



*The
Garret*

Nimmi Gowrinathan

Architectural Art by Tamil Futurist architect Adhavan Sundaramurthy

Pamphlet Design by April Zhu

Cover Image from 2010 Kansas City Repertory Theatre's performance of Lydia Diamond's play "Harriet Jacobs."

JR Lederle, lighting designer

Collette Pollard, scenic designer

Jeffrey Cady, projection designer

\$100 REWARD

WILL be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl HARRIET. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion, and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery. As this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation, it is probable she designs to transport herself to the North.

The above reward, with all reasonable charges, will be given for apprehending her, or securing her in any prison or jail within the U. States.

All persons are hereby forewarned against harboring or entertaining her, or being in any way instrumental in her escape, under the most rigorous penalties of the law.

JAMES NORCOM.

Edenton, N. C. June 20

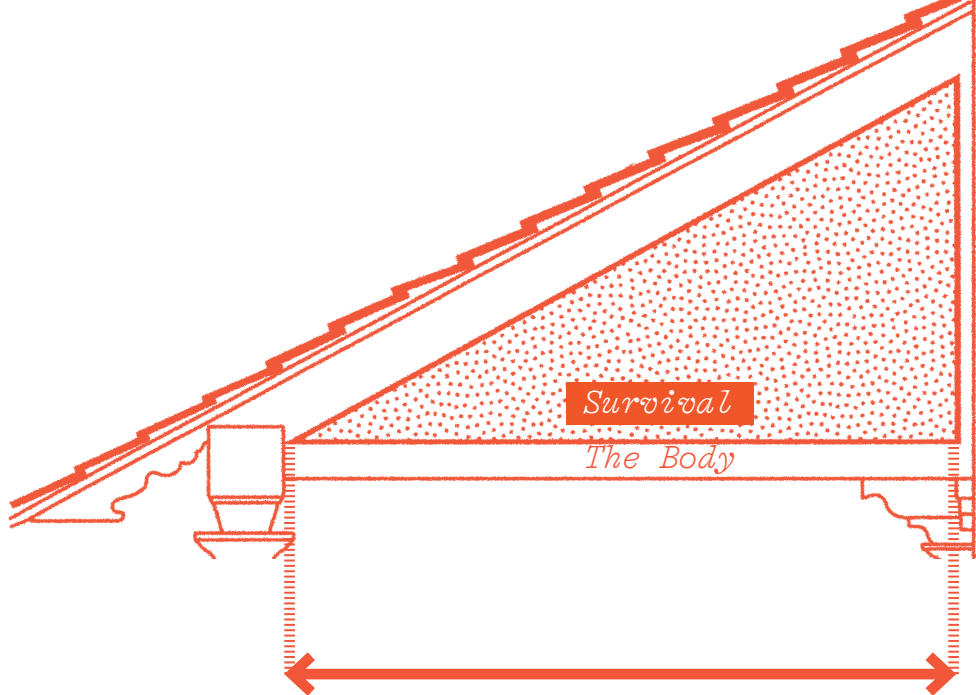
1851

Deep in North Carolina,
Harriet Jacobs was
carefully stashed
away—



“\$100 Reward for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl HARRIET. She is light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently. This girl absconded from the plantation without any known cause or provocation.”

(American Beacon, Virginia, 1835)



Nine Feet

Harriet Jacobs

“It seemed horrible to lie in a cramped position day after day without one gleam of light. A bed had been spread on the floor.”

When the space to survive is limited, we narrate to exist.

Nirbhaya's hollowed-out core lay flatter than it should. Most of her intestines had been removed after a gang rape on the streets of New Delhi. *On the inside*, from her hospital bed she scribbled, "Mother, I want to live." In Northern Sri Lanka, Vithiya's body was found splayed, legs tied to two separate trees. There were signs of a struggle as she fought to survive. The funeral chants were not yet complete before stories, all deftly twisted to fit competing agendas, swirled around mangled bodies as rigor mortis set in.

Violence breeds narrative. A conscious control with violent intent.

A ruthless regime points to toxic "cultural" norms to justify the need for hyper-masculine military occupation. Patriarchal protection mechanisms are triggered as demands for a homeland are chalked around the contours of a dead woman's honor.

As the sharp angles of barbed wire wrap around everyday mobility for the living, outside charities offer money to local women willing to collapse their identities into a one-dimensional victimhood. Inhabiting an ill-fitting feminist framework is the only way to survive. (Kate & Nimmi)

Harriet's movement is limited as she lays across the floorboards of the garret. She assumes the position to evade the search. To walk the line between visible and invisible we fall into narrative frames, forced to "... pleat whole histories with pins in your mouth and guess at the fall of words." (Dionne)

It is from this space that the "antecedent black feminist counter-narrative" emerges. By visualizing the architecture of her oppression, Harriet "does not lose sight of the dehumanizing forces of slavery" while the garret "makes available a place to articulate her lived experiences, and emancipatory desires." (Katherine)

Only one century later, Kimberlé lays bare false inflations, the narrative bars holding black folks captive—forcing them to bend to an embodied truth. She pulls Political violence up front with a “P” that must be capitalized, re-centering the state’s “national project to seek out and destroy activists for resisting the violence of deprivation.” The police baton’s impact belies its design intent: not to penetrate. The everyday violence of a “baton-on-the-head” is simply the flesh wound on the politicized bodies kettled into submission by the state. (Kimberlé & Nimmi)

Narrative is captivity and escape.

On the inside, Asale sits with Racine, as she had sat across from so many like her. Racine “gnaws at her fingers like they alone will swiftly move the hours along on Riker’s Island.” In Racine’s account, Asale locates the carceral lines that link her histories to the inmates’ lives.

“My sense of controlling my own life, you know. I knew, I fight or I die. Self-defense but more than that. I was choosing my life, choosing to live not just for me, but for those damned near dead women on the subway. Because I knew I wasn’t the only one.

You know how they say that every hour a woman is beaten in some part of the world? Well, I knew that, you know. Felt it. I was getting beat on and so was another woman, that day, the next, and the one after that. I squeezed that trigger for me, for them.”

– Racine

Racine was afraid to call the police. To survive, she will argue self-defense against individual abuse. Not self-determination to liberate the collective. The state contorts the bodies of Harriet, Nirbhaya, Vithiya, and Racine as a warning. The oppressed read the figures as a call to action.

As women *on the outside* begin to mobilize, they become visible in the scope of the state: marked as targets for their political dissent and their cultural disobedience. As the state closes in on activists, helping hands from the outside offer a narrow escape to bodies under threat. Harriet’s brother would fulfill a collective dream, running away up North. From the epicenter of slavery a neighbor would remind Harriet’s grandmother that he must be in the right place, “He’s in free parts.”

“One day I hit my head
against something, and
found it was a gimlet. I said
to myself, ‘Now I will have
some light. I succeeded in
making a hole about an inch
long and an inch broad.’”

Harriet Jacobs

As the activists gratefully cross hemispheres, the edges of their ears are suddenly cold. The conversation on the intimate wounds of women settles unnaturally on the surface of elongated conference tables. The light in the hallways is too bright. They sit in rooms they cannot break out of. Their gaze is circumscribed.

On the inside, they can discuss,

*sex trafficking, not fascism.
cultural practices, not military presence.
empowerment, not arms training.*

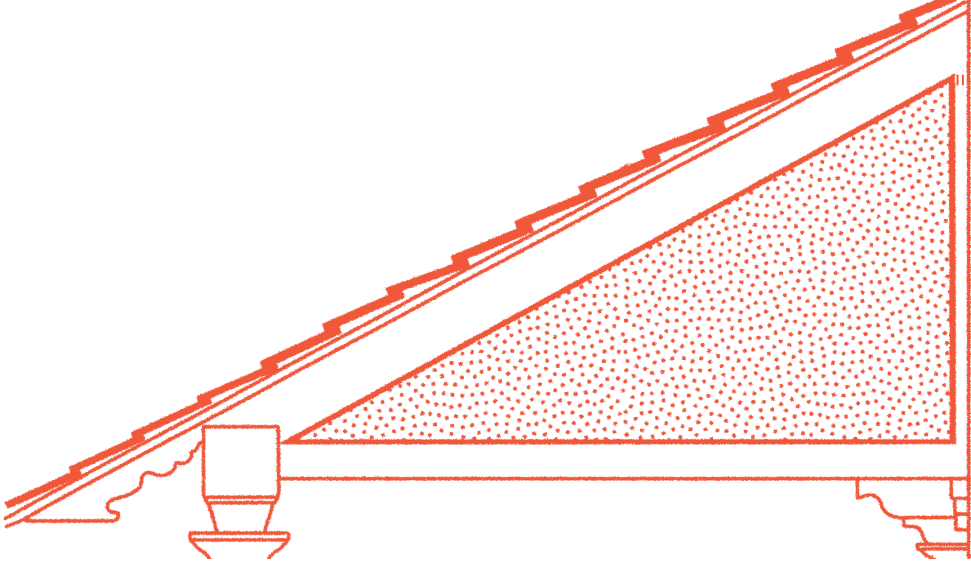
The eco-friendly butcher paper is set to autofill: the collective scribbles stay within the lines of Western Liberal thought.

A timer is set: a bell rings when it's time to move on.

In the sweltering South, activists face an increasingly brazen state, willing to shoot at point blank range. The freedom they imagine up North comes at a price.

“A splintered self is being demanded of her. Unclear how to proceed she resolved to shut out the world. She shrink-wraps her vulnerability, becomes all rustle and shine, so see-through she is opaque.”

– Meena



Three Feet

Harriet Jacobs

**“It was impossible for
me to move in an erect
position.”**



At its highest point, the garret was two feet four inches too low for Harriet to stand erect. The women who rise up eventually meet resistance: the narrative ceiling set by the state.

At nearly 6 feet tall, I defied multigenerational deprivation by standing in front of a college classroom. *On the inside*, I set up a false premise for a generation both primed to critique and captive to categorizing. The window is always cracked: an escape route for the build-up of toxins.

What can be considered capital "V", big violence, and what is lower case "v", small violence? I ask. The former amasses an expected list: *genocide, mass killings, bombings*. The latter *intimate partner violence, microaggressions, poverty*.

As the white lines are chalked onto a dark square, they are immediately uncomfortable with the groupings. If injury is the point of entry—the weight of trauma and loss collapses a flimsy divide.

The imaginative separator is narrative, and the state and its henchmen the content-creators.

In the summer, “the heat of my den was intense, for nothing but thin shingles protected me from the scorching summer’s sun.”

Harriet Jacobs

The Bronx was set ablaze on a summer night. On the streets, an unwieldy anger deepened the soft warmth of June darkness. Neither pandemic nor police restraints could contain it. A potent concoction: part adrenaline, part white and black carbon, with just a dash of fear. A smoke signal to the state.

Sara was my student, her consciousness just beginning to connect the mind and body in the soul of an activist. Sara has asthma. Care was something she gave and never received. That night she called me from the bridge that had beckoned her. A collective airway disease reacts to the choke hold of the state. Here, suspended between boroughs, the air was free: a temporary treatment for a fatigued body politic.

Sara joined the chanting, “Let us breathe!” When the state clasped her hands, she was shocked. Pushed up against a wall, forced to fall in line. Her online persona clashed with an embodied reality as she was asked, for the first time, to sacrifice for the struggle. Harriet counted herself luckier than others, her heels-strings were never cut to keep her from running. Sara ran.

Her phone call pulled the streets into the classroom. We listen to hoarse voices of young folks—corralled behind police lines in collusion with the state. The upper limits of sanctioned narrative space must first be defined before the risk of crafting a counter-narrative can be assessed.

August was just beginning when India eliminated the provision that allowed for the semi-autonomy of indigenous Kashmiris. "What does a land think when its people are imprisoned in their homes; when all is made to fall silent?" (Ather)

Ather reflects on her homeland. In "the world's most beautiful prison," a choking tactic is used to bring Kashmiris who resist "to their knees," to acquiesce to the state. *On the inside*, on house arrest, "you cannot open the window, let alone the door."

Consciousness begins as a child. Crouching by the gimlet hole, Harriett sees her Master threaten to cut off her son's head. As he recoils from the threat, "You can't put me in jail again. I don't belong to you now!" Though her own head hits the roof, the entire person she created runs free.

From exile on the Upper East Side, Syrian activist Marcell coaxes women in Yemen and Syria to identify the "silencing sentences," spoken to them in childhood—the constrained space from which to articulate desire.

“Autumn came with the pleasant abatement of heat. My eyes had become accustomed to the dim light.”

Harriet Jacobs



*All women are beautiful unless they speak like men.
A woman's crown is her shyness.
Speaking up is silver but silence is gold.*

Gender breeds narrative. A refrain of restraint.

In staccato prose Jamaica Kincaid marks the points of pressure on colored girls. "On Sundays walk like a lady, not like the slut you are so bent on becoming." Andaiye recalls her teenage prayers to conform: "Let me be—whatever. Dumber. Prettier. Fairer. Surer."

Muffled by society and silenced by the state the line is clear.

"The pain of occupation and its contraptions weigh on every inch of Kashmir's body. Yet despite the bunkers, barbed wires, checkpoints, lookouts, and military surveillance, the force of life is always palpable."

– Ather

“When the winter came, the cold penetrated through the thin shingle roof, and I was dreadfully chilled.”

Harriet Jacobs

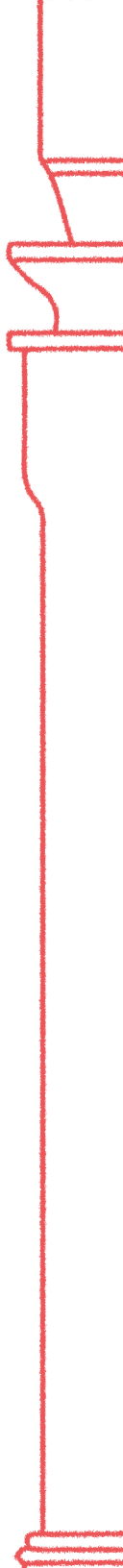
Kanisha's exposed nerves line neural pathways into insight. On the streets, her mind's eye traces the outline of the narrative scaffolding around us, and the hollow caricature sketches of our people moving with shackles *on the inside*.

Through a window she sees structures of violence. As she walked through the capital sidewalks emptying of inauguration protestors (in freezing rain that began when the president-to-be began to speak), she passed a parked limousine with one broken window. It marked the moment that dissent was framed by the state. "The protests have turned violent." She places the scene against the white masses smashing bulletproof glass of the Capitol Building, one term later.

“This is just a thing that happened, in the course of some ideologically motivated vision quest. Whether one would characterize, for example, busting out of a window as violent or not depends on the frame through which you're observing the act, as well as the actor engaging in violence.”

– Kanisha

In our bones we feel the definitions settle differently, yet we are, "waiting for some language to walk into/like a large house/ with no rooms and no quarter." (Dionne)




After sunset, Harriet's Aunt Nancy would bring news of the oppressor's whereabouts in the North. Her grandmother would climb up to discuss Harriet's children and strategize. Imaginings of freedom happen in whispered tones: distinctive voices disguised inside a polyphony of resistance.

In another "trap-door conversation" in Kashmir, Ather recalls: "in my childhood, during curfew the milkman would become a messenger passing notes among me and my friends." Young girls lamenting and scheming all at once.

In a Western-driven culture prone to narcissism and primed for extraction, even benevolent hands seek to pull the INDIVIDUAL VOICE from the masses. They cannot listen closely enough to hear hushed tones or sit uncomfortably inside the collective to reckon with the reflection of difficult conversations.

Every laceration *on the outside* strengthens cords *on the inside* and political voices, garbled at first, find their register. At a workshop with displaced folks in Myanmar, we read Kincaid. A young Rohingya woman stands to ask, "Why is nationalism a bad word? Why are we not allowed to ask for a homeland that is safe?"



Kashmiri poet Uzma writes into the narrowly formatted lines of a prison calendar: each box elongated to fit the entirety of her counter-narrative.

Text from the prison handbook,

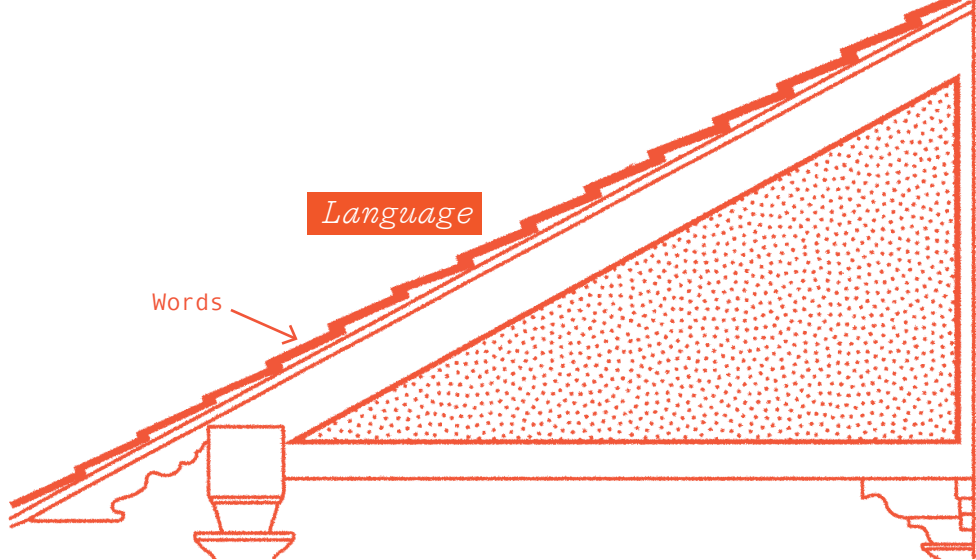
vii. The structural arrangements of fittings and fixtures and locking devices of barracks will be secure enough to prevent escapes.

Recounting the story of a woman in her community,
RAZIYA BIRTHED A STILLBORN AFTER SHE COULDN'T REACH THE HOSPITAL ON TIME BECAUSE OF THE CURFEW

Words from Uzma,

Have you felt constricted by the space of your body—eyes, hands, fingernails, ribcage, limbs, skull; dwelling-rooms, floor, ceiling, windows, latches doorknobs—condemned to a fixity? And by the space of a clock enclosing the repetitive movement of the second-hand, minute-hand, the hour-hand; such that rhythms of the body and architecture of the dwelling aid the regulation and incarceration of bodies, space, and time? (Adi Magazine)

If Harriet were able to stand up straight—the insights of a captive mind would be set free.



A Pent Roof

Harriet Jacobs

“Some boards were laid across the joist at the top. It was a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles, according to the southern custom for such buildings.”

Scientists suggest that geometric language, a recognition of shapes, is a genetic singularity imprinted in humans: an embedded way of knowing for a species that lives in a world where sharp angles matter.

In the garret, the sloped roof was the gatekeeper of freedom. Language is the slippery tool of the master's house. In the hands of the state, the line pulls taut to secure power in Northern quadrants. Each shingle, a singular word layered onto a rigid agenda for supremacy. Through the lens of captivity, light spots appear in between the cracks.

The state's narrative contortions existed well before contemporary iterations of fascism. In 1973, Chile's leaders began to identify a segment of society that presented a direct threat. Unable to marshal the popular support available for invasions abroad, the battle against activists, journalists, and scholars on the inside would be conducted as a "dirty war" to not fill the streets with a "parade of coffins" that might tarnish the image of the regime. The logic was: if opponents were killed and buried in secrecy, eventually their relatives would forget about them. (Zalaquette)

The state incisively cuts with both sides of the sword—rendering bodies of resistance lifeless,

shrouding their sudden silence in terminology. "Disappeared" was woven into narrative norms of violence, eventually cemented as a moniker attached to a United Nations Special Rapporteur and granted its own commemorative day. It traveled from Chile to Mexico to Sri Lanka on the placards of protesting mothers who died remembering their loved ones abducted and killed. Grounded in the everyday realities of absence, these Search Brigades still carry shovels to unearth bodies and collectively contribute to a "construction of truth." (Marina) In Mexico, Heather tells me, they are acutely aware that under cover of this term, the state is the escape artist. A word said too many times reveals its meaning, its place as a structural placeholder for power.

References to resistance, too, are little more than a linguistic façade. Words like "empowerment" are carefully crafted to create the illusion of women's liberation, while ensuring dissent is contained. The Global South activists who coined it were clear-eyed in their intent to challenge overlapping forces of patriarchy and imperialism. When it travelled North, it was re-configured to cast a narrow lens around the sexualized conditions of a victimized woman, offering access to a sewing machine, not political power. (Nimmi, Kate, and Rafia)

“When spring returned
and I took in the little
patch of green the aperture
commanded, I asked myself
how many more summers and
winters I must be condemned
to spend thus.”

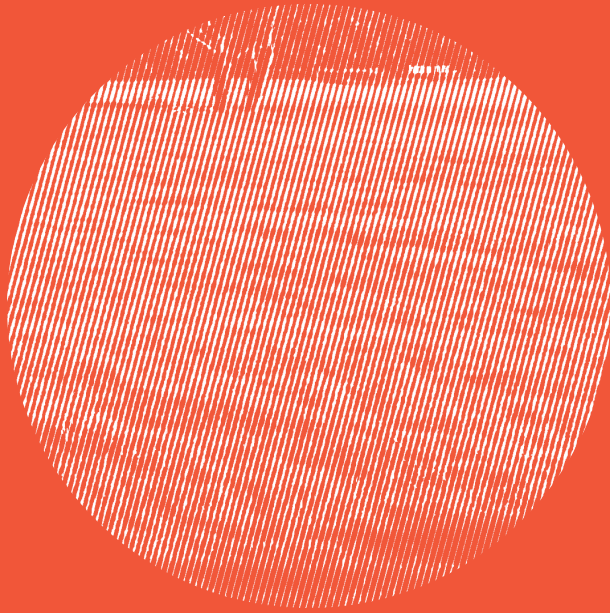
Harriet Jacobs

In mountain villages on the tips of the subcontinent, there are villages that can only be accessed once the snow melts. In an earlier incarnation, as a humanitarian worker hiking hours up a mountain, I found that the language of western benevolence arrived before me.

Delivered through a translated tongue, the articulation of needs from disaster-affected women was always the same: they are “grassroots” and need funds for “capacity building.” Aggrieved survivors of genocide testify into a void of empty promises offered through “transitional justice,” a toothless term in both local dialects and international parlance.

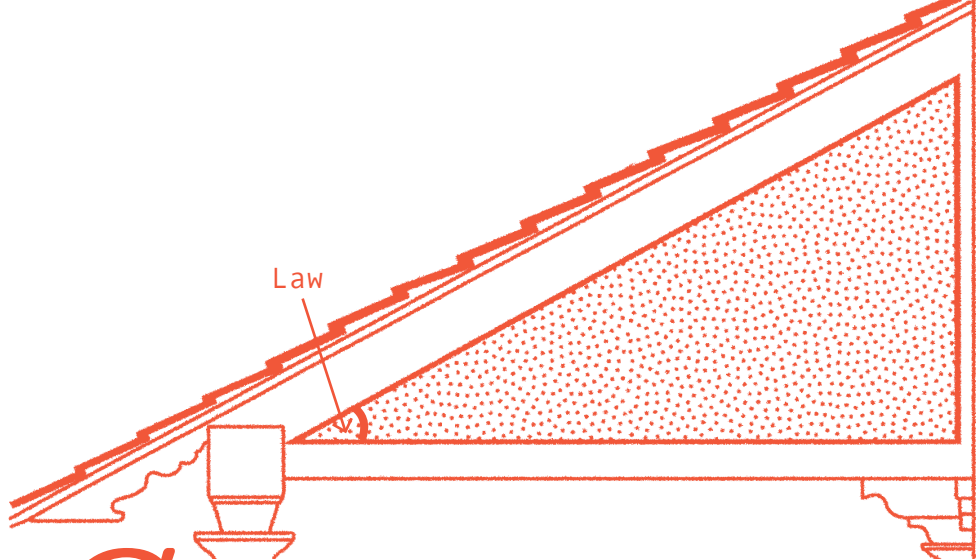
In court, I am asked if a rebellious woman was “affiliated” with a movement. I argue “affiliation” is defined through the isolated individualism of an American existence. It cannot be mapped onto the cartographies of interconnected Tamil lives in any meaningful way. If a social movement emerges from inside a community under siege, we are all affiliated.

Individual words set on top of each other to protect the state. Even those filled with compassionate intent reach peak semantic saturation: meaning disintegrates into the empire’s mission.



Harriet Jacobs

**The air was stifling, the
darkness total.”**



Corners

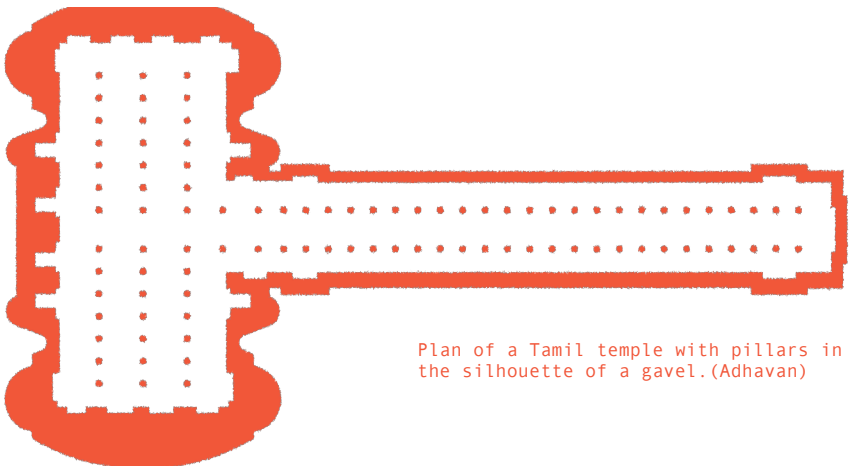
Harriet Jacobs

**“The slope was so sudden
I could not turn on my
other without hitting the
other side.”**

Language meets the body trying to survive in the rigid corner of the law.

Fathima reflects, "Far from nonfiction, every legal text is art—at once artful and artifice. To study a decision, we must look past the surface of its skin and through to the skeleton that enlivens it." (Fathima)

The only circle in a space of sharp edges is the sound block that amplifies the gavel's power—reinforcing subjective authority while demanding silence. In the courtroom, I bear witness through an expertise in suffering. *On the inside*, the details are different, but an asylum case is always the same: The Native Woman vs. The Colonizer—the precedent set well before either the defendant or I was born.



Plan of a Tamil temple with pillars in the silhouette of a gavel. (Adhavan)

In her home country she was a fighter for a free homeland. For her host country, I must establish that she is a victim, not a threat. If she is a mother, the task is infinitely easier. Motherhood transcends borders, party lines, and cultural differences. The aggrieved mother is a deeply emotive cry to rally around a pure (not political) cause.

“Their imprisoned mother could not have the privilege of witnessing their surprise and joy.”

Harriet Jacobs

Motherhood attracts sympathy; domestic violence elicits empathy. As the parts of the mother are parsed, and political selves are sliced off, the Judge hears a story that is simple and sad. I select the negatives that might attract a positive determination.

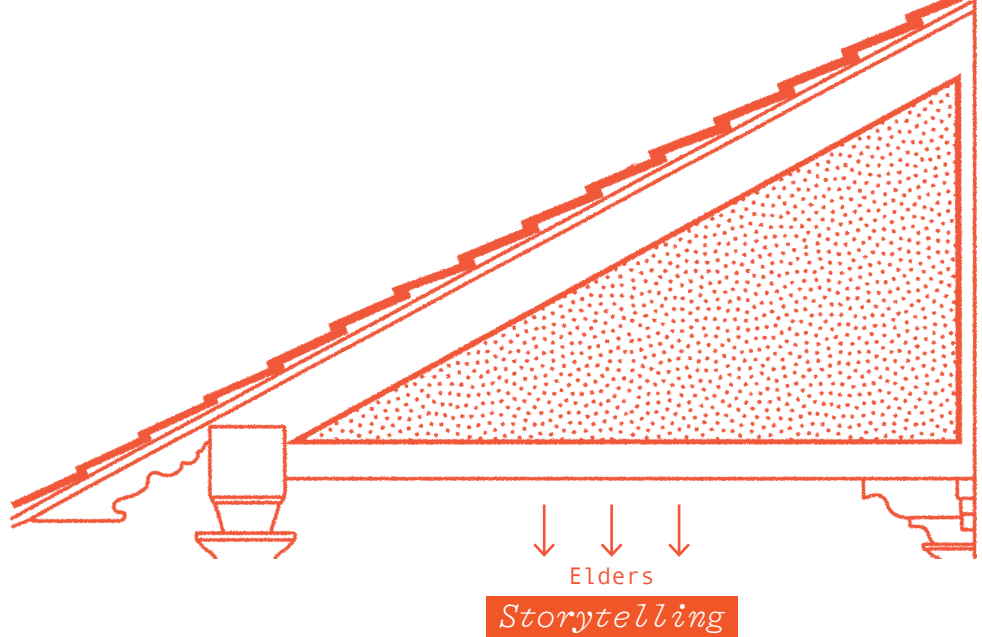
Valeria grapples with the linguistic tags attached to children, and the ones they are denied. Forcibly branded “Undocumented minors”

and “illegals,” they will never be offered their rights as refugees fleeing war. (Valeria)

The narrative I spin strengthens the rigid panels of legal precedent. I am flattening her into a docile subject for her own survival, while lowering the threshold of narrative freedom available to liberate the collective.

“The law is neither magic
nor formula. The law lives
primarily in the gut, and
it is writing outside
the law that illuminates
how differently what is
enacted is embodied among
those who create the law
and those who must bear
it.”

– Fathima



Above the Elders

Harriet Jacobs

“Had the least suspicion rested on my Grandmother’s House it would have been burned to the ground. But it was the last place they thought of.”

Harriet's grandmother was captured and sold as a little girl. "Such was the story my grandmother used to tell me, but I do not remember all the particulars." She remembers sensing that her grandmother's childhood life was much harder than her own.

Sheriden is concerned that "narrative maintains a kind of distance that storytelling cannot." Storytelling as a practice embraced multiple forms of expression, ways of being and telling, that gently carried resistance across generations.

The story is in the sharp intake of air of a Tamil auntie who cradles your face, somehow more intimate than the offering of lips. The melody of a mother who "testifies a night song on the woolly back of a mammoth / shadow boxing rivulets" (Aja).

The sound of the grandmother "singing herself a cradle song to still the rage that grew as she grew older." (Andaiye) Deep silences are textured with a pointillism of painful memories, covered with a tarp of aphorisms to protect us. Andaiye would be chastised, "You does ask altogether too many questions." From different islands, in the same hemisphere, the elder's responses mirror each other. My childhood inquiries were dismissed: "There were troubles for Tamils back home."

“beseeching, because the eye of the storm within her, they called her magic. merely more, she was. a freedom fighter and she taught all of us how to fight.”

– Aja Monet

When my students reckon with identity as cellular composition (rather than stylized outerwear), they return to their mothers. Fama created a sound map of elder’s voices in West African mosques across East Harlem. Amidst laughter, conversations drift between the daily practice of Islam and a fear of President Trump.

Rosanna builds a diorama of the councilman’s house whose rooms she floated around as her mother cleaned. Her childhood imaginings fill dialogue bubbles pasted on the walls.

Ana dismantles the deep patriarchy in the images of a Traditional Mexican board game, Loteria, re-purposing the pieces with her own artwork. Re-creating her grandmother’s fight for freedom in Chiapas.

“Now I whisper to her across time, “Hey Granny, I en crazy. Jus’ down. Not crazy.”

– Andaiye

Sonia went in search of her elders in confinement. Survival, resistance, and language converge inside the Khana-yi aman women’s shelter in Afghanistan. Landay, a “short, poisonous snake” of biting prose, lined the recesses of Sonia’s earliest memories.

These runaways live in an undisclosed location, sealed off from society, with no access to television or internet. And yet, they twist scripture towards emancipation. Sonia watches as they perform the piety that allows them to “vocalize brutal pain to reveal the power structure that makes pain possible.” Landays persist because they belong to no one. (Eliza)

“Abandonment will not abandon me, my friend
It has swallowed all my lovers
That night I was cast upon the sword
Hands tied behind my back,
my mouth was still open.”

Harriet crossed the threshold of life and certain death just once. With her legs buckling, she fell to the floor of her grandmother's storeroom to whisper her request to the father of her children, that he should free them. *Partus sequiter ventrum*: upending imperial language and law, even immobilized she would free her womb. Pity prevented her grandmother and Uncle from scolding her. "Come, come, child," said she, "You've done wrong; but I can't blame you, poor thing!"

Storytelling, itself, has been bastardized in service of the state. Intrusive fingers probe for intimate pain to be pulled into a foreign narrative. Whether threatening to cut achilles tendons or fallopian tubes, power cannot stop the reproduction of resistance handed to us from the elders and sequestered inside a sacred space. Stories that wrap around each other to strengthen the "lineage of thinking" Mariame reminds us we stand atop of.

Harriet Jacobs

**“He carried me back to my
dungeon, laid me tenderly on
the bed. I was left with my
own thoughts—starless as the
midnight darkness around me.”**

Transverse

*For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.*

— Audre Lorde

The master's house is built with reinforcement in mind. Transverse beams strengthen long lines to prevent the transfer of tensile stress: resistance to that which could tear it apart. Capital runs along cross-cutting bars closest to power, hoping to dilute guilt through giving. Gazing down from the rafters, the upper class declares a thirst for knowledge on narrative, casting an extractive gaze on the bodies compressed to survive.

Many decades ago, bell hooks noted that when she first encountered Paulo Freire's words she was like a woman "dying of thirst". The notion of "critical consciousness" offered her a lucid lens through which to see structures of oppression, read their rigidity as dehumanizing, visualize freedom from inside captivity.

For some, narrative is a cerebral curiosity, for others, proof of life inside organs of deprivation.

Harriet couldn't produce the documents to prove she was free, one of the many enslaved peoples trying to "save themselves from the narrative that their skin, stretched in particular ways across muscles and bones, seemed or seems to suggest something about where they shouldn't be." (Ruth) Only the powerful, bell reminds us, have the "privilege of denying their body".

Captivity



Harriet first makes visible the lines that contain her. (Katherine)
"A thing does not exist until it is looked at or measured." (Natalie)
Narrative as captivity is the transverse muscle that cuts deep across the core, separating a liberated mind from embodied pain. As with all carceral geographies from the outside it is "noisily tweaked at the margin but ever hardening at the center" where folks of color languish. (Ruth)

This moment is defined by contestations of dominance: over bodies, resources, political life. An insatiable desire for racialized sexual supremacy embedded in emboldened states. Subjugation

is sustained by a colonially constructed set of narratives: "a maneuver designed to rationalize privilege and domination." (Sylvia)

In the garret that holds all of us inside state-defined limits of articulation, our collective lines will be subject to editorial stripping. Politics carefully pulled from language to maintain the veneer of a polished progressivism.

"That word that gets used often. Narrative-building. When people talk about these things as though they are just abstract ideas, without connection to actual people's lives, I can't recognize it."

– Mariame

Emancipatory Imaginations

If the garret is a hallowed space for emancipatory thoughts, the transverse rib arches across time to incorporate the wisdoms of elsewhere in captivity. As lines of containment become visible, consciousness expands.

In captivity there is silence. The incessant micro-movements of lives caught in the centrifugal force of care-giving fall still. Her body is immobile, but her mind is spinning. Whether paralyzed by fear or containment, there is value in stillness. In the sustained silence, Harriet would organize to deploy a decoy based on the information she gathered from the outside—sending her Master a letter postmarked from Boston.

In the quiet, I can map Ather's sketches of a ruthless state onto Tamil women. I can locate my own cultural captivity inside the violence that housed Meena's married life. Their words, their thinking, is trans—crossing borders, collapsing categories, de-constructing ... everything. "I believe when we are in

relationship with each other, we influence each other," Mariame says.

Poetry from women in liberation struggles is transported across battlefields in Colombia, in Sri Lanka, in Ireland, shaping consciousness and fortifying their resolve in the struggle. (Meena) Rather than distinctive peaks of feminist thought, transverse waves across the Global South transfer the strength to move forward. Until we encountered the language of the fighters who came before us, "we walked in wisdom without shadows, in search of a dead part of ourselves that would be our shelter." (Yvonne)

The narrative place we open for each other is political possibility for resistance and joy. Mariame recalls reading Ida B. Well's confession after collecting testimonies of lynchings in the South. She writes that she stopped to buy an expensive scarf. "It makes me so happy to go back to that and read that passage and be like, 'Yes, Ida!'"

"Tell me how it ends, Mamma, my daughter asks me. Sometimes I make up an ending, a happy one. But most of the time I just say: I don't know how it ends yet."

— Valeria

Anchoring Text

Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Thayer & Eldridge). 1861.

Theory

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I am deeply grateful for the thoughts and insights of activist-scholars Fanta Toure, Marcell Shehwaro, Dr. Heather Cleary, and Dr. Sheriden Booker.

End Notes on Form

This text emerges from the minds of a collective, beginning with its form: a pamphlet. Meena reflects in our discussions, "We have forgotten how to write to persuade, to incite. Women of color cannot enclose our fury in the amber of academic writings, but take it beyond the page, allow it to spill over into the streets."

In the 18th century Olympe de Gouges would pen over seventy pamphlets to challenge the "harsh destiny" offered women, arguing for the emancipation of slaves, before being beheaded for treason. In an unabashed political declaration, the Black Feminist Combahee River Collective came together from a "combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position."

"To write a pamphlet is to function without a censor. To write a pamphlet is to reclaim the power of the collective."

— Meena

This collective cannot, ever, be represented in its entirety. I offer here only the words of those who reached me, a power transferred by community hands, often not found ensconced in their (rightful) place on course syllabi. Each voice is a touchstone of revolutionary thought, radiating outwards to cultivate critical consciousness, shaped, too, by the insights that reached them. All of us are "political beings, constantly in formation." (Asale) All of us beholden to the duty Toni Cade Bambara sets forth for the radical artist: "to make revolution irresistible."

Narrative Ceiling

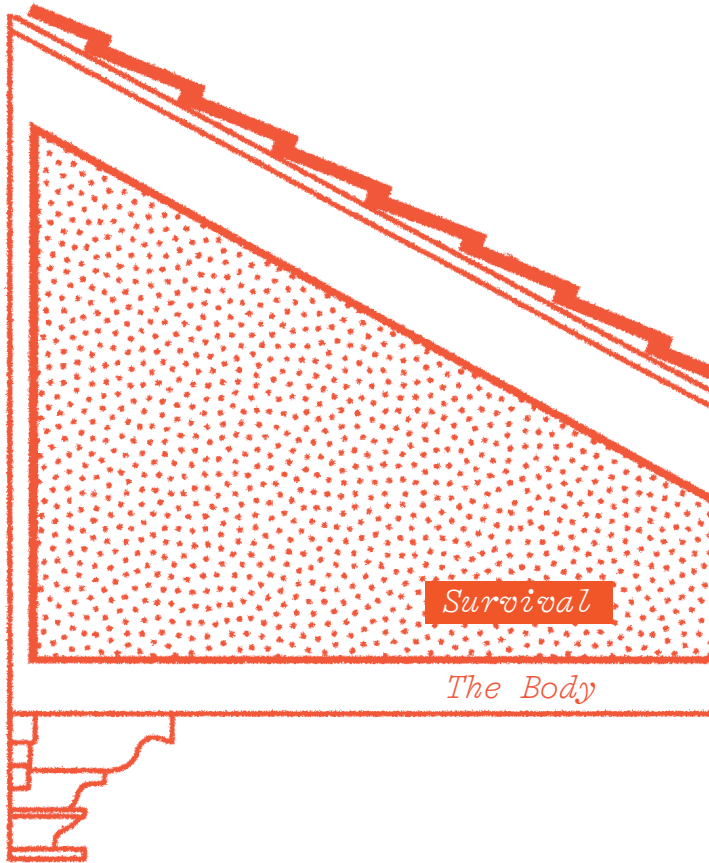
Three Feet

Resist

Survival

The Body

Nine Feet



The Garret

Language

