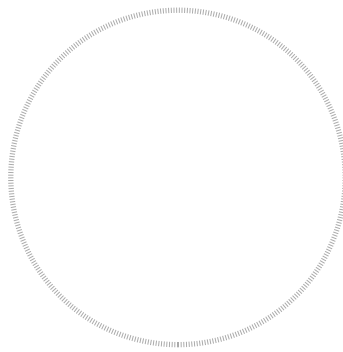


o r a c l e



Disability Justice Network

demos journal

Acknowledgement of Country

We begin this special issue by acknowledging that Indigenous sovereignty on this continent has never been ceded to any entity, state or otherwise. We pay our respects to the elders of all nations on whose Country this issue was edited, designed, and put together, specifically the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, and Ngambri-Guumaal Nations on which *demos journal* is based; the Turrbal and Yuggera Nations; the Yugambeh Nation; and the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation.

So-called Australia is founded on colonisation—as long as “Australia” exists, colonisation is ongoing. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations have lived here for many millennia and continue both practicing their traditions and resisting the colonising settler state.

Editorial

‘Oracle’

This special issue of *demos* journal is an autonomous issue edited by members of the Disability Justice Network: Lina Koleilat, Muhib Nabulsi, Rômy Pacquing McCoy and Shakira Hussein. In the following pages, you will find writing and artwork by disabled First Nations and POC writers and artists relating to—and/or responding with—Disability Justice. The editing of this issue has taken place on the lands of the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, and Ngambri-Guumaal Nations; the Turrbal and Yuggera Nations; the Yugambah Nation; and the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation. Sovereignty of these lands, like all lands across this continent, was never ceded. There is no justice in a Disability Justice that isn't foundationally anti-colonial.

Disability Justice was founded as a movement by queer, disabled women of colour on lands of the Ohlone Nations across the Bay Area on Turtle Island, a.k.a the U.S.A. in response to the failures of the Disability Rights movement. In vying for mainstream acceptance, the Disability Rights movement was increasingly abandoning the struggles of multiply-marginalised disabled people to make meagre gains for a few: namely disabled white, heterosexual, cis-gender men. Unlike the disability rights movement—and its

operating theory of disability, referred to as the “social model of disability”—Disability Justice is founded on, and cannot exist without, an anti-capitalist politic; as Sins Invalid state in their ‘10 principles of Disability Justice’: “In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.”¹

In an important precursor to formalised notions of Disability Justice, Marta Russell and Ravi Malhotra demonstrate that disability as a modern category is not created by “defects” of individual bodies (the medical model), nor solely by an ahistorical and decontextualised “society” (the social model), but as, “a product of the exploitative economic structure of capitalist society.”² The consequences of this formulation for disability activism are enormous: the production that defines colonial capitalist society is inherently ableist, therefore one cannot resist ableism without directly resisting capitalism. As a productive enterprise, publishing too exists within these logics. With reduced capacity for labour, it is difficult for disabled would-be writers to publish their work. From this understanding, we prioritised work by previously unpublished creators for this issue.

1 <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice> (2015).

2 “Capitalism and Disability”, Marta Russell and Ravi Malhotra (2002) in *Capitalism and Disability: Selected Writings* by Marta Russell (Haymarket Books, 2019). A PDF of this essay is freely available: <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5784>.

The theme of the issue is 'Oracle,' inspired by the words and work of Alice Wong:

But my body, that the state calls broken, I call an oracle. It's not just the distant flames that I can see before you. But it's the cold math that calculates the value of my life, an algorithm of expendability, that—whether you realise it or not—can come for you as well.³

If the State, its apparatuses of control and their "algorithms of expendability" feature often in the works collected here, it is not to appeal to the so-called Australian public to respect disabled people's (our) humanity. Rather, it is in rejection of the politics of appeal that have done nothing to materially change the lives of multiply-marginalised disabled people for the better. Mali Hermans's rousing poem 'you ask' renounces the obfuscating language of liberal diversity and inclusion discourses and the co-optation of Disability Justice by the NGO-Industrial complex; instead of requesting the assistance of abled power, Hermans demands that crips (we) care for each other in ongoing resistance against the colonising nation-state. In a powerful account, Ness Gavanozo denounces the daily bureaucratic cruelties of the healthcare system, while ku_aba_'s evocative and elliptical poem '004' resists the weaponised notions of madness employed

by the colony. Such works deny any possibility that the State can remedy the violence that it metes out against disabled people; only crips themselves (ourselves) can do that. Such is the knowledge of the Oracle.

Disability Justice too requires ongoing critique within our communities. The original 2015 '10 Principles of Disability Justice' published by Sins Invalid makes no explicit reference to ongoing colonisation. Though these principles have more recently been updated and now include mention of colonisation, the document still fails to articulate what Disability Justice means on colonised lands where disabled First Nations people are those most impacted by the ableism foundational to colonial-capitalism.⁴

In their unclassifiable work 'WE RISE ANGRY...'—one of two of their pieces in this issue—nayook demonstrates how the settler state's continuing disrespect for the stolen lands of this continent's First Nations is inextricable from the State's violence towards disabled people. Their poem 'in//tergeneration//al' stages a refusal to offer expressions of Bla(c)k joy for consumption by the so-called Australian public—it stands as a stark reminder that disabled community, constituted as it is by largely settlers, is still a settler public. Darcy Hytt's shapeshifting essay 'Not a Beginning' knows this all too well. With

3 'The Year of the Tiger', Alice Wong (2022). A plain language translation is available free [via the disability visibility project](#). A PDF of the original version may or may not be available for free at <https://libgen.is/>

4 [Sins Invalid's '10 Principles of Disability Justice' PDF](#).

shifts between literary forms and deft use of elisions and redactions, Hytt questions—explicitly and otherwise—the very possibility of separation at the Intersection. At one point, they challenge the reader: “Tell me you see clear borders and boundaries between *The Colonial Violence* and *The Ableist Violence*... I dare you.”

Many of the pieces in this issue wrestle with disability as lived by their disabled creators; some do so without explicitly addressing ableism’s roots in colonial-capitalism. We hope that the framing outlined above makes these pages a place for works such as Lay Maloney’s arresting stream-of-consciousness poem ‘Security System,’ Ajar Sana’s ‘Title’ and CB Mako’s essay on the continuing failures of the white Disability Rights movement to be read on their own terms, rather than those determined by the colony.

The issue wouldn’t be what it is without the artworks by Dinith de Alwis Samarawickma and Renay Barker-Muland, ER, and Rômy Pacquing McCoy. Defiant, warm, joyful and at times ambiguous, these visual pieces assert their creators’ continued existence and invite us to look into them and imagine Disability Justice futures. A vibrant work by Pig Spit is presented as a standalone feature poster in the middle of the issue.

Throughout this project, we have had many conversations regarding how we could enact a Disability Justice ethic in editing and publishing. Disabled autonomy in publishing is undoubtedly of

the highest importance when considering how we might mitigate as best we can the harm inflicted on disabled people by publishing under capitalism. But it also raises the question of capacity of those in the editing role(s); if a project is funded by the nation-state through one of its many arts organisations, such editorial work comes with significant pressures thanks to the disciplinary function of the state — which, in another guise, we have felt impact our mind-bodies for the duration of our lives. Though we identified many of the ableist dynamics of the publishing industry, due to our own capacity as disabled editors, we were unable to do many of the things we had planned in order to resist these dynamics. Whatever our failures, we hope this issue can provide a launch-point for other radical disabled-led publishing initiatives in the future, towards which we would be happy to share our learnings from this project. We trust that there will be an ongoing, radical political home for writing and art for multiply-marginalised disabled people across so-called Australia, akin to the one Pauline Vetuna describes in their essay ‘Just the Messenger’. There might already be one—it just hasn’t found us yet.

In solidarity,
Lina, Muhib, Rômy and Shakira.

Postscript

The submissions for this issue were received in January 2023 and the editorial written in June of that year. This is the only reason why neither the pieces collected in this issue nor the editorial above express solidarity with Palestine amidst the Israeli state's ongoing genocide.

We affirm the inalienable right of all colonised peoples to resist their colonisers by any means necessary.

Free Palestine from the River to the Sea

Always was Always will Be

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Country Crip (2022)

Renay Barker-Mulholland

Not a Beginning

Darcy Hytt

II.

Mobways, time spans everywhen¹.
Time is not a straight line with a start and finish – an individual beginning on a journey from one end, facing the future, back to the past, their position along the line as they travel the present. Nah, not mobways.

Some mob describe our time² as spirals, circling around and back over and over. Our time and all within it is as alive as we are. It is omnipresent, it breathes with us, breathes as us. It is all. Always all. No pastpresentfuture. Only all.

If we were to be placed in pastpresentfuture time, if we had to locate our being within it, we would not be the present. We would not be the border between the past, and a future that we definitively travel towards.

And if we were placed in pastpresentfuture time,

which is to say if we were to try to translate our ways of being into the language and epistemologies of the coloniser,

or rather,

to be subjected to the scalpel³,

a colonial project,

a weapon

of epistemic violence⁴,

that dissects and distinguishes and defines,

by choice or by force or by something in between,

we would be angled towards the 'past'. Towards what is known so as to know to not know, to never assume to know. To face towards the future would be

1 'Everywhen' is a term first used by white Australian anthropologist W.E.H Stanner to describe mob conceptions of time, particularly in relation to our Dreamings. (Though, from my understanding, Stanner's observations and opinions on 'Australian Aboriginal societies' were predominantly based on mobs in the so-called Northern Territory.) The term 'everywhen' has been broadly re/used, re/imagined, re/defined, and re/located since its first recorded use in 1953. As colonised communities, we often exercise power and sovereignty in re/claiming and re/appropriating the language and conceptualisations of the coloniser.

2 This is only one mob way of knowing time. We have many times and even more ways of understanding our times.

3 The idea of the scalpel comes from *Unflattening* by Nick Sousanis (2015).

4 See: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988).

to assume to know. And to assume to know is violence.

And so, mobways, to oracle is to remember.

But cripways, I do not remember.

Cripways, I can't tell if it's my autonomic nervous system, or shifts in barometric pressure, or trauma, or the heat, or degranulated mediators, or the tomato I ate earlier, or the dead tissue in my high left frontal lobe, or my thalamus, or gravity, or any other number of things, that disrupts my remembering on any given day.

Often there's no point trying to assign responsibility to a single perpetrator anyways. Always all? Only all?

The colony taught me to locate my problem, my pain, within myself. The colony taught me to wage a war on my body. To slice it up into distinct systems that I had to check reports and Google to confirm, to remember, to write into this piece. And in the spirit of this logic, a lone perpetrator must be identified, and found, hidden, lurking, as only the guilty do, and put on trial, reprimanded, punished. Naughty. Bad body. Your fault. *You* did this to *us*.

In doing so, the colony absolves responsibility for its violence, disappears into the soil (our soil, our Kin), only mist (manufactured – not our mist, not our Kin) remaining, hovering above the soil's surface, until it too fades away. Such a gentle performance for such a

violent Act.

A tale as old as time.

But not our time.

A time that pins us against walls, puts us in boxes, throws us in cells, hides us, chokes us, sends us home before we're ready. The time that put me to sleep and then discharged me with injuries that weren't there before I went under, but that it couldn't have done. Which is the same time that took a child from his mother because he was acting up, put him in a boy's home, horrors known later reduced to Royal Commission findings. The same time that pointed to the child's bloodline to explain his shit parenting, called me disordered for being subjected to it. The time that wrote the book on the same disappearing act it claims typifies Black fatherhood when the child performs it. Where do you think he learned it from? How old is that time, really, anyways?

I try not to break apart my body into blame anymore.

But I do not always remember not to.

V.

Oracle, to remember, to oracle, as in a verb, as in a doing word, an action, a choice. Not merely a passive feeling or state of being.

Not remember, as in the absence of a choice, as in the removal of choice. A

violation of autonomy. A violation of sovereignty.

Who is to blame for not remembering? Who violates such sovereignty? Who cracks and fractures and dissects and siloes and pulls apart and butchers and shatters and rips and takes and takes and takes and—

The mist evaporates.

I am the only one here.

As I write this, blood has started trickling down from my left nostril.

Is this the fault of my nose? My blood? My fingernail, the one that may have scratched the inside of my nostril? My body, sullied by clopidogrel and aspirin, weakened, useless, malfunctioning in the 34-degree heat?

This isn't a metaphor.

I need to go clean this shit up.

IV.

What is mobways anyways, hey? Is it, too, a product of the scalpel? One sometimes named 'pan-Aboriginality'? There is no one mobway. I bear the blood of a Country that this body has never known. Was born outways. Grew up on that one up there Country. But not there anymore. Living down here on this one Country. But also spent time out on that there Country, in between this one and up there. Taught mobways by Country and Kin from all

over. All with their own relationships with the whens and wheres and whos of their trajectories. So my mobways is a bitza diaspora mobways. It is mine and mine only, in the same way that it is, in fact, not just mine at all. But all. Always all. Only all.

If it doesn't make sense, I know I'm doing it justice.

If it's frustrating for the white reader, good.

If it's a bad explanation, shit writing, poor expression, contrived, lazy, then what the fuck is:

Small 4mm restricted diffusion in the high left frontal lobe white matter favours a small lacunar infarct. No significant mass effect. Basal cisterns are preserved and no shift in midline structures or hydrocephalus. Unremarkable MRA TOF.

Mobile interatrial septum and patent foramen ovale with significant right to left shunt. Strong positive bubble study, with right to left shunting detected at rest and post Valsalva.

Baseline tilting showed marked postural hypotension. Supine blood pressure was 130 mmHg with a heart rate of 90 bpm in sinus rhythm. Vasodepressor hypotensive pre-syncope.

The PFO was closed under TOE and fluoroscopic guidance with a guide wire. A 25 mm PFO occluder was then delivered across the defect and

deployed under TOE and fluoroscopic guidance. Atrial tissue was noted between both discs throughout deployment. Following deployment the device appeared stable and well seated without interference to the aortic root or mitral valve.

Oh, no, that's just very specialised knowledge.

You just don't understand.

Not all.

Never all.

Only some.

Only few.

III.

Alright.

So, mobways I oracle, but crieways I do not?

Well, no. To say so would be to succumb to the scalpel again. Same scalpel, though disguised. Always same. Always all. Only all.

There's plenty I don't remember mobways, too. And there's plenty I do remember crieways. Because I have it written down.

Memory and trauma under anaesthetic – is it better to not remember even though the body does? Relationality/relativity of memory b/w

traumatised patients and traumatising healthcare 'professionals'.

Figure out who my LAC is & link in w them/their org re reviewing my stuff before it's submitted & ongoing advocacy etc. I also need to look into specifics around cultural support & advocacy (like I want actual mob not just someone "trained" in "cultural safety" but idk how realistic that is) and support that is queer/trans confident/competent/safe.

Medications

Aspirin – can decrease blood pressure when taken before bed

Quetiapine – can exacerbate high or low blood pressure

Ritalin – can increase blood pressure

Reandron – can increase blood pressure

Depo provera – no significant impact on blood pressure

17/09 7:00AM arrival

Building A level 2 green couch

Fasting from midnight

Nurse will call on Wednesday

Discharged 6 hours post-procedure (procedure 8-10ish) – somewhere between 2-4

Bring medicare

Will go on a second blood thinner post-surgery

If I die

If i have another stroke in my sleep and die tell [REDACTED] it was worth it for the opportunity to know a love like theirs and that I'm so sorry they have to experience this pain again

Don't smoke weed again. It'll make u feel like shit.

I'm too scared to talk to people about my feelings because they won't know how to reply so I'm writing them here instead
Being forced to confront my own mortality is overwhelmingly terrifying and physically debilitating. It feels like a trauma response.

I am scared because I don't know how long I have left to love [REDACTED]. I only want for them to be happy. I want to be here to make them happy.

What if I die before [REDACTED]? He won't understand why I left and never came home.

I am scared I will respond by either doing absolutely nothing, or trying to make changes so drastic that I end up doing more damage (terrified of my mental health either way).

I've worked so so so hard to get to where I am but I still have so far to go. I want to live long enough to make a meaningful contribution to community.

I'm always thinking about and planning for the future. Living in ideas about the future. I don't want to die waiting for my life to happen.

I could've died because of medical negligence. I may still.

I believe that applying for disability is the best thing for me. It will allow me to save a good amount of money for moving to Melbourne and my future studies which will make me much more comfortable going into university. It will also allow me to earn enough income in order to satisfy the requirements of living on campus, which is the reason my application was previously denied. Finally, I feel very uncomfortable with the idea of working at this point in time. It is very anxiety inducing and not something I think I'm capable of. However, I do aspire to get a job when my mental health is somewhat better. I can work up to 15 hours a week/fortnight? while receiving disability benefits which I think is ideal for the less stressful environment I need to learn more about my recently diagnosed mental illnesses and how to manage them. It also, again, allows for more time building my experience and skills via volunteer work and extra curricular activities such as theatre club.

I've never been so deeply genuinely sorry about something as I am for being mentally ill.

I think about you constantly. In all states of rationality. Yet in each of these states, whether during a hell-brain meltdown, a hypomanic frenzy or a sensible calm, I come to the same conclusion, I make the same deductions.

Maybe no matter what state I'm in, I'll never be able to consider the

situation rationally. Maybe I'm completely wrong.

All I'm certain about is that I yearn for the day that I can stop thinking about it. The day that the monster in my stomach can cease to consume me from the inside out when you enter my mind. The day that you don't appear vividly in my nightmares. The day that my view of you isn't skewed by the persistent inkling that you do not give a single fuck about me. Even if only for 24 hours.

Years of crip knowing, crip being – cripways. Fixed in place and time by a date written above, as if an overseer. As if an oracle. And if a date is an oracle, and to oracle is to remember, and the past is time, and time is all, always all, only all, and it breathes with me, it breathes as me, then I am time, then I am oracle, I do oracle, tracing cripways each time I mark paper with pen, write thoughts in phone notes.

I do not pretend to like or agree with all of the remembering. I do not pretend that I don't sometimes wince at it. But I do not blame the knowledge. I do not blame the author. I do not blame the oracle. To oracle is to know pain. I hold the pain with love, with care.

This is not just cripways.

Mobwaysiscripwaysismobways. Always one. Always all.

Reread those notes and tell me you don't feel the colonial stench wafting from them, hard and thick, hitting with a sharp sting.

Reread those notes and tell me you can identify where mobways begin and where cripways end.

Tell me you see clear borders and boundaries between The Colonial Violence and The Ableist Violence.

Tell me it doesn't make sense, it's lazy writing, it's pastpresentfuture, it's some, only some, only few.

Gorn.

Wield the scalpel.

I dare you.

VI.

If a tree falls in a forest,
 And the tree was Throwing Leaves⁵
 Before it fell, and while Throwing
 Leaves,
 The tree saw death in a Blackfulla
 brain,
 But did not tell for longtime,
 Held in, sharp breath, for longtime,
 And if the tree, once fallen,
 Had Throwing Leaves stolen
 By a thief so clever, so devious,
 She robbed the dead before joining
 them,
 Robbed the living once beyond them,

⁵ Throwing Leaves, or 'Maroondah', belongs to the Woi-wurrung Language of the Wurundjeri Peoples and Country.

Robbed the tree of its name,
 Declared herself in its place,
 Who in the tree, peeled back a mask,
 Once obscured by Leaves, now bare,
 Revealing a mirror that owned the secret,
 Does the tree fall mobways or cripways?

I.

Hi.

It's me again.

I'm writing so that you can remember.

So that you can oracle.

Mobways.

Cripways.

Allways.

When I have a lapse in memory that feels scarier than usual, I often try to recall whether it's of a severity that I experienced pre-stroke. But I did not know that I would have a stroke at 21.

Or was it 20?

20.⁶

I did not know that I would have a stroke at 20 before I had one. So I did not write down anything about whether I attempted tasks multiple times within short periods only to realise I'd already

done them, over and over. I didn't record whether I'd ever been convinced that something I had just written was written by someone else, because I had no recollection of writing it, and it didn't seem like something I'd write. I don't know if I ever reread pages of a book to find I'd somehow misread most of it.

But I know now. And this knowledge terrifies me. Because I wonder about what else I should be writing down. I wonder what else I'm depriving you of because I don't know, right now, at this moment, that it's something I should record.

I'm sorry there's so much of yourself that is unfamiliar and unknown and unexplained because I didn't know to write it down.

I don't know whether I should tell you that my eyesight has gotten noticeably worse in the past 6 months, and I always have to wear my glasses now. I don't know whether I should tell you, because I'm sure it's just because I started reading again, so my eyes are working a lot harder than they used to.

I don't know whether I should tell you that I'm sitting at the kitchen table in my Always Was shorts and recently-cropped Mitski shirt, and that the back of the chair is scratching up against the gap between them.

That I'm listening to the carbonated bubbles of my Vanilla Coke burst inside

the can less than a metre away. Counting the seconds between pops like lightning to measure how flat it is.

That I'm eating a gross, grey TV dinner—a vegan shepherd's pie that's been sitting in the freezer since I bought it when I was terrified that I was going to get COVID. Almost exactly a year ago now. I lathered it in shredded cheese to try disguise the look and textures I know I'll hate.

I feel like I should tell you that I know my heart has felt funny in ways that it didn't before surgery.

I get the sense that this is something you should remember, because it is so vivid to me now, but I don't want to assume. I also don't want to underestimate the power those doctors hold over you, and your memory and sense of self.

The medic alert bracelet on my wrist still reads ████████.

Please don't forget that that's not your name anymore.

Not an end.



What could have been Dinithi De Alwis Samarawickrama

the time travel that comes with seeing your baby self through the lens of all the things that happened in between then and now. In this liminal realm I find the space between what could have been and what is.

You Ask Us

Mali Hermans



IDPwD @IDPwD · Nov 10, 2022

...

There are 4.4 million Australians living with disability but not all disability is the same.

This year for [#IDPwD](#), we encourage everyone to [#lookbeyond](#) and discover the unique stories of individuals with disability across Australia.

Share your story using [#lookbeyond](#)

#LookBeyond the prisons we let kill you

cripples burn them to the ground!

#LookBeyond the institutions we let hide you

cripples kick the locked doors down!

#LookBeyond the hospitals we let hurt you

cripples organise health care for the people!

#LookBeyond the workshops we let rob you

cripples end the slavery you make legal!

#LookBeyond the poverty we let starve you

cripples give to each according to their needs!

#LookBeyond the providers we let exploit you

cripples sabotage their greed!

#LookBeyond the doctors we let gaslight you

cripples share the treatments they conceal!

#LookBeyond the psychs we let detain you

cripples help ourselves to heal!

#LookBeyond the pigs we let bash you

cripples abolish every cop!

#LookBeyond the "support" workers we let assault you

cripples ensure the rapists lose their jobs!

#LookBeyond the teachers we let cage you

cripples learn to educate each other!

#LookBeyond the fascists we let terrorise you

cripples act to make them suffer!

#LookBeyond your dead and dying

cripples memorialise every name!

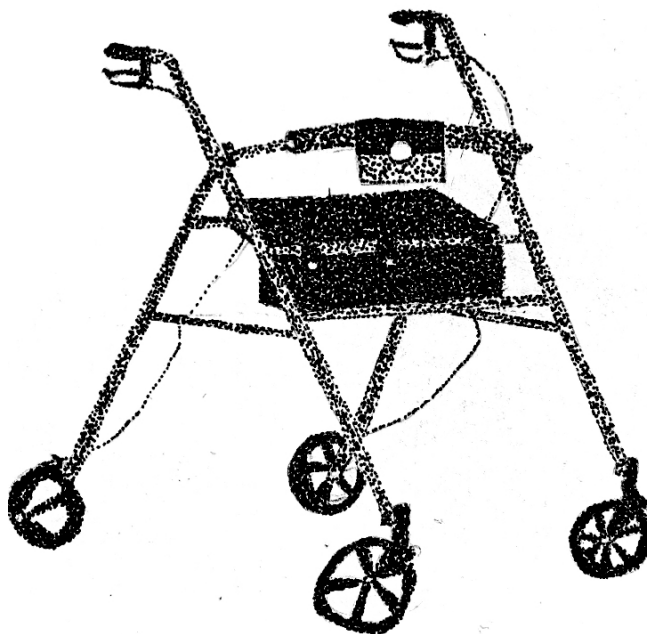
#LookBeyond your grief and suffering

cripples transform our anger and our pain!

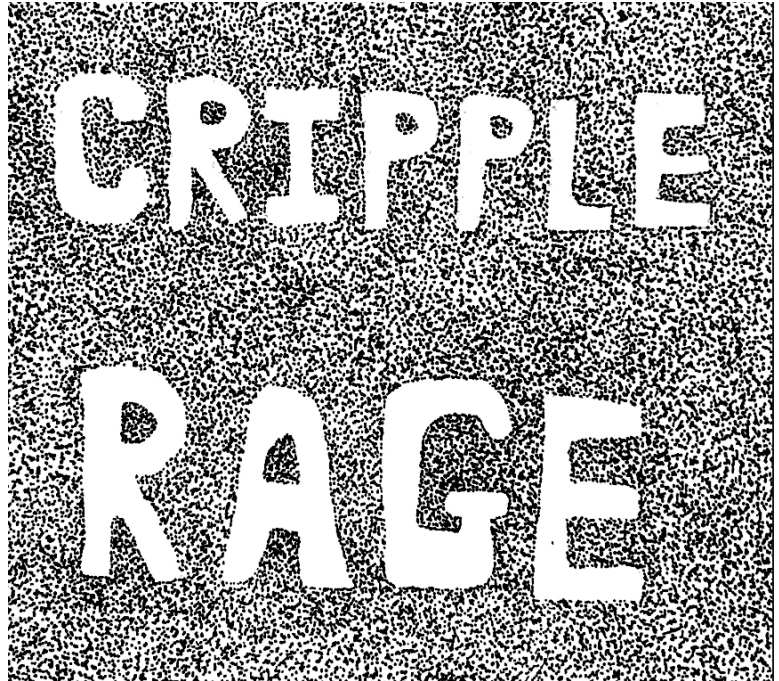
Exhausted

E.R.

Sovereignty is a connection all Blackfellas share, tying us together like string.

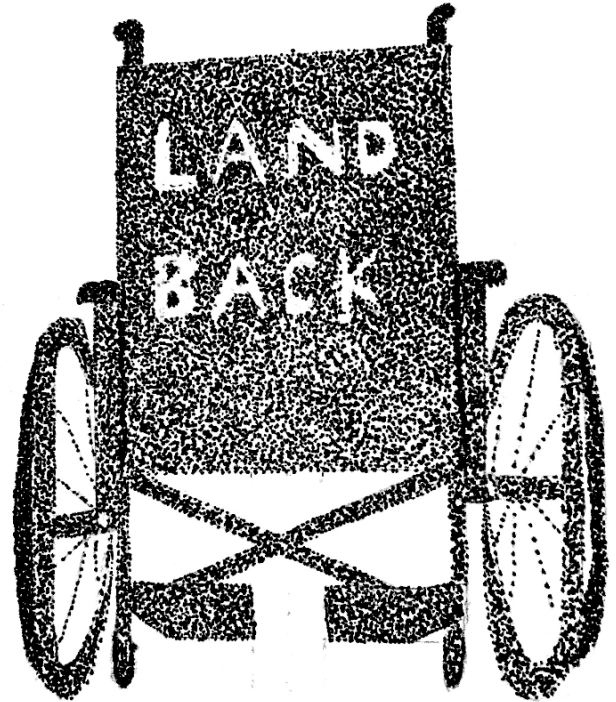


Sovereignty is multifaceted, much like disability.

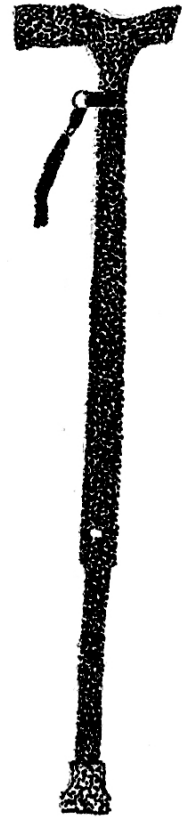
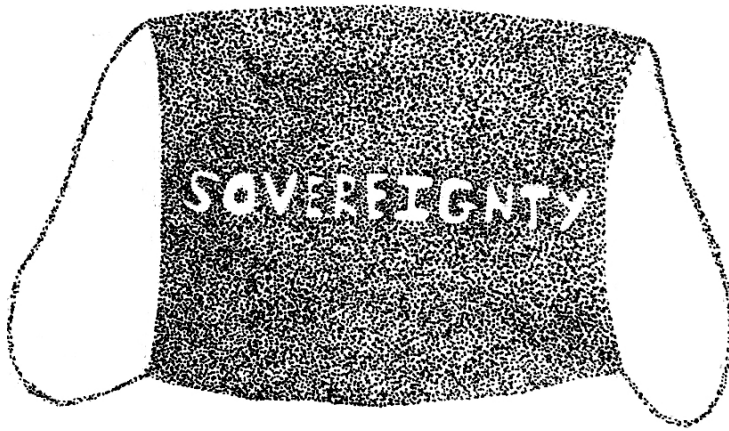


The struggle for the ownership over our bodies has been continuous since 1788. Fighting multiple colonial systems, which duplicates when disabled.

We will continue to fight the way our Ancestors have.
Feet, walkers, canes, white canes, wheelchairs and face
masks.



We demand the right to live.
We demand sovereignty over our bodies.



Disclaimer

Since people ask all the time, my art is not 'dot painting.' Whilst being Aboriginal, 'dot painting' belongs to specific mobs and songlines, none of which I belong to. My art is pointwork, using lots of tiny dots to create art.

Just the Messenger: disability justice on community radio

Pauline Vetuna

In early 2019, I had truly had enough. A disabled mind weary and disabled Body exhausted from years of trying to survive on the margins of an economic, social and physical landscape within which I was, as a visibly Black, visibly disabled woman, both highly visible and invisible. The complexity of the interaction of my physical disabilities, the accumulated traumas I live with, and the impact of it all on the way my non-linear mind and natural intuition works, rendered me and my rhythms unemployable in most workplaces. The gentle, slow needs of my Body and mind are incompatible with the grinding demands of colonial capitalism and have marginalised me within political spaces that, if accessible to disabled people at all, either explicitly or subliminally disregarded embodied knowledge and informal ways of learning that sit outside of institutionalised and text based education.

I say all this to say, my journey to finding a political home and accessible ways to share and engage with political ideas has been as long as the journey of unlearning much of what I had been indoctrinated to accept, as a migrant settler with my own Indigenous lineage

living on stolen Aboriginal land, as a Black person in majority white schools and neighbourhoods without guidance as to how to navigate them, as a disabled person in a world soaking in contempt for, neglect of and dismissal of disabled minds and bodies. I was taught in so many ways to reject myself and to neglect my own needs and best interests in favour of the preferences of those centred in the spaces I interacted with: nondisabled people, white people, people of a particular class, educational or professional background, et cetera.

In mid 2019 however, after several months of me spiralling, setting fire to proverbial bridges but, in the process, correcting my own self neglect for the first time in my life, my political home found me, at 3CR Community Radio. Located on Wurundjeri land within the suburb of Fitzroy in Melbourne, 3CR is a community radio station that in its inception and throughout its vibrant life has been a haven to radical leftist politics in this city. This community hub has also strived to foreground the voices of Aboriginal people, women, workers, ethnic and LGBTQ+ communities, and people with disabilities (amongst

others).

To that end, 3CR has for many years put on an annual Disability Day broadcast, as an antidote to official International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD) celebrations mandated by governments internationally and observed by state institutions comprised largely of nondisabled people. On 3 December, each year, 3CR had put to air 12 hours of disability rights-focused programming, made and coordinated by disabled people. Year after year, the coordinators of these broadcasts had raised the bar for disability rights discourse, with programs taking on an extraordinary array of topics that affect the lives of disabled people. In 2019 I was given the role of Disability Day Worker, to coordinate the broadcast. I had no radio experience, but a clear vision, informed by decades of learning in this highly visible/invisible Body within this colony, for what I wanted to do with that radio space.

Power from the Margins

In coordinating the 2019 day, 3CR and I wanted to centre the voices and perspectives of grassroots Black people, Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people of colour (BIPOC) with disabilities. Not necessarily professional advocates, and not necessarily people with any broadcasting experience. There was one reason for this: through observation, for all the talk that had been going on about intersectionality in both disability rights and racial justice spaces, disabled BIPOC occupied a tough position,

as we sat at the margins of two complex politicised communities: disability spaces dominated by Whiteness, and BIPOC spaces that still actively replicated ableism. I named the broadcast 'Power from the margins', and with only a few unavoidable exceptions, people on air were BIPOC, with a range of disabilities— Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and disabled people with roots in almost every continent.

12 hours may seem like a long time to program, but it is quite difficult to adequately capture the complexity of the intersection between culture, race and ability in a half day broadcast—let alone curate content that explores all the implications of how this plays out in a settler colonial state like Australia, with its internationally notorious racist and ableist border enforcement regime. And all the state and cultural violence that comes with that.

To begin to address that settler state I created the program Ableism in the settler colony, in which Latoya Rule, Dominic Golding and anonymous members of the ex-detainee/refugee community explained the ways in which the settler colonial state criminalises and incarcerates disabled Aboriginal people and disabled non-citizens of colour, whilst also being responsible for causing a multitude of impairments through human rights abuses. In the case of Aboriginal people, this has happened over generations, through the colonial project.

This program concluded the broadcast,

but to begin the day I felt it necessary to explain the framework underpinning the conception of the 2019 broadcast. Disability Justice (DJ) was not a term used in professional advocacy much in this colony at the time, but to grassroots politically disabled people I align with, it is the only disability framework that truly includes us and our kin, as it considers racial and disability justice as being inextricably linked, along with other justice movements. In *It's Too Early*, the 2019 broadcast's breakfast program, my co-hosts and I laid out the history and principles of Disability Justice as a burgeoning movement that brings together the agendas of multiple movements for liberation - led by multiply marginalised disabled and queer BIPOC.

Disability Justice holds anti-capitalism to be inseparable from the liberation of disabled people, and a number of shows during the 'Power from the margins' broadcast highlight the extra economic violence racialised people with disabilities face from the state. Notably in the program *Tuzungumze*, Hamile Ibrahim discussed the complicated and layered pressures that Africans with various disabilities experience, having been structurally forced into low income precarious employment, and denied economic safety nets and health care.

In a year where a royal commission into violence against people with disability had commenced, it would have been remiss of us to neglect discussion of violence against people with disabilities both in interpersonal relationships

and in institutional care. Beloved 3CR broadcaster, activist and proud Yorta Yorta woman Jane Rosengrave shared her story of survival and self-advocacy in the face of such violence on her program *Free as a bird*. Self-advocacy, as it is every year, was a key focus of programming with shows like *Disabled Parent*, *Disabled Child* & the NDIS highlighting the advocacy of disabled people for themselves and their families.

In that show, CB Mako discussed the difficulties of being a migrant, disabled POC navigating state systems to access health care and economic support for their disabled child—even as a fluent English speaker. We aired a number of shows during 'Power from the margins' that highlighted the multifaceted structural challenges that both culturally and linguistically diverse BIPOC face, as well as services being developed at the time by organisations such as *Action on Disability Within Ethnic Communities* and *Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health* for non-English speaking community members.

As one of the few regular 3CR broadcasters on-air on the day, Gavin Moore from *Billabong Beats* used his fantastic program to share a service that supports Aboriginal people with disabilities to access the NDIS. Elsewhere in the day's programming we heard from young queer BIPOC with disabilities discussing medical racism, mental health, relationships and race, were entertained with two hours of music and arts programming. and explored the implications of climate change for disabled indigenous peoples of the Oce-

anic region.

Whenever I am thinking about Disability Justice now I keep the words of Jane, of Hamile, of all the people who were part of the 2019 broadcast in my heart. The title 'Power from the Margins' to me still points to a core belief of mine, that runs through my thinking regarding Disability Justice: that power can be built from the margins, from the truest grassroots, in order to challenge existing interlocking systems of oppression - and that there is actually no other way it will be done. The knowledge of marginalised Bodies must lead. As the second principle of Disability Justice states, "LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED. 'We are led by those who most know these systems.' -Aurora Levins Morales".

Imagining Disability Justice

A month after the 2019 broadcast went to air on December 3, I intuitively started feeling a deep unease in my Body, like something big was coming, and my anxiety forced me into self isolation against this vague unknown threat in January of 2020. Months later, the catastrophic coronavirus pandemic was fully upon us, with profound implications for all disabled people - especially those with compromised immune systems locked away in institutional homes and carceral facilities, with no control over their environments or who they interact with, or in crowded and unsafe housing.

It is difficult to write about the first half of that year. Watching the state

respond in the most heavy handed, carceral ways to what is a public health issue requiring care, comprehensive community engagement and a well resources health care system, was painful and deeply triggering for those of us disabled people who know medical trauma and have well founded fears about loss of autonomy and carceral control of our bodies. Mutual aid initiatives sprung up to address the stark material inequalities laid bare by the pandemic and the states response to supporting the population, as well as the interlocking forms of oppression that compound this material inequality.

At the same time, in 2020 I connected with more multiply-marginalised disabled people here in so-called Australia, and made more connections with disabled people involved in Disability Justice efforts in other settler colonies. There was no escaping the trauma of the mass disabling event that was unfolding, yet the conversations we were having, perhaps as a survival mechanism, were also reaching beyond the present circumstances for what might be possible if we turned more deeply to the knowledge our Bodies hold, and the values that unite us as people committed to Disability Justice. People who desire a better world for everyone with our whole hearts.

When it came time to coordinate the 3CR Community Radio Disability Day broadcast again, the theme to me was clear: 'Imagining Disability Justice'. I wrote this blurb for the day:

The theme and artwork selected

for this year's broadcast is inspired by the book 'Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice', disabled mutual aid, and the soft, gentle care disabled community members have engaged in to ensure their comrades and loved ones had access to what they needed, when both the state and the public (locally and globally) conveyed through actions and rhetoric the message of our disposability. The artwork also speaks to the respite many of us have sought in our imaginations, holding space for ourselves and imagining possibilities beyond the current paradigm, when many of us face being confined until a COVID-19 vaccine is made. Whilst the broadcast will feature people talking about all that the pandemic has revealed about the structural marginalisation of disabled people, we will also be making space for discussions about what we can create together to replace all of this. Space to imagine disability justice.

In 'Imagining Disability Justice', I wanted to capture the voices and ideas of some of the people who were having conversations about Disability Justice here. People like Vanamali Hermans, whose interview with Mario Pozega on the show *Chronically Chilled* covered the Black Lives Matter movement, what abolition could look like from a Disability Justice perspective, and her experiences in mutual aid organising.

People like Elena Macdonald, who lead *Mob Dreaming Up: Yarning Sick, Disabled Realities*, a powerful 2 hour program featuring the voices of six dis-

abled and ill Aboriginal people yarning on the realities of illness and disability within the colony. People like Nakayn, Morag & Liv who we supported to create *THE DREAMSPACE*, another incredible 2 hours of radio discussing pandemic revelations and utopian visions for Disability Justice.

The full broadcast featured over 40 people with disabilities from all different backgrounds and age groups and included discussions about anti-Blackness and COVID-19, abolition of carceral facilities, climate intersections with disability and Indigenous activism, gender based violence, the Royal Commission into violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of disabled people, Queer Disability Justice dreams, disabled sex worker rights, issues to do with the far-Right & autism, and much more.

One of the programs featured an interview with Pan Karanikolas talking about Liat Ben-Moshe's book entitled, *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*, which was the selected text for a political reading group convened in 2020 by Vanamali Hermans and Georgia Mantle through Facebook open invite. This reading group became the impetus for events that took place the following year.

Grounding Disability Justice

After Vanamali and Georgia had co-facilitated nine reading sessions for the book *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*, and inspired by the conversations within it and the potentials for political or-

ganising that could come from such collective learning, they secured some grant money in 2021 and founded the Disability Justice Network (DJN), and from that, a Disability Mutual Aid Fund. The fund was created to assist multiply marginalised disabled people facing hardships and in need of fast assistance. The necessity of such a fund is clear from the sheer volume of multiply marginalised disabled people who need urgent financial assistance on any given day, particular during this pandemic.

The same month the DJN was founded, I had the good fortune of being able to do a webinar on Disability Justice with Alice Wong, a highly accomplished disability rights activist based on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone peoples, who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. Alice is also someone who had been part of the 2020 3CR Disability Day broadcast 'Imagining Disability Justice' and is the inspiration behind the theme for this issue of Demos Journal. She and I decided to structure our webinar on Disability Justice as a simple conversation, with each of us asking the other questions and given the opportunity to respond. We commenced the webinar by grounding ourselves through acknowledging the country from which we both were joining the session from. My first question for Alice, was how Disability Justice organisers who are settlers in the Turtle Island/United States context, address the necessity of solidarity with First Nations peoples over there.

As 2021 went on, I observed more conversations and conflict in different circles about the correct way to orient Disability Justice work within settler colony Australia, with questions about who should be leading such organising - more specifically, whether white disabled settlers, those who are multiply marginalised, should be leading such work at all. There remains divergent views on this. At the same time, I myself was holding a deep intuitive yearning to connect Disability Justice to decolonial political potentials, and ground my own Disability Justice imagining in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sovereignty, first and foremost. It felt even more necessary to me as someone with my own Indigenous lineage in the Oceanic region subject to Australian coloniality, one with ancestral ties to the First Peoples of this continent.

This is ultimately what led to the conception of the 2022 3CR Disability Day broadcast theme, 'Grounding Disability Justice', the follow up to 'Imagining Disability Justice' that made space for an exploration of what Disability Justice has been, is, and will be on these lands - led by Blak Disabled community members. The broadcast featured some of the best formations of words I have ever had the privilege of witnessing from young Blak disabled community members.

"Our world is already here, in some (many) ways. It is partly brought into existence by our collective imaginings, far greater, more expansive, than can be shared in this space. It is held in our work within communities today;

within our struggle to maintain as we have begun; together, centred in Indigenous ways of being (our ways); in abolition, beyond academic text; in intersectional, collective liberation.” - Elena Macdonald, Paredarerme, residing on Wurundjeri land. These words, used as a pull quote in the synopsis for the broadcast were from Elena Macdonald’s reading in the 2021 DJN storytelling event ‘Dreaming Disability Justice’ and featured in the broadcast in the program *Dreaming Disability Justice + Abolitionist Futures*. But it was Elena’s words in their own program, *Manifesto for Rest and Survival* [on resistance and the power of collective - an Indigenous call to disability justice] that must be taken in fully to understand what a Grounded Disability Justice looks like on Sovereign, returned lands.

Every 3CR Disability Day broadcast has been accompanied by artwork by a disabled artist. For 2021, I commissioned artist Renay Barker-Mulholland (Biripi Daingatti) to create the artwork for the broadcast and after yarning about it, she created a beautiful work titled *Gunagala* (sky). Her artist statement:

Flowers grow, the world revolves, and we make it through another day. While the sun sets, the diminishing rays ignite our own introspection on the status quo and our part in that. As we take stock of where we are, intertwined is a wealth of knowledge and strength. This is the destination, and now is the journey.

This work was created in response to my first outing on Country with my

new powered 4wd wheelchair, I was finally able to engage in something so integral to my culture. I came across a giant bush covered in spectacular flowers, and was awestruck by the beauty of it. I finally felt in that moment that I could see what true justice for everyone meant, while noting the solid and intricate branches that grew these magnificent specimens. We’ve had the world stop, and the looming of the unknown has forced us through space and time to reflect on the kind of world it is we’re trying to save. Now is the time to be brave, the revolution is here. Just like that beautiful bush, we needed to make sure every branch supports a magnificent display of us.

The words shared by the Blak disabled community members in the 2021 broadcast, remain for me the ultimate long term goal of Disability Justice on Aboriginal land.

Rest is Survival

In early 2022, after several years of struggling and severe stress, I began the year unintentionally losing weight, losing hair, and feeling more physically vulnerable than usual. My Body then told me to take deep rest by shutting down, and I became unable to eat the foods I normally eat. So, I took deep rest. I attuned fully to her, made the decision to do as much as I could for myself outside the stretched medical system, and let her healing process lead me throughout the year. With access to a welfare payment, I was able

to take 2022 off to rest and regenerate.

Throughout the year, I also witnessed many disabled people being forced to rest, and many more not being able to take that rest due to the demands of waged work, the absence of material support to facilitate such rest, and many other complex factors. Once again, the conversations, heartaches, critical observations and embodied experiences of the year informed the theme:

Disabled Rest is Survival

In year three of the pandemic, where significant public health protections mitigating the deaths of immunocompromised people were removed by the state and voluntarily abandoned by non-disabled people en masse in public space, where the under-resourced medical system and its unsupported workers were stretched, where climate change induced floods swallowed huge parts of this ancient continent's eastern side, and contributed to an electoral turn towards a Labor federal government who have since pursued an agenda including tax cuts for the wealthiest capitalist polluters, the necessity of our multi-movement struggle against capitalist society's commitment to eugenics, social murder and ecocide is clear.

In the midst of this, survival for many in our disability community (both before the pandemic and now) means taking deep rest. Rest for our

disabled and ill Bodies, minds, nervous systems, because we have no other option. Rest in isolation and self quarantine. Rest whilst waiting for health care and care services. Restorative rest for healing. Rest to both preserve and affirm the worth of our Bodies, minds and very lives.

But who has access to rest under colonial capitalism? Those who can buy it, access it, as survival is for those who can afford it and who can participate in an increasingly unsafe workforce to do so. Those who are not incarcerated or in need of medical care from a medical system ill equipped to provide it. Those with safe housing and living circumstances. Those who are held by safe and accessible communities with members practicing consistent COVID safety.

In this year's Saturday Disability Day Broadcast, we're talking about REST as a necessity for our survival, the ways disabled people are habitually denied both rest and income, reflections on disabled rest and joy, disabled Indigenous anticapitalist futures, and much more.

Universal access to rest, to wellness, to life, is Disability Justice.

In the program F*** WORK, which I created with Leilani Fuimaono for the broadcast, I go into more detail about the theme 'Rest is SURVIVAL' and what I see as the need to centre rest in both our organising and in the future we seek to create. Leilani and I push

back at the focus on the abled worker and labour relations in general in leftist politics, and push back at discourse on rest led by nondisabled people, particular those who are materially comfortable. I also discuss what are to me the two things that are essential to developing Disability Justice in this location:

Grounding Disability Justice in Aboriginal Sovereignty and land back. And figuring out how to meet the material needs of everyone, through meeting the needs of multiply marginalised disabled people (beyond colonial capitalism and the abolition of carceral institutions).

There's so much more I would like to say about the essential conversations and other voices heard on the 2022 Disability Day broadcast, but instead I will simply encourage you to explore the podcasts and transcripts on the 3CR website at your leisure. What I have learned from fellow disabled community members over the past four years, and through my experiences as a Disability Day worker on 3CR Community Radio, are now the foundation for the Disability Justice work I will pursue with comrades and kin in the near future.



Accountability Lives in the Air
is by rô

Security System

Lay Maloney

1.

Blue light filter on
My body was scrubbed red in the shower
In bed, I rest with an inch open window
Wind flows in, hitting my face illuminated by the evening feed
My eyes hurt
Blink.
Blink.
Blink.
I shove the cord into my phone to charge
Lying on my side, I glance at the clear bottle:
Alcohol
Vitamin E
Aloe Vera.
One squirt into my right hand,
meet my left
and rub.
Between my fingers, under my nails and down my healed scars on my wrist
Alcohol kills everything that covered my phone
My phone is dirty as the world.
Dried, my hands suffocate beneath my pillow
I blink at the small gap between the glass and my wall which lets me
watch the world.
The sharp scent of alcohol covering my hands like blood
It's clean. I'm clean. My hands are clean.
Outside,
the city lights pollute the starry sky
Inside,
anxiety trashes my universal mind
Grunting, I spin in my bed back to the grog
Addicted to the clean slate, I pump another sip into my hands
and rub it in
I am clean. I am clean.
Shoving my hands down my blanket, I feel my warm skin
Trying not to think about how many things
I've touched.

I am clean. I am clean.
Sleep finds me with my hands clamped between my thighs
I am not dirty. I am clean.

2.

Why did I apologise just now?
I wasn't at fault. It wasn't my fault.
Why did I apologise just now?
I'm sorry for apologising
I'm sorry for apologising about apologising
I'm sorry for apologising about apologising about...
Why did I apologise?

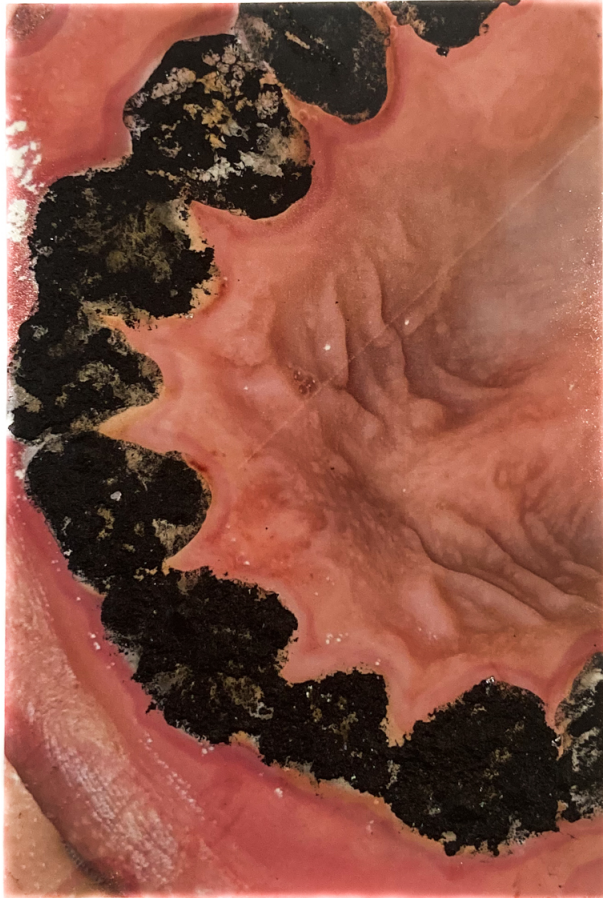
3.

'Nice to meet you, I'm Lay,' I extend my hand
as is expected.
They shake my hand with their hand.
We sit around a table covered in markers and paper.
My hand sits on my knee like a prisoner of war
Ten. Twenty minutes. Half an hour.
Now should be okay. I'm polite enough to wait.
I walk, not run, following the pink and blue symbols that do not apply to me
Using my hand,
I open the door and enter the accessible agender toilet
I grimace
No toilet seat cover
I lock the door
Nearly tripping over my feet to the sink
Water. Soap. Water. Soap. Water.
Three paper towels to dry my hands
Another to unlock the door, open it before throwing it in the bin with my foot
imprisoned between the door and its frame.
I return to the table back to my seat
Content with my purity
Guilt floods my veins as we make eye contact across the table.
I look down at my hands

4.

My nose is running like it has places to go
My head is pounding my brain into slime
My skeleton is made out of lead
My throat is coated in mercury
I pick up my phone.

Typing my symptoms into google, I think about what I could have; Cold?
Tonsillitis. Influenza. COVID-19...
Internet says it could be a cold or a rare disease that's common in Brazil.
I could have the Brazilian household infection
What have I eaten?
What have I touched?
Any of my friends went to Brazil recently?
Fuck, that's racist. I am not racist.
But that's what racist people say!
I sneeze and pain shoots behind my forehead
I scroll further down
Inflammation of the brain. Meningitis.
My brain is hot
It's getting hotter as I read
God, should I call a nurse on call?
Am I gonna die?
I shed my blanket cocoon
I stumble downstairs into the kitchen
I pull strawberries in a plastic coffin from the fridge
Decay spots the red skin
I bite into the fresher flesh of the fruit
Throwing the berry corpses into the bin, I lick my teeth
I wash my hands with the cold water and lime soap
I fill up a translucent glass with water
I hate these bloody stairs
Darkness pours out of my bedroom
I step inside
I place down the cup to rifle through my clear medicine box
I inhale two paracetamol tablets
The tablets are washed down by the water I ascended with
'Hey Siri. What's the time?' I ask my phone, eyes burning
'9:30PM' Siri replies while I rub my eyes
'Hey Siri. Put a timer on for two hours.'
If I am dead in two hours,
oh well
If I feel better in two hours,
all is well



Autoimmune

is by rô

Bodies Chopped by Capitalism

Ness Gavanzo

This is my story of how the lived experience of illness forced me to confront ways in which capitalism has truly messed up our health system. Before February 2022, I was quite naïve about how the so-called welfare system or maybe more of an orientation of this country called Australia has been dis-integrating in the area of public health. Admittedly, one major factor in this ignorance was the fact that I really did not have to use my Medicare card beyond my very rare visits to my GP.

February 2022 was different. I was told that I needed to see a neurosurgeon so I would know what is happening to my spine. After getting a referral from my GP, I then proceeded to ringing neurosurgeon clinics. And after being turned down by around ten clinics, it did become clear to me that the only way for me to see a neurosurgeon is to first sign up for private health insurance. I was totally devastated, as I had thought that all of my medical needs would be provided for free. After all I have been religiously paying my taxes, which include a hefty medicare levy. Since I migrated here in 2012, I had seen how much money is taken from me during tax time for my medical needs. I had not been sick all this time, and I was foolish enough to believe that when the time comes when I would be needing medical support, I would not have to worry as everything

will be provided for free. Not really free, as I did pay for it every taxation time.

As someone that works in the welfare sector, it dawned on me that my only option is to present at the hospital via the emergency department. I did this. The hospital was inundated with patients, as this was also at the height of the covid pandemic lockdowns. The ED doctor explained that I needed an MRI and I should go back to my GP to get a referral. I questioned him as to why would I have to do this. He said that because I am not his regular patient and as it is COVID time, referrals should be via the GP. He added that an MRI is needed immediately. My GP provided the referral and my first big surprise came when I was booking for it. The staff said that I would have to pay in full from my own pocket, as lumbar spine MRI is not free anymore. This is where I realised that our bodies have been chopped by capitalism big time. Of course, I was furious. Only some parts of our body including the brain are still free – in other words, fully covered by Medicare – for the purposes of MRI scans. I didn't have any choice but to pay. It is at this point that I finally understood why my client who is reliant only on Centrelink payments and whose kids are NDIS patients has secured a private health coverage, even though she is having trouble making

ends meet. She pays more than 500 dollars monthly for the health insurance!

The MRI result was grim. The nerves on my spine were already affected. I was told that I should see a neurosurgeon right away. It was totally against my principles to secure a private health insurance, but I was left with no choice. Moneywise, this is not a huge problem for me as I had a full-time job at that time. But I was also boiling in anger because the monthly payments for health insurance was money that I could otherwise have sent to help support my family overseas. The anger comes from the fact that capitalism is winning again in this situation.

As if the blow of paying for the MRI scan was not enough, I again panicked and angered when I was told by neurosurgeon clinics that they can only book appointments for those who have matured private insurance, as cases like mine always end up needing an immediate surgery. "We cannot just put you back to a public hospital if you need surgery." This means that I cannot use my recently booked health insurance until February 2023. Again, the tentacles of capitalism are clearly killing sick people. At this point, I felt betrayed several times. While I am boiling in anger, I knew that I had to act quickly, as my spine will not just stop deteriorating. I am again in the cycle of pushing myself in the public health system. With the pain on my back and my legs getting worse, I again presented at the emergency department of a public hospital. This time, I used all my skills

in advocating for myself. I insisted at every stage inside the ED that I needed to be seen by a neurosurgeon and I would not agree to be discharged if this didn't happen. After talking to several ED doctors, at around midnight I finally was visited by a female neurosurgeon. After she explained to me my condition, I felt some relief even though the prognosis was quite dim. I know at this point, that they cannot just send me home if I present again in the ED. This is as though a miraculous gate was finally opening for me. My optimism has been revived. It is worth noting that I sent a complaint-letter to the hospital patient advocate, which I am sure this has helped in allowing me to be seen by a neurosurgeon.

I continued to have such crippling pain on my back and legs that I ended up in the hospital again in March 2022. This time, I was admitted in the neurosciences ward and a whole team of neurosurgeons have examined me. The final verdict is to administer an epidural steroid injection. I felt hopeful that with a series of injections, maybe my spine would cooperate and I would not be needing any surgery in the future. Although at the back of my mind were the voices of the neurosurgeons saying that there are far too many cases similar to mine where the injection only works for a certain amount of time. Voila! The surgeons were right, as by the end of May I felt a surge of pain on my back and legs. I informed the neurosurgeon about my ongoing pain over a scheduled telehealth appointment and I agreed to have a second epidural injection. On the day this was

booked to take place, I just was about to go out of my house when I received a call from the hospital. "I am so sorry to inform you that your injection will not happen today due to the machine not working." In a rich country like Australia this is happening! This left me enduring so much pain for another two weeks as the rescheduled appointment is only possible after this period. I am almost begging my spine to behave until the new date. The 2nd injection did not have an effect, as I continue to have an increasing level of pain.

At my scheduled review appointment via telehealth, I discussed my current situation with the neurosurgeon. She instructed me to present at the ED right away. By the time I arrived at the hospital, I could hardly walk. This time, I was admitted to the ward right away. A suite of medicine, including high dosages of steroids, was introduced to my body. The surgeons announced that they were unable to operate on me, as I needed to be free from COVID for 8 weeks in order for the anaesthesia to take effect. After four days, I was sent home with a script for various pain medication.

Taking 23 tablets a day of various pain tablets did not deliver the desired result. The pain continued to escalate and in less than two weeks, I was back at the hospital yet again. On my first day as an inpatient, the decision was to undergo emergency surgery. However, the following day another neurosurgeon said that my case will be reviewed again during a case conference and the surgery might not happen

this time. She ordered new tests that I needed to undergo and that the 3rd and last epidural injection should be done as soon as possible. There is a twist though as she further stated "we cannot administer your third epidural steroid injection at present as the list is full. It will take two months before we can do it for you." The only assurance she can give me was the referral she can do to a private clinic across the street, so I can be prioritised. Again, I have to pay in full. And I also need to have a nuclear scan, so they can test whether my bones would be able to handle the surgery. "Dread" was how I described my emotion upon hearing the word 'nuclear', as I only associate it to nuclear weapons. I'm sure this was something very serious, especially that the request was also categorised as urgent. I was discharged again after a few days as the doctors made it clear that they need first the result of the nuclear scan.

For my third injection, I have nothing but repulsion to the system that continuously kill people in the name of profit. If I have no means to produce the money needed for this procedure the message is clear – just watch yourself decline in the fastest way possible. The injection to my spine is crucial, as this is the only way for me to be able to undergo the nuclear scan which is now a prerequisite for my eventual surgery. I found myself again reflecting on all the other people who just don't have the resources for these kinds of crucial procedures and tests. I had to rely on my credit card and prevent myself from thinking about payment when the due

date comes.

During the following months, I continued to be IN and OUT of the hospital. Every hospital admission was marked by too much distress on my part. I had to prove myself worthy to be admitted every time I presented at the emergency department. On one occasion, I had to wait for more than 5 hours after being triaged due to the non-stop influx of ambulance vehicles. During this time, even those elderly patients that came via the ambulance were still placed in the ED waiting area. I was in so much pain that the only way I could trick my mind was to take a call from a distressed CALD woman who was asking for help from my community organisation. I was lying down on the chairs as this is the only position that the pain is a little bearable. I ended up talking to her with the background noise of ambulance sirens and the announcements to medical personnel via a paging system. She was able to guess that I was in the ED waiting area, as she is a nurse. I was able to provide her with the family violence crisis intervention that she desperately needed, while I also benefited from our conversation, as my mind was diverted from the pain that was consuming me. I must admit that I can only do volunteer work over the phone in a very limited capacity, due to the level of pain that I constantly battle.

The Buzzer Lady

I finally had emergency spinal surgery just before Christmas 2022. Before this, I had to advocate for myself

on all levels, calling the hospital every few days regularly. During my countless stay in the hospital I befriended a good number of people, from patients to nurses, orderlies, and other hospital staff. As my mental health gradually deteriorated due to the amount of stress and anxiety that I constantly deal with, I made an active decision to make myself useful to others even if most of the time I am the one benefiting from these informal friendships. I became the "buzzer lady" in every ward that I am placed in as my ward-mates are usually elderly people and are tied to their beds. They would call my attention if they need the nurse, and I will get up and use their buzzer to call the nurse. On occasions when I myself cannot get up due to the crippling pain, I would buzz the nurse from my own buzzer and just tell her/him that it is for another patient. Due to the number of admissions that I had in the hospital, there came a point where they instantly know me already. The staff that are in level 9 know me even if I am a patient of level 10, and that is because there are times that level 10 is full and they end up squeezing me in at level 9. There were two admissions where the nurses said to me that they will convince the surgeons to not discharge me as I am still in too much pain. I did say to them to not do that as at the end of the day the surgeons have the last say and their hands are also tied due to the limited number of beds and staff available. One of the side effects of the medicines that I take is insomnia. There are times where I cannot sleep for fifty hours straight that I would talk to

my roommates on end or if they fall asleep I would just enjoy the overlooking scenery courtesy of the hospital window while listening to what is happening in the hallway. I could hear the conversation among nurses or between nurses and some patients who obviously have also mental health issues. From these exchanges I would appreciate greatly the patience and care that nurses and other hospital staff have for the patients. From all my hospital visits I have accumulated a whole heap of life stories from my fellow patients and hospital staff. Every first day of my hospital admission, the staff would instantly recognise me and would be torn between being happy seeing me and at the same time sad that until now I am still unwell and surgery has been very evasive to me. Nonetheless, I guess I have managed to have a new family in the hospital:)

So long as capitalism continues to creep in the public health system and politicians turn a blind eye to the ever-growing need for more resources (including additional staffing), patients will always be likened to be in a raffle draw where those that are picked up are the most lucky but also are in the stage of near death. Patients' bodies will continue to be chopped in the name of profit. It is utterly awful to feel responsible for your co-patients and to end up consoling yourself whenever you are sent home even if your presenting health issue has not been resolved as the other patients are way worse than you. Why is it us patients adjusting and minimizing our own suffering so we can feel better even if only

in our minds as our physical self is still in misery?

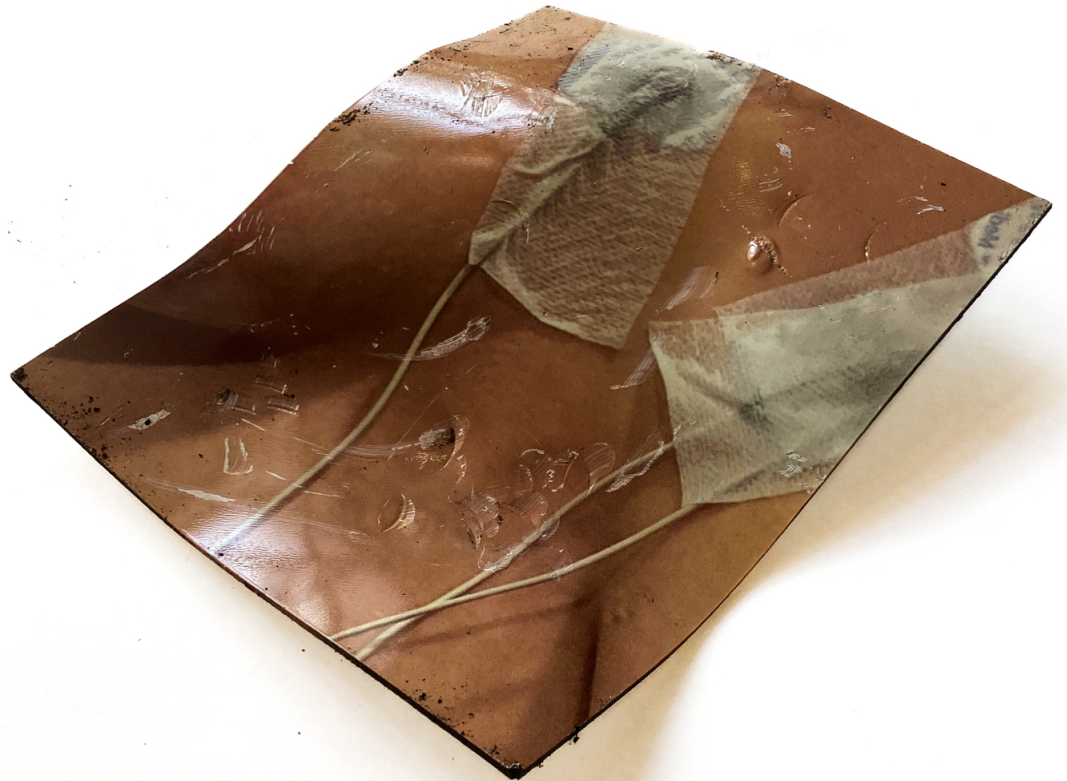
Thanks to my being an activist and a welfare worker I was able to navigate the very complicated public health system, and I did not end up losing muscle and nerve functions before they operated on me. I must say that the doctors did tell me that they needed my spine to be in a much worse condition so it will be easier to operate on. They explained it to me in medical terms but how I wrote it is what they are trying to say. Also, reading between the lines when they were talking to me, it was far too obvious that they do not have any capacity to prioritise me as there are too many elderly patients who are needing emergency surgeries. Being categorised as needing emergency surgery in some of my admissions and to end up being placed in the surgery waitlist as a category 2 patient in October is a very clear indication that they are operating on very tight resources. After all, spine is only next to the brain and heart. I am also better than the older patients as I am still able to stand up and I am way younger than them. There you go, even myself is adjusting to the evils brought about by capitalism :(

I hope that with this short story of someone who traversed the thin line separating the healthy and the disabled we realise that it only takes one illness for a person to lose a lot. This short-lived experience has given me an insider's point of view of how messed up our public health system is. However, I must admit that this is just a

small part of the bigger whole that many of us as disabled persons have time and again have to traverse and to contend with. Every journey and episode of illness (for some of us it is a continuous never-ending journey) is marked by frustration, helplessness, anger, anxiety and a whole gamut of negative emotions but also of hope and renewed vigour to fight this oppressive system by continuing our advocacies in any shape and form. We continue to choose to prevail no matter what our circumstances are.

NGG

31Dec.2022



Alaala

is by rô

Title

Ajar Sana

I feel that I don't truly belong anywhere.

As a brown migrant Muslim woman, my intersecting identities allow me to be a part of diverse communities, but parts of me are not accepted and get left behind.

A couple of years ago, I was moving out of college. Ma was visiting and wanted to help but she didn't want to taint my chance of acceptance because of her *hijab* and *salwar kameez*.

I felt hyper aware of my differences as if she brought to light what I had been hiding. I moulded myself more into white Australian culture.

At my new shared house, I frequently made excuses to avoid drinking for weekly wine nights. You know, the "I've got a headache" or "Sorry, early day tomorrow".

In Ramadan, I fasted on snacks that I could keep in my room overnight. Slowly, I began sneaking into our kitchen to eat properly before my fast began. Eventually my housemates put two and two together.

I felt like I owed them for tolerating me despite my differences.

With the added pressure to bridge our gap and meet them on common ground, I hid my prayer scarf and

avoided talking about religion or faith.

Today, I openly practice hijab.

Subtitle

I juggle different parts of my identity in every community that welcomes me, but no matter how hard I try, my whole person never quite fits.

I find myself negotiating social situations with even immediate family and close friends, between maintaining these relationships and standing up for myself.

My intersectional identities afford me this tolerance for discrimination. To me, this is the cost of intersectionality.

This all makes maintaining social circles and even support networks really draining, and sometimes even costly to my well-being.

My family and friends often ask me if I really need to make my life harder by calling myself disabled, that everyone has difficulties that they cope with without making it their identity, and perhaps I'd help myself more by just trying harder.

Having to prove my diagnoses is a painful burden.

Subtitle

Disability is an afterthought even amongst those closest to me.

I don't feel safe or comfortable even with friends, because my disability is forgotten, seen as an inconvenience, or even a ploy.

When disability is attributed as inherent to me, rather than the circumstances that disable me, I am being conditioned to believe that the problem lies with me. This is insidious and upholds the structures that disable us and keep us from living the life we want.

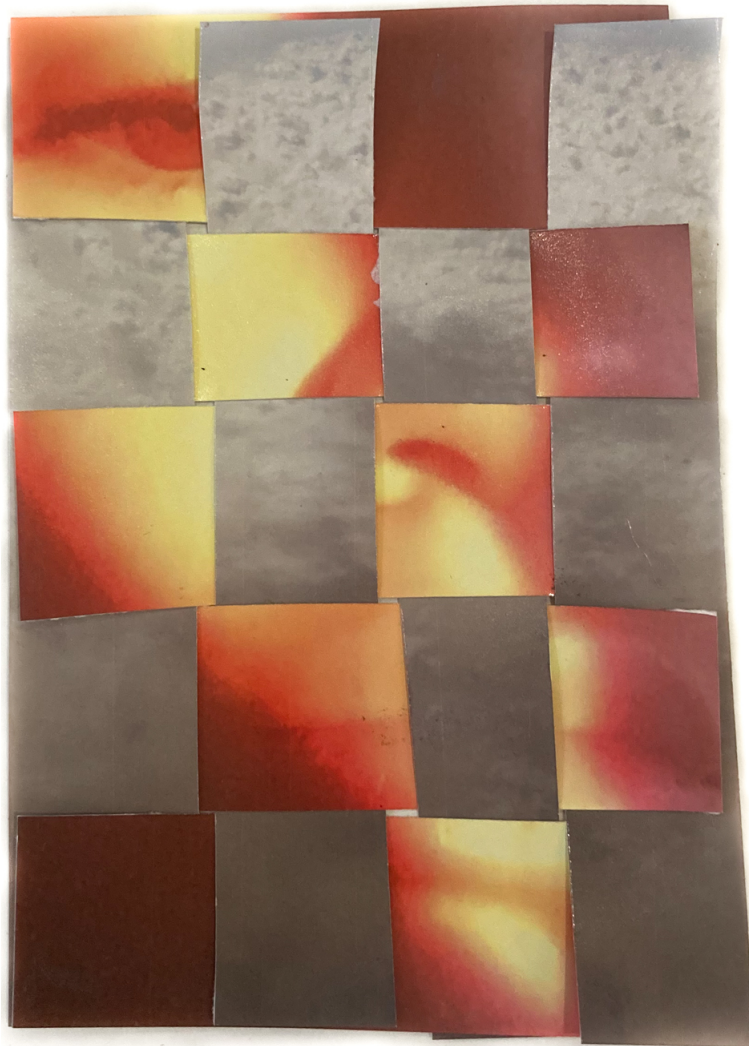
Whether you're disabled or not, we all have strategies and systems in place to make sure that everything keeps ticking over. The difference is noticeable though, when each step forwards puts us three steps back. Let me tell you, it really adds up.

I became a disability advocate out of necessity.

The otherness I have felt from years of being misunderstood was alienating and still affects me. We have to see the person first, a failure to foster spaces that empower our intersectional identities hurts the abled and disabled community.

We can strive for true inclusion, but only if we first heal together as a community with disability justice at its heart. Nothing about us without us.

Holdings Pattern



and



Self Portrait in Banana Leaf

are by rô

Behind the Zoom

CB Mako

'Are you telling me that you expect an artist fee or even a mentee fee while sitting at home, online, on their computer during a Zoom workshop?' The person on the other side of the online meeting asks, their voice and face show shock about my suggestion. I am equally surprised as I did not expect this reaction from someone who leads a national disability organisation.

My autistic self is rapidly asking in my head, 'Why don't they get it? Why? Surely, in this Year Three of the global pandemic – just before the new COVID19 variant explodes during the summer holidays – where was the shift in paradigm, a change in systems and structures?'

And does this mean I received the triple whammy of whitesplained, mansplained and able-splained?

*

There's an ongoing social media hashtag #PayTheArtist and #PayTheWriter. Is this ongoing online advocacy meant only for the employed? For those with privilege and power? I was reminded of Sara Ahmed's book, 'Complaint' (Duke University Press, 2021), in which she wrote that the pandemic 'has brought home the abject cruelty and harshness of inequalities.'

*

I should have asked:

Do you even know what happens behind the screen during an online conference for a non-mainstream Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour (BIPOC) writer or/and artist ('minoritized' might be a better word than 'non-mainstream' here? Or 'racialised' Or just leave out 'non-mainstream'?) while the global pandemic continues to rage? More so for the Disabled, Queer BIPOC?

Have you ever thought that the writer-artist on Zoom could be hungry, that in a pandemic lockdown or even during a self-imposed isolation, they have no access to food? How about their lack of access to drive to the nearest grocery because they ran out of money? And did you even think that they could be hiding in a room, escaping domestic abuse and violence?

What people don't see on the computer screen during a Zoom meeting, or any online conference could even include other situations like disability, dealing with mental health issues, chronic illness, underlying or pre-existing medical conditions.

*

Ideas percolate in my head while three stove top burners roar into life. With

gas flames aglow, it is almost dinner time. Hurrying, I drain the egg noodles with a colander in one hand while holding a boiling pot on the other hand.

Steam fogs my bifocal eyeglasses, and yet I continue to concentrate to finish this singular and seemingly dangerous kitchen task while completely ignoring The Essential Worker - an angry male household member. He is standing in the narrow outdoor space of the backyard, just outside his very own man shed. He keeps on hitting the windowpane in front of me with multiple plastic bottle caps. On my periphery, I see quick, incessant, and angry pelting of plastic bottle caps onto the kitchen windowpane. I deliberately ignore the Essential Worker - in the middle of the arsenic hours, no less - so that I won't burn myself by accident again.

I am prone to accidents. My underdeveloped kinaesthetic ability shows in the form of oil splatters on my forearms, accidental cuts on my calloused fingertips. And while fleeing from domestic abuse and violence during one of Melbourne's pandemic lockdowns, I fell off my e-bicycle, dislocating my shoulder. Such intense pain took months of physiotherapy, acupuncture, and a whole lot of painkillers, to have my writing arm back in order.

*

In hindsight, did the person with privilege and power remember the Australian of the Year, Dylan Alcott's speech:

My advice is to you, non-disabled

people. It's time for you to challenge your unconscious biases, leave your negative perceptions at the door and lift your expectation of what you think people with disability can do. Because it's always more than you think.

Surely, they would listen to Mr Alcott - after all, he may be disabled, but at least he is a white man.

*

Did the person with privilege and power of a national organisation have an unconscious bias, like the Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE), where Disabled people working in ADEs get paid as little as \$2.37 per hour?

*

My brain searches the literary community's version of ADEs in the state I currently reside. And as several states go to 'meh' mode as the pandemic rages during the summer, we are left behind.

We are considered annoying and the hashtag reminders of #COVIDIs-NotOver and #LeaveNoOneBehind. Is this what the able-bodied, mainstream narrative call 'microaggressions'?

*

Earlier in the year, an announcement about a mentorship competition came up on my Twitter feed. As I read the competition rules, they encourage diverse applicants to enter. But as I

read further, there is no access costs nor stipend allotment to winning mentees. Does this mean only the mentors receive payment? And yet, the organisers proudly announce that they are fully funded by a prestigious arts funding organisation. Further, to enter the competition, the writer must be a member of the literary organisation or should sign up for a membership first. This seems to be the default in entering writing competitions. There are even two different fees, a competition fee and subscription fee to qualify to simply submit an entry. The fees are quite expensive for me, as a diverse writer.

Therefore, more questions arise:

Why is this still the status quo for many writing competitions despite the pandemic already on its third year?

Were the organisers not affected by the global pandemic?

Isn't the global pandemic already a game-changer across industries, processes, and supply chains?

*

As the days move closer to the deadline, another coronavirus variant ravage throughout the state during school summer. Meanwhile, government officials announce that the state is opening up and remove almost all of their pandemic mandates and isolation rules.

I email the prestigious writing organisation about access costs, asking if

there would be a stipend for the chosen mentees while many of the population was in self-imposed isolation. The email reply I receive is lengthy and when read aloud, sounds terse.

Did the white woman in power chastising me for raising a concern on behalf of potential 'diverse' applicants during an ongoing global pandemic? The organisation for the mentorship prize is from another state. Their borders are still closed, and their COVID-19 active case numbers are enviably low.

Clearly, there was a level of privilege from this interstate writing organisation. If I apply, I will be in the group which they consider as 'marginalised' - those who are scrambling for food, grocery, and pantry staples; asking for #MutualAid on social media; asking the community to please send food. All this while also looking for P2 / N95 facemasks for the new COVID-19 variant. And these facemasks - approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) - are not only expensive compared to the earlier versions of facemasks during the beginning of the global pandemic in 2020 but searching for a single P2 / N95 facemask is also akin to a treasure hunt or the proverbial finding a needle in a haystack.

As a marginalised artist, I am also trying to procure rapid antigen tests, in time for the new school year.

And as a marginalised writer, our household has been already in financial hardship since the multiple pandemic Melbourne lockdowns began in March

2020.

And as a marginalised parent, I find it difficult to feed my remote-learning school students while working from home. At the same time, I need to assist them with their remote-learning device, which is a loan from their school.

So, whether Zoom meeting or a lengthy email reply, the concept of #PayTheArtist and #PayTheWriter while participating in an online workshop or even a mentorship seems to be a foreign concept to those who have privilege and power among the various arts organisations. Even if the arts organisations are located in the heart of a UNESCO City of Literature.

*

On 8th of March - International Women's Day with hashtag #IWD; the one and only day I feel I could voice out my thoughts without repercussions from The Essential Worker in our household.

The theme was promoted on social media with images of women with arms crossed on their chests under the hashtag #BreakTheBias – a slogan created by the UK-based marketing company Aurora Ventures. This corporate-friendly hashtag succeeded in swamping the official International Women's Day theme - "Changing Climates: Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow".

Not surprisingly, the day after International Women's Day, the verbal abuse of the coercive controller in my house-

hold continues. He is angry I did not serve enough food for dinner. Didn't the Essential Worker know about the massive increase in petrol prices and the inflated costs of food and grocery caused by broken supply chains brought about by the recent flooding and the ongoing global pandemic?

Once again, I try to find work in the arts sector, a gig work while in self-imposed isolation as COVID-19 active cases increase, people who caught the new variant, straining an already-exhausted health system.

And once again, I find the courage to ask the next arts organisation if there are any access costs while meeting on Zoom.

*

Eventually, I receive a reply – an invitation via email.

Because the invitation comes from a renowned writer, I say yes quickly, especially when the committee consists of fellow Disabled arts workers and Disabled artists. Finally, I could feel some relief. There is an organisation consciously includes accessibility in its planning phase. They are offering grants to artists who would like to include Auslan Sign Language, audio description, and captions into their arts performance.

Excited, I login and meet everyone online. There is an Auslan interpreter on the Zoom meeting.

However, I realise everyone knows everyone.

Except me.

Am I the newest member of this small group of Disabled artists? Surely, I'm not their token person of colour? Besides, the other members were also in a previous online workshop. A workshop which paid disabled artists for their time while online.

For three months, we met online each week. Disabled artists were paid while participating for the pilot Justice-Centred Design project by Creatives of Colour. Comprising of Bla(c)k and POC facilitators, they were understanding and empathic when I and other participants were late logging online. We are still in the middle of the global pandemic, after all.

*

However, I realise not all Zoom or online meetings are the same.

Despite the access, despite meeting among disabled artists, why do I feel I'm their token disabled person of colour?

*

The Zoom meeting happens during the rainiest and coldest May morning in more than 70 years. Coincidentally, it is also my Disabled child's first face-to-face oncology check-up since the pandemic began.

With my child in tow, I burst into the front door of our rented house, still drenched from the cold, icy rain, after our Shebah rideshare crawled in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

Dropping everything, shouting (in hangry mode) a series of instructions to other household members to cook their own dinner and my child's dinner. All this while I simultaneously plug in and turn on my laptop, camera, microphone, and headphones, and eventually click the Zoom link. I didn't realise that I was more than ten minutes late already.

I did apologise in advance while waiting for our ride share at the lobby of the Royal Children's Hospital. I even attached a photo of my Disabled child sitting, waiting at the hospital's iconic lobby. However, they have strict rules for Zoom meetings I am unaware of. I'm not in synchrony within the online committee. Am I the only one with a disabled child? Is everyone child-free in the committee of disabled artists? I send an email, this time to the organiser, apologising and explaining the series of events prior to the Zoom meeting.

*

Later, as I inhale my late dinner of hot soup and bread, I forgot to take my SSRI medication. My tongue is now loose and sharp, flippant even. I spew a sentence, one of the words triggers the Essential Worker.

Too late.

I zip my mouth shut.

Expediently, I proceed to the medicine drawer. Panic moves me to swallow three 5mg of diazepam.

Because I am also Hard-of-Hearing – who already took off the all-day-wear hearing aids – I did not hear the dead-ly, heavy footsteps. Like a stealthy ninja ready to strike, the coercive controller is right behind me. He pulls opens the top drawer directly beside my head as I crouch to place my prescription medication in the bottom drawer.

My eldest offspring sees the interchange and walks out of the dinner table, carrying their own plate into their bedroom.

‘See? Look what you made me do!’ His voice is whiplash, reminding me of a leather belt hitting my own brown skin. He literally attacked me with the title of Jess Hill’s book about power, control and domestic violence.

I lean onto the kitchen cabinet. Waiting for the medicines to work, my mobile chimes, notifying me a new email in my inbox. I receive a group email, informing everyone to be on time during Zoom meetings. Is this another form of able-splaining and mansplaining?

Truly, those who have privilege, power, and position would never know what happens behind a Zoom meeting.



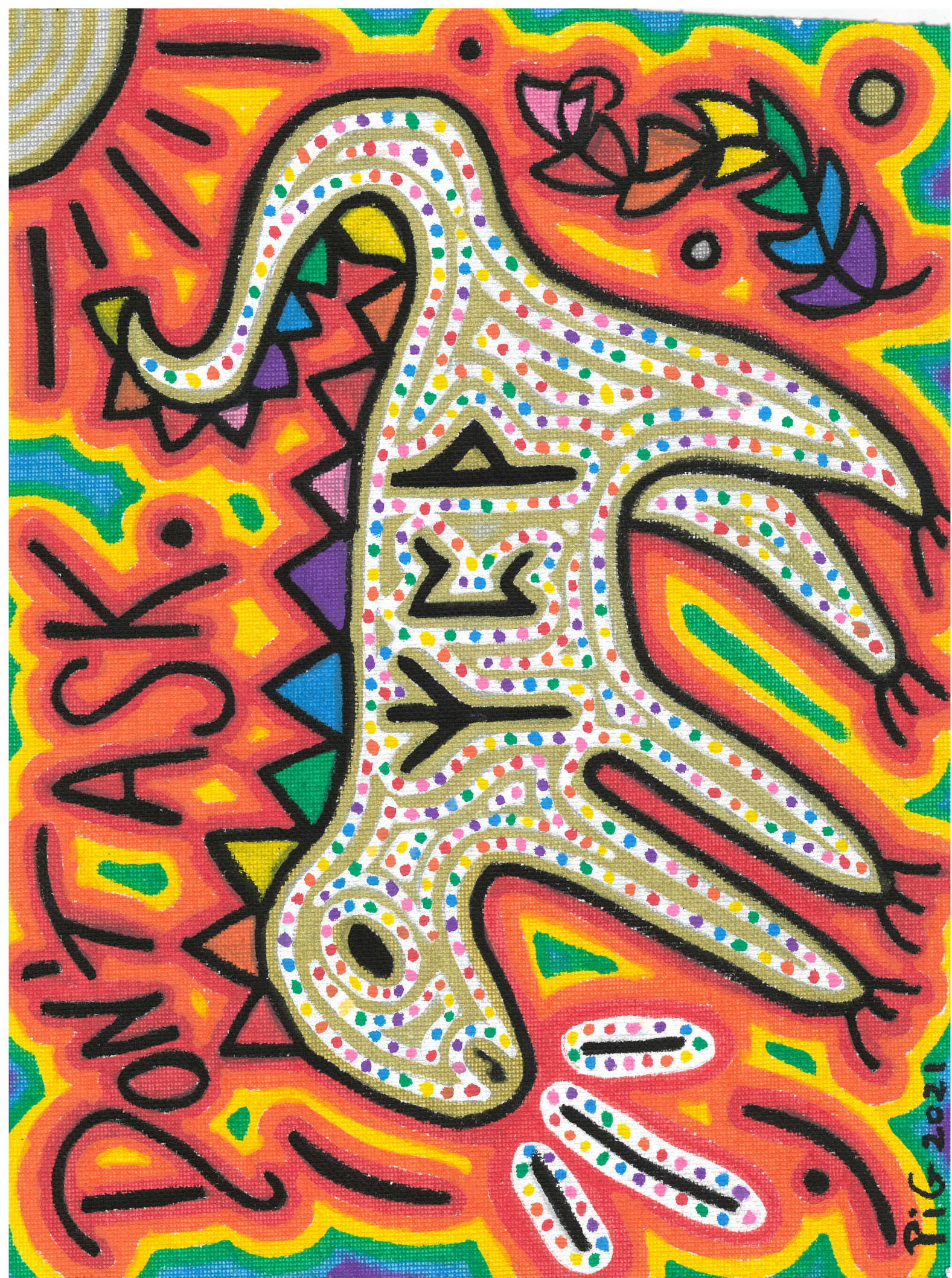
**Mababangong
Bangungot**

is by rô

0 0 4

written by ku_aba_

Made from waters from the Castillian spring
And white cloth
They gave me a star shaped eye
Count me a madman
I was chased off the bus because I followed a voice too far into the forest
I got lost
I try to smoke out the spirits inside of me whenever I can
But
One day I spoke of a dream
What was shown to me was right
My father had been cursed
Then my mother counted me blessed
With magic
Sight
Connection
Made from the skin of my ancestors
And ochre
Everyone is born on the outside
They gave me a home at the centre
Hear wherever you cast your gaze
One, two, three terracotta coffins
Under a star shaped eye
Floating down a gully
A madman once more
What was shown to me was wrong
Whichever side of the coin they call
I am never just
A person with a star shaped eye



Don't Ask

Pig Spit

in // ter generation // al

nayook

He says, ***I always hear sad things about your people***

what about the happiness, too, and I say: ***my cousins are dying -***

but they are not dying, they are dead

men

walking

and the last week, another one fell down

and I have forgotten how to mourn

I have forgotten

how it feels to let grief rest in my lap just for a while

not coiled up against my ribs

I say: ***I was born into your civilised thinkpieces where my body is just another point of your discussion -***

do you too know another woman, and another, and another whose body never belonged to her

she had to lease it back

piece by piece

I wonder if it was enough

or was it just another place for all the things we mustn't talk about

to keep safe

I say: ***it has been two hundred years -***

though it took less than thirty to silence the voices of the generations before us
more effectively than ripping the tongue from their head

while you made us watch parent and child learn how to live without each other

and now you are shocked that these are the lessons we teach our children

but then, even survival is a weapon and you know this as you take aim

Our happiness is not for you, I say, and I am sorry that you do not feel our joy

until it has been worked and shaped and painted up like a trinket that you keep in a box on a shelf

and I am tired

I am not selling what you are buying

I am not for sale

any more

and if a smile does not reach your heart

if you cannot feel us through your sadness

if you cannot feel us without your love

then you are missing out

and I am not sorry, but that. is sad



Prognosis

is by rô

WE RISE ANGRY, BE- CAUSE WE LIVE WITH THE SIGHT OF OUR DEATHS AT THE HANDS OF TOO MANY LIKE US, AND YET

nayook

I am of the Nira' Baluk, a people who lived in a place where fire and water will walk the exact same paths at different times.

I was born at the time the fires run their course. I was born into what they called a drought.

When I came back to this city ten years ago, I saw water everywhere. In the middle of *this* drought, people watered their lawns and their pathways straight from the tap and complained about having to use a minuteglass in their showers. The woman that might have been my wife leaves the tap running when she brushes her teeth, any tap over any sink in her house. I thought then that we were lucky to have such fresh, clean water. No smell. No taste. Not like tank water that flows through old, rusting pipes. Not like bore water.

Do you remember the taste of bore water? When it is ripped from the ground, piped up past the remains of centuries of living and dying and living again, you can never boil that taste out. There are filters, and filters, and filters, but these filters break. And fail. And cost more and more, clean land and clean water, a cost that eventually someone will not meet and what then? Then you drink bore water, or you die. This water keeps you sick, makes you sicker, but you drink this water or you die. Even a river that will break its banks over and over is cleaner than any underground well in a drought. Cleaner than that well when the drought ends. Do you understand?

The woman that then might have been my mother-in-law told me how she planned to catch floodwaters before they landed, catch them and clean them and bottle them and ship them

out to drier months in drier places, catch and clean and pipe and bottle and ship and *sell* this water. She called it benevolence. People are dying for want of this water, she said. So I asked her why she had to put a price on this water that people die for, and she said, we are not a charity. Well. There it is, then. People are not dying for want of water. They are dying for want of basic human decency. They are dying because we – like something shiftless and much older than we pretend to be – we are overtaken by the drive to collect and keep whatever we can lay hands on, far beyond what we could ever need. We build walls to protect our hoard, then fences to protect these walls, and we spend so much time protecting these walls that what's held inside is so long rotten.

What, then, are we protecting? This world has been built around a hierarchy where those with nothing must prove their personal right to live, while those with everything are born into the right to make these decisions that feel objective.

This cannot continue. Even if it were nobody I knew and nobody you knew whose skin cracks and bleeds, whose bones break and whose hearts fail like it is this mythical luck that has failed them instead of systematised violence, each level more sanitised until we do not recognise this as violence. We do not recognise what we do as violent any more, when people are still living and dying on the edge of our choices. Do you understand?

I am of the Nira' Baluk, a people dispossessed in 1839 by colonists with guns and god. The Nira' Baluk were remembered as a people who gave as good as we got. When they gave us guns, we shot at them. When they gave us their words, we cursed them with ours. But when they gave us their god, they took none of our responsibility.

We did not poison our waters. We did not have that choice. In that respect, we are lucky.

Do you understand?



Country Crip (2022)

Renay Barker-Mulholland

Contributor Bios

Ajar Sana joined community organising to share her lived experience and empower young people towards social change. Her advocacy stems from grassroots organising and community development and embodies feminist and intersectional frameworks in achieving gender equity and true inclusion of people with disability. Ajar passionately believes in the philosophy of “for the people, by the people” and has over eight years of advocacy and policy experience in gender-based violence, disability justice and youth issues. Ajar is a strong believer in the power of community and has served on several committees and boards focused on social policy reform—including the ACT Disability Reference Group, ACT Ministerial Council on Women, Women With Disabilities Australia Youth Advisory Group, Women With Disabilities ACT, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

CB Mako is one of the founding members of the Disabled QBIPOC Collective along with Gemma Mahadeo, Nayook, and Pauline Vetuna. Based in Naarm, cubbie is also a contributor of anthologies, ‘Growing up Disabled in Australia’, ‘Collisions: Fictions of the Future’, and ‘Resilience’. Winner of the Grace Marion Wilson Emerging Writers Competition, shortlisted in Overland’s Fair Australia Prize, and the City of Melbourne’s Lord Mayor’s Creative Writing Awards, cubbie’s writings are in Mascara Literary Review, The Suburban Review, Peril

Magazine, Kill Your Darlings, Archer Magazine, among others.

Darcy Hytt is a storyteller living on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country. Their practice navigates a space between the lived reality of colonial violence, and the dreaming of a liberation beyond the colony’s imagination. Darcy can be found on Instagram at @wetdirt2008.

Dinithi De Alwis Samarawickrama is a multi-disciplinary artist from Sri-Lanka. They identify as a queer, disabled, immigrant and settler, living and working on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Their works concern the theme of diasporic longing and loss. It is primarily centred on the acts of dreaming and prayer. Through the analysis and honouring of ancestral practices and speculative ecologies they hope to build a spiritual foundation of critical deep love and togetherness, that helps them and their loved ones move towards a post-colonial, post-capitalist world.

E.R. is a Koori disabled artist, living with physical and psychosocial disability. Their Instagram is @lavendermould.

ku_aba_ (he/they/xyr) is a 25 year old Murri, Bama and Yolgnu storyteller living in Naarm (Melbourne).

Lay Maloney is a storyteller of the Gumbaynggirr and Gunggandji Nations, and of South Sea Islander heritage.

Their mind, body, and spirit is an inherited legacy from thousands of years of cultures, and the hundreds of years of colonialism which has attempted to destroy them.

Lina Koleilat is a PhD candidate in the School of Culture History and Language at ANU. She is the editor of *demos journal*.

Mali Hermans (she/they) is a disabled and neurodivergent Koori and European woman living in Meanjin/Brisbane. Mali is an organiser, writer, community worker and socialist deeply invested in disability justice and abolitionist work.

nayook is a Nirim Baluk (Taun Wurung) storyteller.

Ness Gavanzo: A self-confessed activist since I was 17. Current Chairperson of Gabriela Australia, an organisation of women in Australia of Filipino heritage that actively promotes women and children's rights. Active in many grassroots' formations that fight for social justice, I am also a therapeutic practitioner and skilled in the areas of family & domestic violence and family services.

Pauline Vetuna: Gunantuna. Disability Justice, pro-Blackness & respecting our Mother (Earth). For the margins of the margins. She/They. slow & imagining abolition.

Pig Spit: gamilaraay/wadi wadi artist living w schizoaffective. I draw the creature I see & share their wise words.

Renay Barker-Mulholland is a self-proclaimed Blak of All Trades. She primarily lives and creates on Wadawurrung Country but Ioves to share and experience art everywhere. Renay is disabled and lives with chronic pain and fatigue. Renay's work (in all its forms) aims to defy the colonial boundaries imposed on First Nations people and women in particular, and shares her staunch intersectional feminist, abolitionist perspectives.

Rômy Pacquing McCoy is a climate crippled apparition who weaves everything that can be woven, across multiple lifeworlds on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples. They make art with the name rô. You can find them on ig at @afeverdream

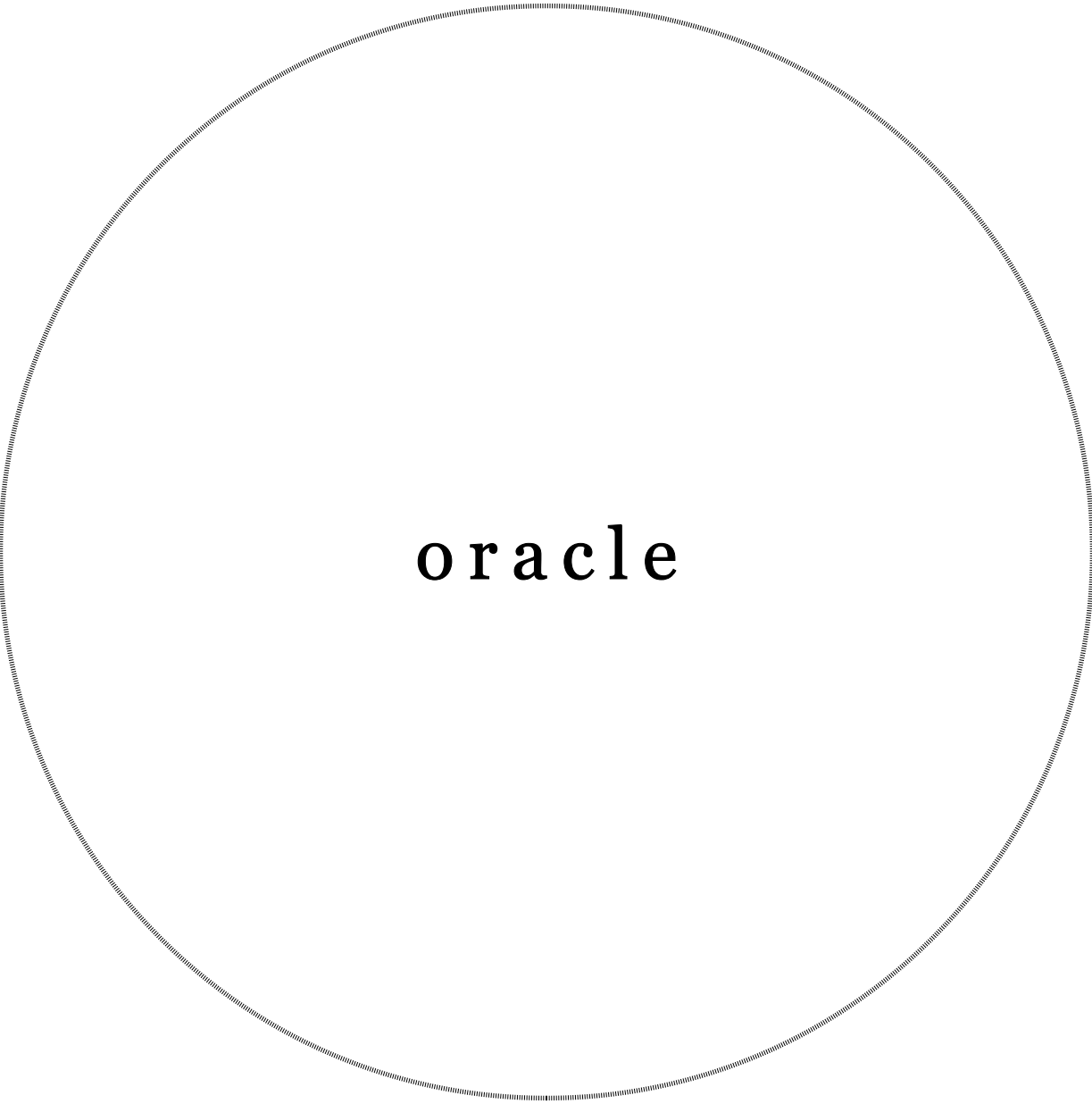
Shakira Hussein is a writer and researcher based at the National Centre for Contemporary Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne. She is also a board member of the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights.

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