somatics; questioning dominant narratives of security; exploring narrative strategies for resistance in violent contexts; grappling with ‘staying with the trouble’ in a broken world; and naming worlds of possibilities that already thrive, the cohort concluded in May 2026. Following this journey, we published the Curriculum Zine in June 2026 as a map for others, offering prompts, readings and resources for anyone wishing to replicate a similar cohort adapted to their contexts and experiences. This current volume serves as an archive and celebration of the group’s final pieces of writing, which transformed theoretical prompts and conversations into speculative fictions, counter-histories, and tender, imaginative and thoughtful reflections born from our intimate conversations that imagined the “otherwise”.





Acknowledgements

Published by

Global Narrative Hive & Intrasentido

Cohort Facilitators

Lucila Sandoval & Fenya Fischler

Authors

Agustina Paz Frontera

Kruthika N.S.

Priyanka Bromhead

Rabih Rezek

Ram Botero

Sara Abou Ghazal

Yisel Meza

Design & illustrations

Citlalli Dunne ✉ citlalldunne.com

Contact

You can reach us at

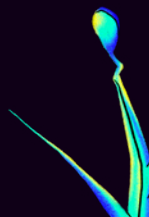
imaginingtheotherwise@proton.me

The **fonts used** in these zines are Ac437_ IBM_3270pc, IBM Plex Mono, Inclusive Sans, Instrument Serif, Macondo Swash Caps Regular, Maragsa Display, Miniver, PT Mono, Sama Kannada, Sligoil Micro, Underwood Champion Regular

Published June 2026



To every writer
in the 2025–2026
cohort: thank
you for trusting
this experimental
process, sharing
so openly, and
imagining the
otherwise
with us.





H_2O INSTALLATION

Rabih Rezek & Priyanka Bromhead

When the final bell rang, Hadi placed the book carefully inside his bag and hurried toward the station.

The rain had almost stopped by the time he arrived.

Drops still fell from the metal roof above the platform seats, one at a time. Passengers stared at glowing screens, phones in their hands, small displays in their palms, wider panels mounted across the platform. Soft light spilled from them, washing over their faces. From every screen, something seemed to arrive: images, voices, fragments of distant worlds, pulling their attention inward.

Around them, the station slowly faded into a background they no longer fully touched.

Hadi knew this feeling. When screens spoke, the world outside them began to disappear.

He sat down on an empty seat.

Immediately, he stood up again.

Wet.

A dark patch of water spread beneath him across the bench. At that exact moment another drop fell from above, landing precisely where he had been sitting.

He stepped backward and looked upward.

Water gathered slowly along the edge of the roof
before releasing itself drop by drop into space.

Then the train arrived.

Inside the carriage, Hadi found a seat beside the window.
His clothes still carried the cold dampness of the rain.
He leaned back and opened the book again.

The Little Prince was traveling between planets.

One asteroid after another.

One strange figure after another.

Outside, the station lights drifted away. Inside,
the rhythm of the train became steady and hypnotic.
Metal against metal. Repetition.

He lifted the book closer to his face, sometimes stretching his
arms to hold it away from him, and at other times folding them
back until the pages almost touched his skin as he read.

Lights gathered from outside with the speed of the train...
sometimes disappearing as the train entered dark tunnels,
but there was still a small light.

Outside, repeating lights slid across the windows, light
stretching across the glass from left to right, and from
the book itself, inside and outside folding into
one another.

The light gathered between them
— small, tight, almost alive.

And suddenly, the carriage disappeared
around him.

He was no longer sitting.

He was standing.

In front of a throne.

Large. Elevated. Covered in fabric that
moved even though there was no wind.

On it sat a king.

Alone.

The space around him was
empty, no walls, no horizon.
Only the surface. Only position.

Hadi looked around.

Only the king remained watching,
waiting, as if everything already
belonged to him.

Hadi spoke.

“My throat...”

He swallowed.

“I feel thirsty.”

The word stayed there.

No answer.

The king adjusted slightly, lifting his head, as if
responding to something else entirely.

“I order the sun to set,” he said.

His voice was calm. Certain.

Hadi waited.

Nothing changed.

He tried again.

“Can I have some water?”

The king did not respond.

Not because he refused.

Hadi stood still.

The space felt wider.

Empty in a different way.

He looked at the king, then beyond him, trying to find something—anything—that could answer.

There was nothing.

The thirst remained.

Hadi described it again, carefully,
as if shaping something invisible in the air.

“Is it a kingdom?” the king asked.

His robes spread across the throne
like a second surface.

“No,” Hadi said.

“A form of power?”

Hadi swallowed again. His throat burned now.

“No,” he said quietly. “It moves.”

The king frowned slightly, as if movement
itself was suspicious.

Hadi stepped forward.

“It falls from the sky. It gathers underground.
It becomes rain, rivers, oceans.”

The king listened carefully.

“But what is it?” he asked again.

His hands moved before the words arrived.

“It has no shape of its own.”

He looked around the empty planet.

“If you place it inside your hand,
it escapes.

If you place it inside a stone, it waits.
If you heat it, it disappears into the air.”

The king leaned forward for the first time.

“And you need this?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Hadi stopped.

The question entered him differently.

Not like an order.

Like an absence.

He tried to explain.

“It carries life through everything.”

Still, the king did not understand.

Hadi continued.

“It moves inside the body,
inside trees, inside clouds.”

His voice lowered.

“It is already everywhere on Earth.”

The king looked out across his silent planet.

There was no rain.

No rivers.

No sound of movement.

Only the surface.

Only position.

Slowly, something unfamiliar
appeared across the king's face.

Not knowledge.

Not understanding.

But distance.

As if, for the first time, he sensed
something beyond his world.

Hadi felt the thirst return stronger than before.

He stepped backward.

The throne moved further away.

The planet widened.

The sound of the train returned,
cutting through the silence.

Metal against metal.

Movement through darkness.



H2O Installation

A short story by Rabiha Rezek & Priyanka Bromhead



Priyanka Bromhead is an anti-disciplinary artist, cultural worker, and community organiser whose practice explores the intersections of memory, identity, and displacement. A proud Eela Thamizh refugee raised on Darug land in so-called Australia, she works across multiple forms: lyrical prose, digital vignettes, essays, and experimental narratives, blending the political with the intimate. Her work examines misogynoir, exile, and belonging, alongside sensuality, intimacy, and resilience. She is deeply interested in how personal and collective memory shape diasporic identity, and in storytelling as a means of survival and transformation. Spanning visual and digital art, music, literature, theatre, and community arts, her practice creates spaces that honour lived experience and insist on solidarity, justice, and joy as vital counterpoints to displacement and struggle.

Rabih Rezek is an image-maker and dancer working closely with communities. He has directed, produced, filmed, and edited projects for international broadcasters and platforms. Rabih's practice includes creating and editing multi-screen video installations, documenting social initiatives, as well as presenting and recording dance and theatre performances. He has also led and developed dance theatre projects and workshops in both writing and education.

Rabih has organised and documented numerous social and musical initiatives aimed at generating dialogue and contributing to solutions for social issues. He shares his ideas through multiple artistic forms, and art continues to help express and explore possibilities for change.



[human record]

Yisel Meza



She was starting to get used to the vastness of it. The stars, the comets, the possible life forms from other planets—all so far out of reach. Suddenly, the dizziness from her eyes was gone and all the shapes she had imagined were still part of an impression in her head. She

heard Anna snore. Lately, she had been snoring every time she slept. Perhaps, she was still getting used to this life. The two of them, their bodies feeling different and all the information of Earth. It was overwhelming. She felt the switch of her chip go on— “New water regulations placed..corn crops had decreased... another reunion to speak of possible solutions... another riot registered, 90 people dead..the fight in...” all the news from Earth piling up inside her head. It was time to work; the archive was not going to complete itself.

She made her way into the machine room, where the chair was waiting for her. Once on the chair, she felt the movement, her face facing the roof, her hand reaching for the yellow cable, which reminded her of a flower pistil. And then the stems of the machine holding her eyes open, the images sliding, her hands reaching and moving around the empty space, right, left, somewhere in between. She was helping the machine to catalogue the information, to choose what needed more capacity in this memory that was the archive. She had been repeatedly told that everything happening —at the moment—was the most important information. The moment, not the past which was already written in textbooks. Not the future, because they certainly did not have one. Probably because everyone with power only cared about the now.

Her little rebel act, at least she saw it that way, was to give too much space to the flora and fauna of Earth. She liked to imagine that if one day another being found the archive, they would smile at how cats got brain freeze, licking cold

things, or how they would admire the bees dancing around the purple flowers resting on the floor or react to the presence of an eel sliding through the water. Of course, she also saved everything else, the things that made her ashamed. Things she did not want to name but were part of the history of humanity. The things of the past, that she was supposed to ignore, but she knew that had brought our world up to this point.

When she was ready to take a break, she went back to the room. Anna was sitting down, staring out.

“Do you think you’ll ever get used to the craters?”

Her face was unmoved. No reaction at all. And then a deep concentration, like she was trying to remember something. Just then C.C realized that Anna was holding something in her left hand. She was holding a screwdriver. It was dripping. She ran towards her. Shook her, hoping to get some reaction. Some blood around the back of her left ear. Part of the chip damage.

“What happened?!” C.C asked her, while looking for the kit to clean and cover the wound.

Anna half-paralyzed, half-awake did not move. It took her a couple more minutes to respond.

“Why am I here? Where is everybody?”

“What do you mean? We are here taking care of the archive. There is no one else but us and the machines,” C.C replied.

And then Anna's chip started to beep. She stood up and made her way to the machine. C.C rapidly followed her.

"Hey! Wait, you cannot work in this condition."

"Don't be silly, I know what I must do. You are right, the archive needs taking care of."

And just as she said this, she placed herself on the chair and connected the cable into what was left of the chip. It seemed like it was not going to work but somehow it did. C.C stared at Anna moving her hands, the whirls and spins she was used to.



When Anna returned to the resting room, C.C was waiting for her. Ready to place her on the testing bed. She did not put up a fight; she was basically acting as if she was on autopilot mode. C.C returned to the machine while the tests were being run. It all looked fine, but she was not too sure about it. She took the cable and double checked the last work that was saved.

"Ceasefire... another shooting... riots... a folder named Anna..."

Piñata at 7. The US and their savior speech again. First boyfriend at 13, maybe I like girls too. Lucky to be born privileged. University graduation and first abortion. Attacks on West Asia. Attacks

on Europe. Whisker's death. Life on a boat, research. First water shortage. Wars. A pile of memories. Why had Anna saved all this information? Their work was to save the Earth, not themselves.



The testing bed was empty. C.C took an emergency kit, ready for any situation. She ran all around. Anna's name repeated throughout her lungs and the station.

But Anna was just there, sitting next to the machine humming. The sounds familiar, taking C.C back to when she was a child and used to help her mom organize the place they lived in. Somehow an enormous place when she was young, but later in life considered very small, altered by her perception. She sat next to Anna and hummed with her. "Oh, it's nice you know this song," she said.

For a couple of minutes, they just sat there humming. **"We should tell this... why we left, who we were, our story"** Anna said as she rested her head on C.C's shoulder.



How fragile was the chip, she thought as she helped Anna take away what was left. All the news disappearing from Anna's mind. Maybe it was better this way. There was enough information as it was, and everything new that came was just what the people at the Institute were sending them. Maybe it was time to record other things... songs and how they made you feel. The feeling of sleeping and waking up here, where some mythical gods were supposed to exist. Staring at the vastness, she handed the screwdriver to Anna. This too was to be told.





Human records

A short story by Yisel Meza



Yisel Meza is a poet and a short story writer who specializes in speculative fiction and science fiction. Born and raised in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico in 1992. She attended the University of California Berkeley where she graduated with a double major in English and Comparative Literature in 2019. Later, she decided to focus on her creative writing skills by completing a Masters in Literary Creation in 2021 offered by the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, where she authored her book, “Una androide no escribió esto—Historias de androides para humanos” under the tutelage of the writer Mónica Ojeda. Currently, she teaches creative writing workshops, works in a law firm and continues to write and thinks on her new book project.

5 veces ~~nadie sabe~~——

(Five times, nobody knows)

Fragmentos de un texto para ser representado en teatro.

Intro

Oscuridad total. Entra a escena una mujer, viste de negro. Una luz la ilumina a solo a ella. Quizás soy yo. ¿Quién es yo? Una escritora enroscada, periodista si hace falta, subida a todas las tendencias antipunitivas, anticarcelarias, antirracistas, antipatriarcales, anti-especistas. Ahora que Argentina es gobernada por Javier Milei, Patricia Bullrich, Donald Trump y Peter Thiel, además, ahora me he vuelto a decir antifascista, palabra que no decía desde 2005. Yo es, quizás, la Voz Narradora.

Voz Narradora

Estamos en un barrio periférico de una ciudad grande de Argentina. Escucharemos una secuencia sonora.

El sonido se reproduce. Roces de tela y ruido sobre el micrófono. La Voz 1 (presumiblemente de Pablo) dice "Ey", y 5 segundos de palabras que no se entienden. Un vehículo frena y derrapa. Un perro ladra. Se oye una conversación inentendible. La Voz 2 dice "ya estamos jugados" y 3 segundos de palabras inentendibles (estas palabras serán muy importantes más adelante). La moto acelera. Un arma se dispara. El perro ladra. La grabación continúa 5 minutos (se oye la noche, monótonamente) y se escucha a la Voz 3 que dice "Nene, nene, despertate". Se oye roce de tela sobre el micrófono, gritos inentendibles. Fin de secuencia sonora.

Voz Narradora

Pablo María Sampueza murió esa noche. Tenía 17 años. Antes de morir había grabado en su teléfono un rap que termina diciendo

“soy un burro, no sé cantar, soy un perro, canto mal”. Sospechamos que Pablo se olvidó de poner stop en la grabadora y por eso contamos con este fragmento sonoro en el que se escuchan los sonidos de su propia muerte como si fueran parte de esa canción que improvisaba a las 3 de la mañana.

No sabemos qué hacía Pablo esa noche que la muerte lo encontró ni quién lo mató. Sin embargo hay mucha gente tratando de descubrirlo, como nadie sabe, circulan muchas versiones. Todos cuentan otra historia. Para cada versión la causa de la muerte es otra, para cada versión, el audio que acabamos de escuchar dice otra cosa, y para cada versión el mundo que viene es totalmente distinto.

Bienvenidos a Cinco veces nadie sabe,
una obrita sobre la seguridad.

Escena 1. La versión de las cocineras comunitarias.

Sandra y Mirta conversan en la cocina de un espacio comunitario en el conurbano bonaerense. Una de ellas es paraguaya y la otra peruana. Tienen 30 y 65 años. La comida que preparan es para celebrar los 10 años del espacio comunitario “La Migranta Poderosa”. Por la puerta abierta entra el sonido del barrio. La mesa en la que trabajan está junto a un pizarrón donde está escrito “apoyo escolar” con tiza. (...) Escuchamos una conversación ya empezada.

Sandra

Es como la historia del huevo o la gallina, la diferencia es que siempre hay huevo. (Se ríe) ¿Qué vino primero, el narco o la mentí-

ra de la política? (*Hace un silencio*). De los dos lados hay huevo. ¿Vos te acordás de cómo era antes?

(...)

Mirta

Ya sé. (*Suelta todo*) Juguemos a pensar en qué momento la cosa se volvió una mierda y si en ese mismo momento podíamos hacer otra cosa para que hoy todo fuera distinto.

Sandra

¿Estás tomando desde tempranito? (*Se ríe*)

Mirta

No vendría mal, pero no, es un juego que hacen en el taller de la ONG para imaginar el futuro desde el pasado. (*Gesticula con cara de persona sofisticada, como si tomara un té*) A ver... cuando armamos el barrio y le prometimos a el Patillas que íbamos a colaborar con ellos y no íbamos a cortar más rutas, ¿viste?

(...)

La cosa es que nosotros cumplimos y no bardeamos más, pero ellos no. La policía viene y caga a trompadas un poco a los pibes y los vuelve a tirar acá. ¿Qué pasaba si en vez de soltar las armas nos defendíamos?

Sandra

No, no es por ahí,... no es por ahí. Estás loca, ¿sos guerrillera? jaja También podía ser que la policía no fuera corrupta y cumplieran su parte. En un tiempo paralelo...

Mirta

Una novela decís, ciencia ficción...
Pasame el mate, soñadora.

Pausa larga.

Sandra

O capaz... *(Se anima)* Imaginate que tenemos otra oportunidad y un día los pibes que hoy están re duros, de golpe, se vuelven bebés de nuevo.

Mirta

¿Bebés? Imaginate... Pablo vuelve a nacer y todo el barrio lo cuida,... lo que mata acá es la falta de amor... Imaginate...

Entramos al tiempo paralelo en el que los chicos son bebés de nuevo. Ellas están observando la escena, hablan por lo bajo. Se ven dos bebés gigantes, con cuerpos de adolescentes pero vestidos como bebés. Juegan con una pelota. Balbucean como bebés. Pasa un policía y le hace upa a uno y se lo entrega a una anciana. Bailan una canción infantil. Sandra y Mirta comentan lo que ven, cuando el policía agarra al bebé dicen no, no, cuando lo agarra la abuela festejan. La escena es onírica, como una fantasía de folleto evangélico.

(...)

Sandra

Me mandaron el audio de la muerte de Pablo.
Me lo pasó una del municipio así que no le cuentas a nadie que lo tengo o te mato.

Escuchan las dos el audio, dejan de hacer todo. Mientras escuchan las dos están abrazadas, se tapan la boca, se

agarran las manos. Esta versión del audio dice claramente "y te metiste con Julieta", algo que no era entendible en el audio que se oyó en la introducción.

Sandra

Ay, no, no ¿con Julieta? ¿Qué Julieta? ¿Es un crimen pasional? Te dije que Pablito no era narco. Aunque puede ser un código transa. Así como la María es marihuana, la Julieta puede ser otra cosa, no una mujer.

Mirta

A ver... no dice "la Julieta", ¡no inventés! Ponelo de nuevo, ¡pobrecito! Debe ser "la pipeta" donde cocinan la droga... ¡La pipeta! La pipeta es para fumar. Por ahí no le dispara un transa sino un amigo que no quería que se siga drogando...

Sandra

O la policía. La frenada puede ser de un auto de la policía. A ver... lo pongo de nuevo.

(...)

Continúa.



Credit: Agustina Paz Frontera



5 veces nadie sabe

Una obra de Agustina Paz Frontera



My name is Agustina Paz Frontera.

I was born in Argentina in the 1980s, when a military dictatorship financed by colonial powers was still throwing people out of aeroplanes, stealing babies, raping women and terrorising the entire population. I am an internal migrant, the granddaughter of transcontinental migrants, the daughter of people broken by uprooting and economic crises. When I was 23, my friend Flor disappeared, and we never heard from her again. That's when I became a feminist. In the meantime, I always wrote, met with others, and tried to improve the ways in which we understand common life. Ten years ago, I participated in the founding of Ni Una Menos and LatFem. The popular feminist uprising in my country changed my life forever: it gave me a desire for the future and a desire to work with others to build it in the best way possible.

From my small apartment in Brussels, looking at an interesting bit of a public park, there is a middle-aged man who brings a big bucket full of soapy water and a makeshift instrument that, after being dipped in the bucket, can produce huge bubbles in the open air, sometimes, and depending on the weather, catching some shades of the rainbow.

In one of my two screens, the news of Israel bombing Lebanon is continuously running, and through my only window, this guy is standing in the park making gigantic bubbles; the contrast bothers me. I have closed my curtains, but working behind them bothered me too. I now open my curtains only if he is not there.

When the threat to evacuate three densely populated housing zones in Beirut came out, I called my mom. Our house is adjacent to one of the threatened areas, but with enough distance not to panic. But with enough distance that I almost see in my mind's eye where my mom will be sitting when the warning air raids start, or when the actual raids start.

I remember during the 2006 war, I saw my mom muting the TV's sound during one air raid that shook our whole house so that she could hear the effect of the rocket clearly, leaving me dumbfounded. That is my mom, the queen of original character.

On that very first call, when I asked her what the plan was, she paused for a bit and said the plan was to unfreeze the Manteh plate that had been sitting in the deep freezer for months and to quickly cook some leftover yogurt in time for dinner, catching me off guard. Not the plan I have in mind.

I had thought about telling her more about this guy at the park, because my observations absolutely entertained my mom. They aren't really observations; they are significantly altered sightings that amuse her. But her nonchalant attitude toward the imminent threat and danger she and the rest of the country face made me change my mind. Now my mom and the guy in the park are behind the curtain.

Yesterday, someone shared a post by a psychotherapist about this particular dilemma: to experience different

realities at the same time. I know I rolled my eyes at it as I was scrolling through posts offering logistical information about donations, food parcels, and some shitposting about the current political situation as comic relief. That is my only duty as someone who is outside.

But I tried to look for it again because I couldn't sleep. My body was wide awake way beyond midnight, even though I took my sleeping aid, even though I had Al Jazeera Live's analysts gently whispering to me to sleep in the background like always, even though I had closed the curtains so well that no light came out to bother me. I couldn't sleep. My body couldn't sleep, and I was racing through people's stories and posts. I was thinking that if I can find that post again, I could read it in full to understand whether my body is acting out because of this two-realities thing, and then still roll my eyes at it again.

When the USA and Israel bombed Iran earlier this month, it was around 2:00 AM in my time zone, and I had woken up because my nose was blocked and congested, and I wasn't breathing well. I also needed to pee because I drank too much tea before sleeping, and I hadn't closed the curtains well enough. Sometimes these cracks of light come in and wake me up, and I get so bothered that I started taping the edge of the curtains to the wall. That dawn, I pumped some vessel-opening medicine in my nose to open it, and I firmly reattached the curtain edge to the wall, and I slept again, only to wake up a few hours later to this shitshow. As I opened my curtains on that very first day of the war in Iran, confused and slightly but silently panicked, I was surprised to see it was a sunny day. I closed my curtains quickly.

I guess, even before anyone shot any rockets anywhere, I knew the war would start again in Lebanon, not that it really ever stopped. It never does. When it started, I didn't have strong feelings about whose rockets landed first. When my

grandparents became the sole survivors of both their families in 1948, it wasn't because anyone threw anything. That much will always be clear to me. There is a very annoying activist who pops up in my feed, wanting to know what the plan was to launch six missiles at Israel that morning, even when 83 children had been killed so far. And she pops up in my feed wanting to know why six rockets were launched on Israel that morning, two weeks into this, 686 dead so far in Lebanon, some of them are families that never woke up, never saw the next day.

I call my mom often in these circumstances. Rarely is she in the mood to talk, and often she asks me straight up, "What do you want?" because she is very busy taking care of things. She says care takes a lot of her time. I don't get far in understanding what this care looks like. I tried the other day to pretend that I didn't take a hint and asked her if the windows are kept open and what measures she is taking to make sure—when they crack from the sound of bombing—nobody gets injured. She says that she is leaving the light curtains down to catch the shards of glass. So I take the hint and hang up, hearing her midway pumping up the sound of the TV.

I've become a voyeur of some sort inside my friends' group chat. I watch them as they share the logistics of this war: the sound and smell of it all, who needs to move from what neighborhood, who can get one drink early before sunset for some normalcy, before Israel starts the slow burn doctrine of the mass destruction of Beirut's suburb, making sure people in the city and the surrounding towns sleep on the sound of Israeli rockets shredding homes to pieces, and ultimately to wake up and discover who is dead.

I've not seen him since last week. The giant bubble man is gone, and we have had three sunny days here. I know because I keep looking out the window, and I'm very vigilant about his presence as the main reason I work behind closed curtains. But he is gone now for three days, forcing me to look at a reality that is unbothered by Israeli warplanes, where I live, behind the curtains of my mother's reality.



My mom says care takes a lot of time

A piece by Sara Abou Ghazal



Sara Abou Ghazal is a Palestinian writer who grew up in Beirut. She is a founding member of several feminist collectives such as Sawt al-niswa, Alwarsha, and WHRDMENA.

Writes fiction & non-fiction.

Some of her texts can be found on her blog [**Badiya.**](#)

voisiA
Division

Kruthika N.S.

Chapter 1: Dr. Rao's Perfectly Planned Vision for the Future Despite Severe Myopia and Avoidable Retinal Surgeries

This is Dr. Anand Rao.

He exists in the early '70s, in Bangalore's Chinnapet, where the air is still fresh and business is still done in paises and aanes.

Dr. Rao is never seen without his perfectly symmetrical topi (hat), and since graduation, has ditched the panche for a cleaner, more symmetrical look: pants.

Each morning before work, he combs his coconut-oiled hair in a neat middle part, which unfortunately shifts to one side upon meeting his topi.

Dr. Rao researches telescopes for a living, and his department often jokes that he has broken more telescopes than built them. But his attention to detail, precision in optical lens diagrams, and pleasant demeanour makes most people overlook his butterfingered deficiencies.



Here's Dr. Rao on a perfectly bright May morning, testing out some new lenses from East Germany.

Dr. Rao will need three retinal operations within two months of this test.

He has many more to go. He might not look it, but at this time, he has just turned twenty-three.

And like the many satellites he will be awed by, his orbit has just been altered, for Dr. Rao is fresh off the academic trajectory, and straight into that of marriage.





Now in the '70s, a government job in science means you've made it. "Life is settled", people say, as though for everyone else, life just wanders about aimlessly, kicking a pebble, with nowhere to sit down. Naturally, Dr. Rao is the pick of all eligible single women ('s fathers and/or other male guardians). And of course, it helps that he comes from a "good family" with "good values". Which implies that there also exist inherently bad families with inherently bad values.



Within two months of a word-of-mouth search in Chinnapet and its neighbouring localities, Dr. Rao's uncle (Mr. Rama Rao) handpicks a suitable match (twenty year old Parimala Murthy). The families meet on the second Sunday of an auspicious month, over unending servings of coffeetea, chakli-kodbales, boondi-laadoos and the highlight of course, mango juice.



The time you take to read this comic gives you a rough estimate of how long the couple has known each other before their families finalise the wedding hall, the priest, and the dowry, while also allowing the couple to have a short conversation to show how progressive they are for the time.



"Do you... *coughs* like...science?"

"Umm. Lots. But I think...
Reflection and refraction...how
sometimes light bounces right
back and sometimes it bends.
Like...like life."

"It was my favourite
subject. What...what do
you like about it?"

"And like the elements of
a good marriage too, no?"

And just like that, it is love at first
chat. As much as the looming stares of
their families allow for romance.



In a year following their wedding (which had a perfectly symmetrical mantapa), Dr. Rao and Ms. Parimala, are blessed with what Dr. Rao believes is his destiny: Perfectly identical twin boys.

"Mirrorless reflection!", he beams.



"One will be a doctor
and the other a
scientist!"



"What do you
think of perfect
palindrome names?"



"We should get them
identical cradles!"



"We should give them
drishti battus* on both
cheeks. It's odd just
on one side, no?"



"I've got it! This one's Nayan,
and that's Naman! N-A-Y-A-N,
and N-A-M--, wait. I can't
tell them apart already!"

In a few moments, Ms. Parimala will sigh, smile, and agree with all his suggestions. In a few more moments, a nurse will rush back into the ward, warning Dr. Rao yet again, that if he continues to bother his wife and newborns with such ridiculous outbursts, she will have to ask him to leave and ban him from any and all birthing wards hereafter. Dr. Rao will then slowly walk out and start scribbling in a new notebook the remainder of his plans for Nayan and Naman's lives.

***Drishti battu:**

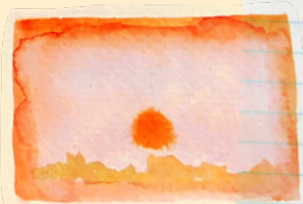
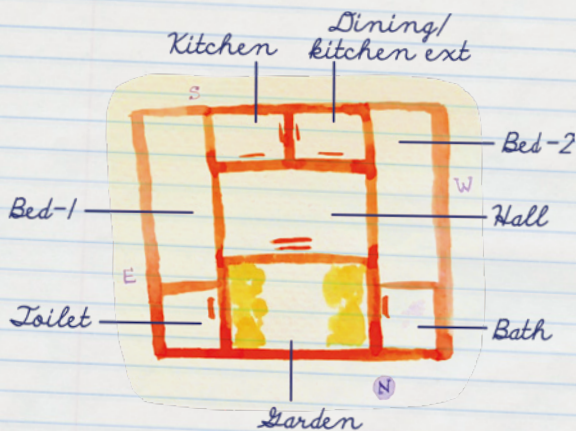
"Eye-dot" -

A black kohl dot often marked on the cheek or chin of a baby, to ward off the evil eye or any negative energy from a gaze bearing ill will.

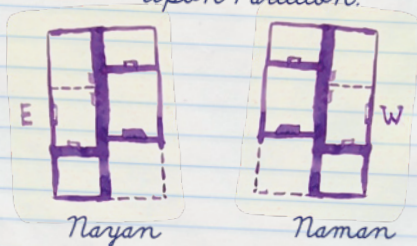
He first plans an elaborate sketch of his sons' inheritance, on a piece of land he inherited from his father, who inherited it from his grandfather, etc:

A house...no, a home...like nobody in Chinnapet has seen. A home that when sliced perfectly into halves along a single line going North to South, each of his sons will inherit a perfectly full home.

"The toilet and bathroom should be large enough to later become one for each."



Upon Partition:



"Each of them should get a tree in the garden. And of course, a sunset for one and a sunrise for the other. The early riser will take the East facing window. Perfect!"



Of course, these plans are the symptoms of a quarter-life crisis before the term is even coined, but they are also a symptom of his time: the pressure to be a provider, a protector, a father.

Pending chores regarding the birth of my twin sons:

- 1. Ring father-in-law for Vaasthu advice.*
- 2. Consult Dr. D'Souza on available vaccinations.*
- 3. Ring family members to announce naming ceremony date.*
- 4. Purchase sweets for colleagues, neighbours & friends.*
- 5. Purchase a Mysore Silk sari for Parimala.*

Mango

Jackfruit



For the remainder of his life, Dr. Rao will fill in these pages with plans growing only greater in complexity, ranging from the best ways to watch the next total solar eclipse with his boys on their 8th birthday, to a will for his only selfacquired property: a BDA plot in an up and coming locality called Jayanagar, which he will leave to Parimala and the twins, split equally.

In the margins of this page, he will add a note to buy lemons and chillis to ward off the evil eye, and get back to the ward with some kohl from his aunt to add a drishti battu on each cheek of each of his sons.

Yes. Despite his scientific temper which has developed over years of reading many men with English and French and German sounding names, Dr. Rao is one of the most superstitious fellows of Chinnapet.

Most people find that hard to fathom. For a man who obsesses over things like the "Rayleigh Criterion", "collimation", and the new age (in the '70s) Celestron C8 telescope, nothing piques his curiosity more than the power of lemons under new vehicles, the right ritual to fix a birth chart defect, and most of all, drishti gombes*.



His drishti
gombe obsession
is especially
intriguing considering
his terrible eyesight. (See
asterisk below.)

Here's a gombe he has
carefully handpicked after
months of construction of
his new art deco Chinnapet
mansion. He makes sure that
the gombe looks fierce and
hungry enough to eat even the
most negative of vibes, with its
eyes large enough to notice even
the tiniest of them.

***Drishti gombe:**

"Eye-doll" - An evil eye talisman
resembling a demon head, often
placed on top of south Indian
homes, and believed to consume
any evil eye / negative energy
directly towards the house or
its occupants.

It seems like a madman's whim,
but there's a logical method to
even this madness: The gombe
has been so carefully selected,
that it can even "work" when his
sons split the house into the
two symmetrical halves he has
so carefully planned for
on their day of birth.



VISION DIVISION

A comic by kruthika n.s. / The Workplace Doodler





Kruthika N.S.

Kruthika / ಕೃತ್ಯಿಕಾ / TheWorkplaceDoodler is an artist, writer, and researcher working across law and visual storytelling. Her practice explores how narratives shape systems of power, with a focus on feminist and abolitionist imaginaries. She works in transdisciplinary forms like graphic essays, puppet films, and participatory games, using speculative art as a tactic for social change. Most recently, she completed an artistic residency with Our Collective Practice, a global girls' advocacy organisation, exploring the power of radical imagination in dreaming, realising, and birthing new futures. During this residency, she showcased a series of pop-up books at a solo show titled 'Sultana's Dream', and produced an immersive exhibit centering girls' dreams.

Over the past eight years, Kruthika has collaborated with more than 30 social justice organisations—like the Urgent Action Fund, AWID, and the Oxford Internet Institute—on campaigns that merge legal research, illustration, and storytelling. Her art has been supported by the Goethe Institute, the Asian American Arts Alliance, and Sandbox Collective.

Dakit

RAM Botero

I did not know when I crossed the border between Marilog and Arakan. There was no dramatic change in the land to mark the difference. The road continued its meandering curve, the farms remained farms, the mountains did not rearrange themselves to acknowledge an administrative line. If a border existed, it did not ask to be recognized. Marilog is a highland district under the administrative region of Davao City, in the province of Davao del Sur, while Arakan belongs to North Cotabato. On paper, these distinctions are clear. On the ground, they dissolve. Much of the area that encompasses Marilog and Arakan belong to the ancestral domains of various indigenous groups, land that long predates the language used to divide it, land that remembers movement more than borders.

I was there as an assistant researcher for my cousin, who is taking her doctorate in Sociology at the University of Canberra. Her research, *On the Good Life*, follows how indigenous and non-indigenous farmers in Marilog negotiate everyday life while caught in the crossfire between armed guerrilla movements and the state military. Our work introduced us first to sisters ate Presing and ate Lydia, non-indigenous farmers who migrated to Marilog in the early 1960s, after the government opened the area to lowland migrants during the height of the logging industry. They were still children then, perhaps six and eight years old, when their family decided to move uphill in search of what they imagined would be a good life. They spoke of the mountain as it once was, of canopies so thick that sunlight barely reached the ground, of afternoons still shrouded in mist, of how easy it was to lose one's way. As children, they helped their parents plant cabbages, carrots, turnips, squash, and castor beans, which were dried and pressed into oil for light. Now they have families of their own and children who continue to cultivate the land, introducing new crops and fruits. They spoke, too, of the present, of the difficulty transporting produce down to the lowlands, of middlemen who buy cheaply and sell expensively, of vegetables grown by their hands returning to them at prices they could not afford. Somewhere between the mountain and the market, a border is invented, separating those who toil the land from those who profit from it.

Then we met ate Linda, an indigenous farmer from Arakan whose family had followed nomadic routes before settling in what is now part of Marilog. At twelve, she and her siblings joined an armed guerrilla movement after witnessing her father's murder at the hands of a security guard from Central Mindanao University, carried out on the administration's orders after her father insisted that the university's expansion had encroached on their ancestral land. The case was never resolved. Taking up arms was not, for her, an ideological awakening but a response to a world that had made violence permissible. She grew up within the movement. When I asked how a child could carry a long firearm and walk for days across treacherous terrain, she told me she developed agility quickly, that what once felt impossibly heavy eventually became light. What stayed with me was not this endurance but her way of seeing. Unlike ate Presing and ate Lydia, who understood land primarily as something to be cultivated and farmed for livelihood, ate Linda spoke of it as a living presence, one where the border between the natural world and the spiritual world was thin and permeable.

She told us of a memory from her childhood, during a severe locust infestation. A diwata appeared to her in a dream and instructed her to prepare food and water for two royal guests who would arrive at dawn. She was also told to mark the boundaries of their farm using branches from a particular tree, whose name I have forgotten. When she woke up early the next day, she hurriedly ran outside and saw two enormous locusts perched on a boulder across their hut. She prepared the offering and placed it before them, then cut branches and fenced the crops as she had been told. Moments later, the sky darkened, the swarm arrived, and what had been daylight turned briefly into night. The two locusts finished the offering, joined the swarm, and they moved across the mountains, devastating everything they encountered except her family's crops. I remember my hesitation as she spoke, the instinct to measure the story against plausibility, until I later encountered it again, documented in Karl Gaspar's book *Manobo Dreams of Arakan*. What her story names is another kind of border, not one that separates but one that governs exchange, between the human and the more-than-human, between taking and being allowed to keep.

On another community engagement in Bohol, in the Visayas, for a documentary theater project, I found myself on the island of Pamilakan, named after pamilak, a traditional method of catching whale sharks using a giant hook. The practice

has since been criminalized; even owning a pamilak can lead to imprisonment. Some fisherfolk told us, half joking and half resigned, that perhaps it is better to be an animal now, since animals seem to be valued more than people. Pamilakan is remote. It takes three hours by boat, navigating gargantuan waves, to reach it from the mainland. Potable water is scarce, so they gather rainwater for drinking. When their livelihood was suddenly outlawed, the island was opened to tourism. Gentrification followed, reshaping the shoreline and displacing residents. Many became tour and diving guides, yet they still relied on the sea for food. What piqued my interest was a ritual performed after fishing. Before returning to shore, fisherfolk pass by a place they call Dakit-dakit, a vanishing island visible only at low tide, where they leave a portion of their catch on a concha or a large clam shell. The belief is simple. If you take something, you must give something in return.

When I asked why this practice persisted, the fisherfolk fell quiet. Finally, a woman spoke of a fisherman who caught nothing one day and left a cigarette stick as his offering. Another fisherman later found it, assumed someone had dropped it, and so smoked it. That night, neighbors saw a consortium of small white crabs crawling beneath his house. Days later, he fell ill and eventually died. Dakit, in Cebuano, means a dwelling place of the supernatural. It is understood as the border between the seen and the unseen, a reminder that nature is responsive, watchful, alive. Stories like this are ubiquitous across the Philippines and much of Southeast Asia; to some, they may appear as superstition, but to others, they are instruction.

When I asked Linda whether she still experienced the supernatural, she said she did, though less frequently now. It had receded deeper into the mountains or returned only as fragments in her dreams. The world has changed, she said. She remembered a seed bank from her childhood her father prayed over daily, and it never seemed to empty. Hunger was unknown to her as a child. Now seeds can only be planted once. Harvested seeds are not sustainable anymore; often they fail to grow, or grow without bearing fruit. She suspects that this was brought about by new agricultural technologies, pesticides brought by lowlanders, or the packaged seeds sold in sachets and cans. She is not sure. What she knows is that abundance has depleted, and with it, relations.

Disputes over land have created a fracture between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, particularly after the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997, which recognized indigenous peoples' autonomy, cultural integrity, and ancestral

land rights, while also granting certificates of land ownership to lowland migrants who settled between the 1960s and 1997 as a form of dignity and recognition of their stake in the land. What appears equitable on paper fails in practice.

This failure cannot be understood without interrogating the long history that shaped how power is exercised in Mindanao. Mindanao was never fully annexed into the Spanish colonial republic because of sustained resistance from moro and indigenous communities, whose social, political, and spiritual systems did not easily yield to external rule. Later, during the American occupation, many indigenous leaders were co-opted in the aftermath of military campaigns, marked by mass violence amounting to genocide, followed by administrative reorganization. Datus and chieftains were installed as intermediaries, chosen not by their communities but by the colonial state.

This logic did not end with the country's so-called independence. It mutated to serve a new master. For over twenty years, Rodrigo Duterte served as mayor in Davao City, during which time he appointed deputy mayors of indigenous communities. This machination shaped how policies were implemented on the ground. Provisions meant to recognize land rights became entangled with patronage politics. Certificates intended as acknowledgment of settlements were circulated, delayed, or transferred in ways that favored those with access to capital and political proximity. What persists is not mere corruption, but the corruption of a power structure, under which belonging is understood as allegiance to authority rather than as emerging through shared life.

In Marilog, this fracture has been exploited repeatedly. Over decades, land certificates intended for settlers were sold to businessmen, who built tourist resorts; these developments multiplied rapidly during the pandemic and have displaced both indigenous and non-indigenous residents. I asked an indigenous local where I could buy traditional woven baskets. He told me they were becoming difficult to find, that the craft was slowly disappearing. When the resorts were built, large areas of land were cleared and many of the nito palms were cut. These palms are the source material for the baskets. Without them, there is nothing to weave with.

Old settlers remain without the certificates they were promised decades ago, while businessmen acquire them with ease. Some indigenous residents, themselves cornered, seize land not to reclaim it for community use but to sell it to the highest bidder. Ate Imelda, an indigenous woman and community leader, told us life was

different before the resorts arrived. She spoke of learning from ate Presing and ate Lydia's father, whom she considered a mentor, how to negotiate with local government. That shared history now feels distant. A border has grown where there was once a bond.

In Philippine society, *kapwa* is a core value; it is the recognition of a shared identity, an inner self shared with the other. In my language in Mindanao, we say *isig-kaingon*, which literally translates to "same as myself." The prefix *ka-* marks relational proximity; *kaibigan*, friend; *kasama*, comrade; *karamay*, one who shares in your burden. In *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, the self is not a solitary space but something constituted and shared with others. This value feels intrinsic in many communities in the Philippines, a bond that allows different truths to sit alongside each other and to be carried collectively; work is shared, trust is shared, care is shared. Protection from others, then, becomes a strange proposition. Protection from whom, when the other is not fully separate from you. And yet, as these relations thin, as land is enclosed and life reorganized around property, borders harden not only on maps but between people.

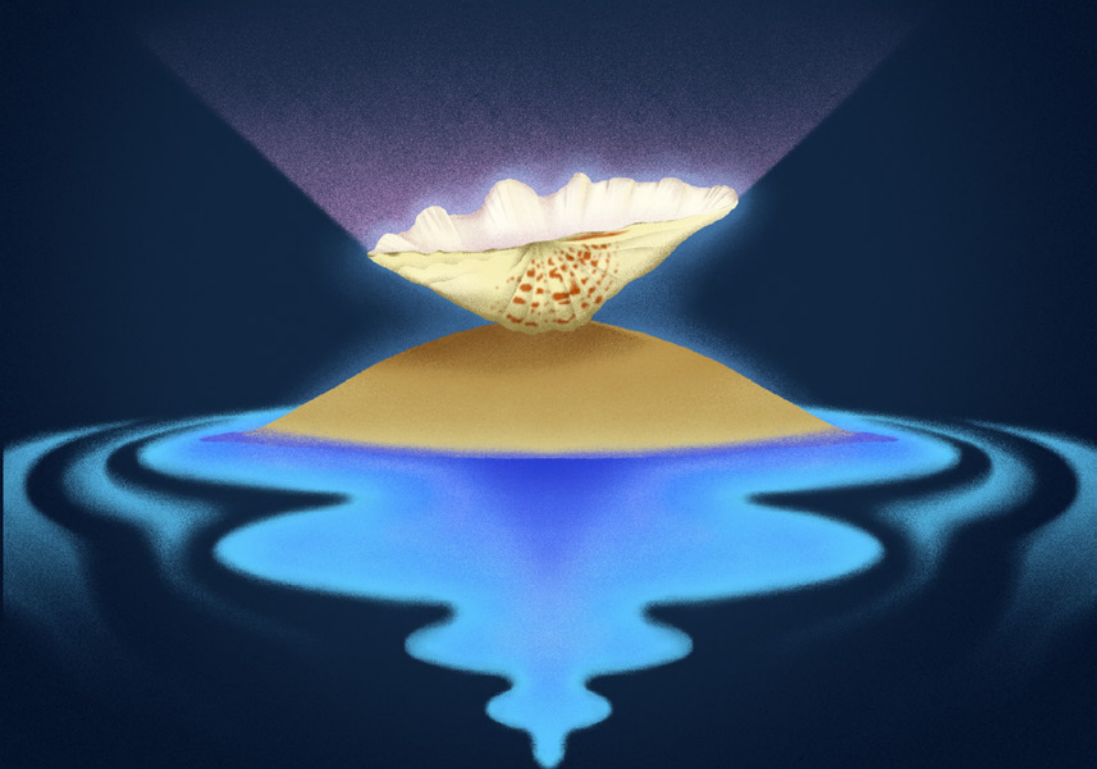
This is further complicated by the unresolved political boundary between Marilog and Arakan. Ate Presing and ate Lydia like to joke that the border moves with the people. A house can belong to both districts at once: the husband registered in Marilog while the wife is in Arakan. Children grow up with documents that do not quite match the geography of their lives. Signs insist you have entered Marilog, while a few steps away a public school lists its address as Arakan. Repeated attempts to formally survey and fix the border have been resisted, largely because many residents depend on Arakan's social services. When ate Presing and ate Lydia's father petitioned the Davao City government to build a primary school so that children would no longer have to cross mountains to study, no response came. Arakan acted immediately. Belonging here becomes tactical. The border is negotiable, malleable.

As I try to write about borders, I encounter another one, less apparent but no less insistent, the distance between thought and word. Thought moves relationally, holding contradiction without urgency to resolve it. Language demands structure. Writing risks fixing what was thought in motion, fencing in what was once open. To describe is already to draw a line. To explain is to impose coherence. And yet, refusing to write is also a form of erasure. In March 2000, at the World Water Forum

in The Hague, Arundhati Roy describes how water was spoken of as a basic human right, carried by the language of care and necessity, only to be rerouted, almost seamlessly, into the logic of the market, assigned a “true price,” its scarcity used to justify cost, and cost to determine access. “As a writer,” she said, “one spends a lifetime journeying into the heart of language, trying to minimize, if not eliminate, the distance between language and thought. Language is the skin on my thought.” And yet there are worlds where this distance is not struggled against but produced. The “right” remains in language, but its fulfillment is filtered through systems that foreclose it, as one corporate panelist puts it: “God gave us the rivers, but he didn’t put in the delivery systems. That’s why we need private enterprise.” What appears as reason deceptively redraws the terms, separating what is given from what is made accessible, and in that separation, ownership enters. Here, the border becomes more insidious, not only between those who can pay and those who cannot, but between language and thought itself, where words continue to promise what the structures they justify have already withdrawn.

So I return to kapwa, not as a solution but as a framework. The borders we traverse are many, between lands, between humans, between human and spirit, between law and life, between thought and language. The present arrangement of borders asks us to believe that separation is natural, necessary, inevitable. But moving through Marilog, crossing into Arakan without noticing when one ends and the other begins, that belief feels flimsy. Perhaps the present orientation we are accustomed to is not the only horizon of what is possible.

Perhaps this is why borders here never fully settle. The land remembers relations older than the state’s imposition, and the people, moving with it, keep finding ways to live otherwise.



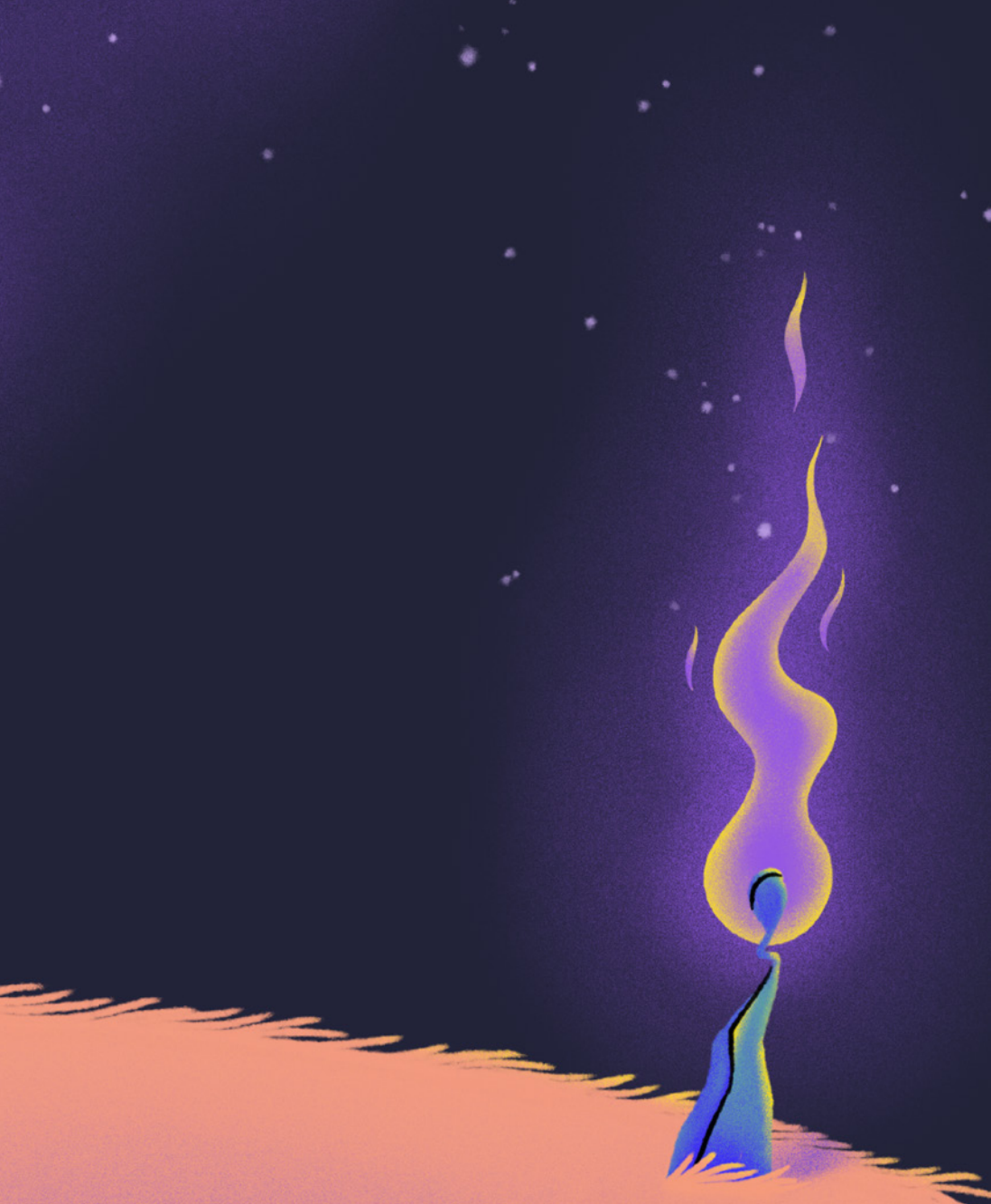
Dakit

A piece by RAM Botero



RAM Botero is a feminist, human rights activist, cultural worker, and transdisciplinary artist whose writing, films, and performances weave history, reclaim mythology, and reframe gender as acts of resistance. Her work tethers the present to the past, holding space for what was erased, what endures, and what remains to be imagined.

She is a current member of RESBAK (Respond and Break the Silence Against the Killings), an art collective raising awareness of state-sponsored extrajudicial killings. She is also part of the Progressive Democratic Futures Collective, a community of activists from various political blocs coming together not only to challenge the shrinking of civic spaces but also to forge new ones.



Global
Narrative
Hive

 INTRASENTIDO