

Decolonising Archives

**Caption in Red Thread: D/deaf and Disabled Narratives
in the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive
by Dr Khairani Barokka**



Decolonising Archives is a programme developed by UAL Decolonising Arts Institute in partnership with UAL Library, Archives and Special Collections. It sets out to explore institutional histories, memories and what it means to decolonise the university from within. We welcomed our first 4 researchers in residence in January 2020: **Dr Elisa Adami, Dr Khairani Barokka, Dr Mohammad Namazi** and **Dr Ana González Rueda**.

They shared their research projects in an online symposium on 2 December 2020. Each of the researchers focus on a specific collection, aspect of a collection, or particular materials within the UAL Archives and Special Collections Centre and London College of Communication library; the Central Saint Martins Museum and Study Collection and the Special Collections at Chelsea College of Arts library.

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[First image says in red text, on a white background: To follow along the whole script with image descriptions of the performance lecture, please watch the recording provided by organisers. This lecture is creative non-fiction and visuals, submitted as part of the 2020 UAL Decolonising Archives Research Residency project.]

[Bismillah. **Video animation of me in monochrome (hereafter KB in captions). I am an Indonesian woman, with glasses and hair tied back, wearing a batik top and dangly earrings, against a background of two framed pictures of watercolour, painted, fantastical animals (paintings are by Jen Tyers, 2015); in the video, my image when I speak is in graphic black, white and grey.]** *Selamat datang semuanya. Welcome, all.*

["Caption in Red Thread: D/deaf and Disabled Narratives in the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive" in a bubble of red yarn, tied to another bubble of red thread that reads "Dr Khairani Barokka". The background is red cloth.]

Caption in Red Thread: D/deaf and Disabled Narratives in the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive (ACAA).

If you are sighted, please close your eyes for just a moment. **[Image of red cloth on screen, in close up.]** Imagine the colour crimson. Inhale for four breaths. Exhale for four breaths. Open your eyes. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** Thank you.

[A 'red-thread' arrow points to the opening bracket of ["Caption in Red Thread: D/deaf and Disabled Narratives in the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art

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in Britain Archive” in black text on a white background].

The following is an entire caption for an archive, in red thread.¹ In Indonesian, *benang merah*, **[Red cursive ‘thread’ spelling “benang merah” as one connected word, against a white background.]** or red thread, refers to a connective fibre to be followed, a sowing of clues. **[Frame shows illustration of a red thread, spelling out the cursive-and-connected words “benang merah”, above ten grey folders at the top of a shelf, with a white background behind the cursive.]** And so I invite you to follow this hum with me, a thrum **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** that was always here. For we, disabled communities, and D/deaf ones, especially as forcibly framed within colonialities, have always been here.

“Here” means specifically **[Image of ten grey folders on a top shelf, with the roof on the upper half of the screen.]** the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archives, a set of documents in ten folders. They are located in a single room, **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** in a building on the Chelsea College of Arts campus at University of the Arts London (UAL), United Kingdom (UK). Gaining access to this room requires accessible transport to reach that campus. It requires the legal right to be in the UK and the financial means of doing so. It requires a significant amount of walking on the campus to reach this room, particularly for people like us for whom distance is a risk, a red thread leading to potential bodymind crisis. To reach these archives requires knowledge of, as can be typical, **[Previous image of grey folders, with “benang merah” painted across screen in cursive red and white, as two interlinked words.]** maze-like access routes. It requires permission to access this locked room and potential assistance with bringing down these ten folders from the highest shelf, which (before the pandemic) was kindly provided for me by librarian Gustavo Montero. Further **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**, accessing these materials requires sightedness.

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From Gustavo, I have been able to learn that this archive is “[p]robably the first of its kind in a public institution” in the UK **[Against a white background, the words “The African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive” are written in black, with red painted typography overlaying the words “African-Caribbean”, “Asian”, “African”, “Art”, “Britain” and “Archive”.]**. Contents range from exhibition catalogues to advertisements for shows and community events, to exhibition review clippings. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** In the mid-90s, UAL began the process of no longer separating black artists (which is ‘black’ as in ‘politically black’, with a lower-case ‘b’, so this includes all those **[A folder entitled “Black Artists” [in white lettering on a black background] and “White Institutions” [in black lettering on a white background], ringed in red paint, with red thread criss-crossing a white background]**, classified as “BAME”) from the main archives of artists at UAL. This process was in response to (as Gustavo Montero says),

changes in the art system **[Against a white background, the words “The African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive” are written in black, with red painted typography overlaying the words “African-Caribbean”, “Asian”, “African”, “Art”, “Britain”, and “Archive”. This time, below it is written in red text, “Archive begun 1985, ‘closed’ [as in, new entries to the archives by African, and Asian, and Afro-Caribbean artists were no longer separated from the main archive of white artists, according to Gustavo Grandal Montero] 2007. Earliest material is from 1970.”]** (including art publishing) and [finished] in 2007 with a formal “closure” of the ACAA archive.

[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] In this caption, we remember to critically interrogate, in underlying, red thread hum, **[Against a white background, the words “The African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive” are written in black, with red painted typography overlaying the words “African-Caribbean”, “Asian”,**

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“**African**”, “**Art**”, “**Britain**”, and “**Archive**”.] what is meant by [**Words bolded in red handwriting show up, one after another, against a white background, adding on to each other until the final image shows “African-Caribbean Asian African Art Britain Archive”.**] “African-Caribbean”, “Asian”, by “African”, by “Art”, by “Britain”, and by “Archive”. [**Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.**] The creation of this archive was an exercise in taxonomy. It used public knowledge of each artist’s self-identification, artists’ birthplaces. These taxonomical practices are enmeshed in a politic that also declares who is thought of as disabled, and how. In a politic that determines what is art, and why, and where it is to be archived. (Note that designers’ archives, for instance, are housed [**Words bolded in red handwriting against a white background: “African-Caribbean Asian African Art Britain Archive”.**] elsewhere at UAL, and the separation between art and design is itself colonial taxonomy.)

This presentation is part of a [**Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.**] nine-year-long research process of mine, that reverses colonial, capitalist, ableist logics with regards to art, specifically: that portrayals of human beings, by human beings, are assumed to be of, and/or by, people who fall under the very specific colonial, capitalist rubric of “abled” bodyminds. I prefer to use the term “non-disabled” here instead of “abled”, as the answer to “Able to do what?” finds itself in the sentence “To perform the tasks of colonial, capitalist subjects.” [**Red cursive ‘thread’ spelling “benang merah” as one connected word, against a white background.**] Therefore, we hold no truck with abusive tenets such as [**Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.**] a supposedly universal hierarchy of ‘ability’ to frame all humans within. And, in line with disability justice principles, I say “disabled” rather than “person with disability”. “Disability justice” is a term in English coined by Sins Invalid (Berne et al, 2018), a queer crips of colour collective in North America, though I personally interpret the world as containing vastly multiple, and certainly pre-colonial, disability justice models.

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Decolonising disability studies is of paramount importance.² Whilst colonial visual cultures have trained us to assume images of humans are ‘abled’ until proven otherwise, as explicated in my prior practice research (Barokka 2018, Barokka 2020), **[Image of red cloth on screen, moving further into close up.]**³ I assume human images are of potentially disabled and/or neurodivergent **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** and/or chronically ill and/or D/deaf people, before I assume they are ‘normative’ according to colonial capitalism.

In my case, as a disabled researcher, keep in mind that, despite everything society tells me and inflicts, it is not that my kind of soulbody—my preferred term for self instead of bodymind, drawing from the Indonesian phrase “*jiwa raga*”—should change, but that this kind of soulbody has not been deemed worthy of structural care instead of structural **[Closer-up frame of illustration of red thread, spelling out the cursive-and-connected words “benang merah”, above ten grey folders at the top of a shelf, with a white background behind the cursive.]** violence. Structural violence that is tied to the eugenicist logic **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** that all those not deemed ‘abled’ need to be wiped out. And indeed, in this COVID-19 pandemic, two-thirds of those who have died in the UK so far have been disabled (Webster, 2020).⁴ These logics of cruelty are working. Their reversal is urgent.

And so no wonder that these archives have not often **[Panning upwards closer-up frame of illustration of red thread, spelling out the cursive-and-connected words “benang merah”, above ten grey folders at the top of a shelf, with a white background behind the cursive.]** previously been interpreted as bursting with D/deaf and disabled possibilities, red threads—because so many among us do not declare disability, this potential othering, **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** out of the need for survival in the face of eugenicism.

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That ‘disability’ is shaped by societal forces is called “the social model” in the UK—but, today, I am inviting you to go even deeper. To decolonial disability justice frameworks, such as those that recognise how we Javanese have had disabled gods, but that all understandings of disability as holy were virtually wiped out by colonial Western medicine (Thohari 2013).⁵ And, further still, to anti-colonial disability justice frameworks, which recognise that Javanese culture is a coloniser of other cultures within Indonesia. **[Red cursive ‘thread’ spelling “benang merah” as one connected word, against a white background.]** Benang merah. Red thread. The experience denoted as **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** “disability” I feel when at level ten out of ten pain is not what disability means to me when life is more livable at lower thresholds of pain; we *must* understand disability as many spectrums of experience and existence (Barokka 2020).⁶ Disability justice studies requires an understanding of nuance and fluidity, as does decolonising archives through a disability justice lens.

[A ‘red-thread’ arrow points to the opening bracket of “Caption in Red Thread: D/deaf and Disabled Narratives in the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive” in black text on a white background.] Caption as beginning, caption as a questioning. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**

This is an archive where absence is presence. And presence is absence. (Red thread indicating both.) This archive is the presence of the artists in this archive as in varying modalities of community with absent people racialised as ‘other’ who nation states work hard to break and, for instance, in refugee Mercy Baguma’s death in August next to her infant child, are starved by poverty enforced by the Home Office. This is an archive in varying modalities of community with D/deaf and/or disabled migrant artists who, like myself, are not given access to public funds, and must work themselves through pain and the crunching of the head imploding from all the

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needless potential-death scenarios, from all the unbearable moments, even for those of us who have survived repeatedly what others deem unbearable, simply because our bodyminds' nationalities were not deemed worthy of protection from violence. This is, above all, an archive of living with imperial violence, that screams in other languages than non-disabled ones, yet is deemed negligible to border controls, to the imperial forces that murder and maim in Yemen, for instance, on UK taxpayers' dimes supporting **[Image of red cloth on screen, moving further into close up.]** distributed manufacturing that circumvents arms sales bans. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**

What is in these archives is in varying modalities of community with those subjected to structural adjustment programs (SAPs) by Bretton Woods institutions (Peet 2009), that structurally gut and impoverish communal healthcare systems, that extract medicines from rainforests to be made into corporate intellectual property (IP).⁷ Among those whose lives were ended were innumerable artists whose work could not be archived here, could not make it here, who may well have not wanted to step foot here.

A pertinent quote by Julie Sadler, from her contribution to the book "Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities":

The surge of birth anomalies in Iraq is not the natural consequence of Third World **[Red cursive 'thread' spelling "benang merah" as one connected word, against a white background.]** poverty and instability; it is not an incomprehensible horror that has **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** grown out of the essential character of the country. Rather it is the production of a colonial set of policies and actions that began with economic sanctions and has continued through invasion and into reconstruction. Iraq has been reordered as a necropolitical colonial state, with US and

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coalition interests first producing disability and then dictating who may have access to resources and who is excluded. War contaminants, animated by imperialism and racism, act upon the bodies of Iraqis to produce disabled toxic subjectivities and bodies. These bodies are then evaluated based on the colonial bio-necropolitical scheme that finds them wanting, and then further excluded from resources and from meaningful humanness as being too close to death. (Sadler 2017, p. 353).
evaluated based on the colonial bio-necropolitical scheme that finds them wanting, and then further excluded from resources and from meaningful humanness as being too close to death. (Sadler 2017, p. 353)⁸.

[An image of the Sadler quote in black text on a white background, with red markings replacing the words “birth anomalies”, “Iraq”, “country”, and “Iraqis” where they appear, as well as putting “Third World” in quotation marks, underlining words from “disability and then dictating who may have access to resources”. “War contaminants” is also underlined.]

‘The surge of [red yarn] in [red thread] is not the natural consequence of [red thread] poverty and instability; it is not an incomprehensible horror that has grown out of the essential character of [red thread]. Rather it is the production of a colonial set of policies and actions that began with economic sanctions and has continued through invasion and into reconstruction. [Red thread] has been reordered as a necropolitical colonial state, with US and coalition interests first producing disability and then dictating who may have access to resources and who is excluded. War contaminants, animated by imperialism and racism, act upon the bodies of [red thread] to produce disabled toxic subjectivities and bodies. These bodies are then evaluated based on the colonial bio-necropolitical scheme that finds them wanting, and then further excluded from resources and from meaningful humanness as being too close to death.’

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[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] US-based women of colour activists Mia Mingus and Alice Wong have a project called Access is Love, which “aims to help build a world where accessibility is understood as an act of love” (Wong 2019).⁹ Not enough people understand the opposite corollary: inaccessibility, and ableism, *are outgrowths and key facets of white supremacy—they are violence.*

I speak today as a survivor of state traumatising as a child, through the policies of a dictator installed by Western forces, including with UK support, the UK also having once ruled over what is now Indonesia for several years in the British Interregnum period. My generation, and other generations over thirty years of Soeharto’s New Order **[Red handwriting against a white background of “African-Caribbean”, “Asian”, “African”.]** capitalist dictatorship (in which Javanese colonialism was bolstered by Western colonialism), were specifically traumatised **[The words “Art” and “Britain” handwritten in red on a white background are added to the previous image.]** with the arts, with hyperviolent and hypermisogynist visual imagery and myth formation. We lived **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** and inherited a legacy of artistic suppression in order to survive, of understanding some art forms as ‘safe’ and others as a threat to self and community, as R Diyah Larasati notes in *The Dance That Makes You Vanish*, 2013, and thus to be abandoned **[Panning upwards closer-up frame of an illustration of red thread, against a white background, with the previously-written words “African-Caribbean”, “Asian”, “African”, “Art”, “Britain” and “Archive”.]** or hidden.

That my generation creates art that goes against how we were traumatised **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** is sublime to me. And because I was traumatised with the arts, perhaps that was the first instance of my soulbody becoming more explicitly non-normative. The UK

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contributed to further disablement of my soulbody, with this and with the siphoning of resources for healthcare from Indonesia, and with the destruction of rainforests by UK companies **[Image of red cloth in close-up.]** claiming to be ‘sustainable’ where many medicines to alleviate suffering were **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** and are found, taken and continue to be taken with corporate and state land grabs.

[Red cursive ‘thread’ spelling “benang merah” as one connected word, against a white background.]

To be here before you today required a jumping of many bureaucratic hoops, **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** and much needless physical and emotional suffering in doing so, through lack of access and care. I say all this to help you understand that such are the soulbody costs borne by people who would like to decolonise archives in a colonising other country.

Throughout the past year of this project, I have gone through a process that recognises language going further in resonance than the English word “cripping”, taken from D/deaf and disabled reclamation of the insult “crip” (McRuer 2006).¹⁰ What recognising D/deaf and disabled histories here feels like is more akin to “homing”. Towards a homeness of sensation in the soulbody. In the same way that I translated the Indonesian term “jiwa raga” into the word “soulbody” and began to use it when “bodymind” did not seem to fit quite right. Perhaps the Indonesian would be “*memulangi*”. Or “*menuju pulang*” – going towards home.

There are processes, have been processes, will be processes, process-ing themselves beyond colonial, linear time, that, apart from now being in the English language, are not intended for everyone’s consumption. That occur on a molecular level, on a community level that resists poaching by outsiders’ need for precious, granular, fragile emotive-intellectual exercises as, ultimately, commodities.

[Closer-up frame of illustration of red thread, spelling out the cursive-and-connected words “benang merah”, above ten grey folders at the top of a shelf, with a white background behind the cursive.]

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When perceiving these archives:

What counts as violence? What counts as disablement?

What counts as illness?

What is recognised as these things, and by whom?

Which disability models are used to interpret these things? There are practically innumerable disability models, including the ones I subscribe to the most, indigenous disability models.

In the words of indigenous academic Zoe Todd (2020)

[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.],

“Indigenous is neither wholly a racial category or wholly an onto-epistemological one. It refracts them both and represents easily thousands of different cosmologies from around earth.”¹¹

Violence does not only occur to the bodymind in ways that are measurable in terms of suffering in a way that ‘modern medicine’, or Western medicine, even Western psychology, can comprehend. Violence occurs in terms of imposing unfit disability models onto our *soulbodies/bodyminds* **[Image of red cloth in close-up, panning closer in.]** (here I recognize that there may well be those who, being non-spiritual or **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** non-religious, prefer the self-description of “bodymind” over “soulbody”).

When we say “inaccessible”, what is made inaccessible in colonial archives, which UAL Archives inevitably are?

And how?

And inaccessible to whom?

Why are these archives here, and not elsewhere?

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There are D/deaf and/or disabled (again, using Western, English categories) people, artists, especially those of what I like to call the majority world, in:

the artists in the archive

the curators whose work is here

the media workers who covered their work

literally every person who contributed to making the artwork in these archives, including bus drivers, cab drivers, kiosk owners, café chefs, et al, who contributed to these art workers' days, their familial, collegial and kin networks, as, after all, we exist in the 'communal' (and when I say "majority world", I mean everyone who is not regarded in Western countries as the majority).

the archivists and librarians

the university administrators

other university staff and faculty who have used or seen or contributed to these archives

UAL students and other audiences

And there have always been D/deaf and/or disabled artists, including activist artists, who are not in these archives but should be, whose work perhaps was not critically regarded because of the bodymind or soulbody creating it, because of this very identification with such categories.

What kind of art we create to further our survival is entirely caught up in histories of violence that penalise those bodyminds thought of as 'non-normative'.

[White background. In black handwriting] "What policies—by municipality, or nation state, or university, or one's own family—prevent people from disclosing D/deafness and/or disability, in a world where [in

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red handwriting] colonial, capitalist ableism requires subterfuge for survival? Subterfuge that may threaten our lives [in black handwriting]—for instance, by not making ourselves available to care—as much as preserve them. [This last period is connected to the question mark at the end of “survival” with an abstract tangle of red thread on the right hand side of the page.]

And there is the relationship of diaspora to places more firmly under “imperial duress” (to quote Ann Laura Stoler; Stoler 2016), which is to say, all places.¹²

The archives are a burial site for the not-gone, still-here, never-dead. Perhaps better said: a resting place that thrums with the desire and possibility to go in disability justice directions. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**

What is the thrum of connection—red thread—between sheets of paper separated by plastic, **[Back to previous red and black illustration.]** the molecular forms of resistance to classification perhaps present in a **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** near-imperceptible hum?

Between the usage in the shampoos, soaps, laundry detergents, pot noodles of the artists, curators, gallerists, attendees documented, of palm oil **[Red cursive ‘thread’ spelling “benang merah” as one connected word, against a white background.]** taken, violent land grabs upon Indonesian rainforests to make way for plantation **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** trees?

A hum calling for reclamation, that can only be accessed by ancestral work. By an explosion of time’s linearities. Our forebears’ work existing in our felt body, in the futures of those who will not know our names, even if they will

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share our contribution to hum, feel our hum within, that may well express or have expressed joy through bodyminds in gestures and languages that the non-disabled may not understand as genius, may mark as “primitive” or “brute” or “grotesque”.

[Red text on a white background of the following paragraph, in the lower part of the image.]

La Marr Jurelle Bruce writes:

Europeans repeatedly consolidated their identities as free and reasonable by casting the black-cum-mad as antithetical embodiment of *unfreedom* and *unreason*. Thus, any critical investigation of madness and modernity must confront the matters of blackness and anti-blackness in the foundation of modern Reason. (I distinguish “reason” from “Reason.” [with a capital “R”])’ (Bruce 2017, p. 304)¹³ **[Followed by an image in the lower part of the frame, where the words “Europeans”, “free”, “reasonable”, “black-cum-mad”, “unfreedom” and “unreason”, “madness”, “modernity”, “blackness”, “anti-blackness”, “reason” and “Reason” are handwritten in red in their previous positions in the quote, and connected by thread.]**

In Bruce’s “How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity”, 2020, the genius of Black artistry from Kendrick Lamar to Ntozake Shange is theorised with “mad methodology”, framed within multiple, interlocking societal layers of what “madness” means, and how creativity exists as resistance to white notions of psychic normality.¹⁴

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In Sami Schalk’s *Bodyminds Reimagined*, 2018, she uses analyses of Black feminist speculative fiction to discuss the relationship between conceptions of ‘disability’ and ‘ability’ as framed by the historical violence of white supremacy.¹⁵

In Theri Pickens’ beautifully structured “Black Madness :: Mad Blackness”, 2019 — “Dear reader, you may have to learn to think madly. Blackly. [...] I am profoundly guided by a mistrust in [Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] linearity” (p. xi), the following is written, which is sewn through all three of these recent works:¹⁶

To think through the relationship between race and disability requires answering several questions: How might we read race and disability outside of the confines of the scripts heretofore provided? In what ways do we need to shift or challenge existing analytical paradigms? **[Back to previous image of red text and thread on a white background.]** To what aesthetic practices and thinkers do we need to turn to expand our imaginations vis-à-vis these two discourses and material realities? **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** What sacred cows or shibboleths do we need to leave behind methodologically, theoretically, aesthetically? (p. 3)¹⁷

As someone from what is now known as Southeast Asia, I appreciate this call to slaughter sacred cows, and urge us to count among them Euro- and US-centric notions of race in relation to disability as applicable to all—the nation state I am a citizen of has over six hundred indigenous languages and cultures, and our configurations of power, race and ethnicity are deeply **[Closing up on image of “African-Caribbean”, “Asian” and “African” in red handwriting on a white background.]** complex and historically rooted. In analysing work by artists of “African-Caribbean, Asian and African descent”, identity needs to be understood beyond homogenising categories made to fit US and UK censuses, and Western simplifications of complex interrelationships.

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**[In red handwriting, words bordered above and below
by red thread-and-abstract-patterns border:**

What Is A Normative Colonial Subject

Breathe in the presence / of entanglement of policies / of sanctioned violence.]

What Is A Normative Colonial Subject

Breathe **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**
in the presence / of entanglement of policies / of sanctioned
violence.

The body is an archive. Molecular imprint of all the forces met
moment to **[Back to red and white image just prior, this
time moving closer inwards on text.]** moment.

How is it that we have all imbibed this filter, this one filter of
“normative bodymind/soulbody under colonial capitalism until
proven otherwise to those imposing this filter forcibly?”

Are you imposing this filter **[Back to monochrome video-
animation of KB.]** on these archives?

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Here, I call upon Marisa Fuentes' important work on reading archives "against the bias grain", 2016, and doing so with anti-colonial disability justice lenses, as integral to this exercise.

We embark on questioning in red thread, with regards to D/deaf and disabled histories from this archive, which spring from all of its artefacts—a tiny sampling of which I present here:

- **[Photo of photocopy of advertisement for “The Foot Finders (Paintings by Prisoners)” exhibition, at Nelson Mandela Gallery, 1984. It is ringed with drawn, red thread and displayed on a pedestal of red threads.]** Advertisement for “The Foot Finders (Paintings by Prisoners)” exhibition, at Nelson Mandela Gallery, 1984. Red thread binds around how the artwork of incarcerated people framed here are framed here, the thread attempts to loosen bars. And how are they framed here, in more ways than one, in light of the high incidence of health crises, **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** lack of care, ableist violence within prison communities? And also, in light of a **[Back to previous image]** school-to-prison pipeline that means disabled children of colour in Western communities—and, from personal, anecdotal observation, disabled children in general **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** in ‘the Global South’—are more likely to be incarcerated (Annamma 2017, Hill 2017)?¹⁸
- **[Photo of orange poster for “The Atrocity Exhibition & Other Empire Stories; An Exhibition of Work by Donald G Rodney of The BLK ART Group; July 12–Aug 2, 1986”. The red thread blooms and diffuses on its right side.]** Photo of poster for “The Atrocity Exhibition & Other Empire Stories; An Exhibition of Work by Donald G Rodney of The BLK ART Group; July 12–Aug 2, 1986”. The red thread blooms and diffuses on its right side. What was the MoD doing at the time, and what are the distances created by its policies between ‘normative British subjects’ and those who bear the brunt of imperial violence? In Jasbir Puar’s “The Right to

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Maim”, 2017, accessibility in Western countries is laid **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** bare as financed by the very maiming and disabling of people by these countries’ foreign policy, **[Back to image just prior.]** in places like Palestine, in places like Indonesia.

- **[Photo of photocopy of press release for “AIDS (and No Body Wants To Know)”, by Diana Constance, for The People’s Gallery, 1988. Red thread abstract background is drawn, as well as the words “Aids (And No Body Wants To Know Council Mobil Oil Diamond”).]** How are images by and for people living with HIV/AIDS divorced or contextualised within anti-colonial disability justice movements? How is artists’ work being in the collections of companies like Mobil Oil and Diamond Trading Company, as Constance’s has, intertwined with their practices of extractive violence?
- **[Photocopy of an advertisement for The People’s Gallery 1985 exhibition of ANC Private Collection, at Nelson Mandela Studio. It contains a ‘Whites Only’ sign. It peeks from behind an abstract curtain of red thread.]** The violence of apartheid as producing disabled bodies, as coming with its own subjectivities of disability as intertwined with brutal taxonomies of race.

[Picture of a cropped photo to show review entitled “Body Politic”, in response to the exhibition “Mirage”; red background with red thread, and red rectangular abstract forms overlay the article. The mouth of a photo of a brown person with naked breasts is covered with one of these red rectangles.] How do we as disabled people of indigenous genders and sexualities, of the majority world, police our bodies, as inherited disciplinary, punitive systems from colonial capitalism? Ann Laura Stoler’s “Race and the Education of Desire” shows how, in what is now Indonesia, colonial racial taxonomy demarcated sexual activity, what was considered allowable.

Who was allowed ownership of her own body’s ways and desires, and who was not.

[Picture of a cropped photo of a photocopy of a Press

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Release for “Art Can Damage Your Health” exhibition, behind abstract tangle of red thread, against a white background. The show title is underlined in red.] What are the conceptual frameworks of ‘damage’ here, in this exhibition title, “Art Can Damage Your Health?” What is the ‘art’ referred to here, what is ‘health’?

And the list goes on.

As Tuck and Yang say, “Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. [...] The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or ‘settler moves to innocence’, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (2012).¹⁹

I use the red thread as a means of grounding, **[Closer-up frame of illustration of red thread, spelling out the cursive-and-connected words “benang merah”, above ten grey folders at the top of a shelf, with a white background behind the cursive.]** of understanding materialities of anti-coloniality, in dialogue with each other, within and outside of official bounds of the African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain (ACAA) archives—as materials that are ensconced in, created under, layers of **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** complicity with ableist, colonial, capitalism. **[In red handwriting, words bordered above and below by red thread-and-abstract-patterns border:**

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What Is A Normative Colonial Subject

Breathe in the presence / of entanglement of policies / of sanctioned violence.]

The unspooling of this red thread is done in the hope that the naming of these complicities, **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** which we are all enmeshed with, bolsters the naming and strengthening of resistances, which can be used in a push towards restitution, repatriation of land and life, and reparations.

This has everything to do with what Yoshi Fajar Kresno Murti calls, in the book “Arsipelago: Kerja Arsip & Pengarsipan Seni Budaya di Indonesia” **[“Arsipelago: Archival Work & Archiving Art & Culture In Indonesia”]** a “politic of claim” and “a politic of access” with regards to archives (Wardani and Murti, eds., 2014, p. vi).²⁰ **[Photocopy in black and white of an image of a dark-skinned man sitting wearing Western clothes, playing an instrument, alongside light-skinned, Asian musicians in traditional dress. Red thread connects them at their feet, and around the small table between them.]** Simply put, who gets to claim archives, art and culture? And who gets to access it? A quote from Yoshi:

Documentation on the birth of **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** ‘Indonesia’ as a nation state and the archives of past ‘Indonesianness’ are formed, reproduced, and preserved by the moment of colonialism. [...] Documentation and documenting are not seen [by the **[Red handwriting against a white background of ‘African-Caribbean’, ‘Asian’, ‘African Art’, ‘Britain’]** state] as fundamental cultural work in the context of citizenship’s **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** ‘development’, let alone perceived as a liberatory project (ibid., p. vii-viii; my translation).²¹

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In other words, when we decolonise archives, it is important to separate the bureaucratic imperatives of nation states from communal, liberatory politic, an impulse that the many examples of community archiving in **[Picture of a cropped photo to show review entitled “Body Politic”, in response to the exhibition “Mirage”; red background with red thread, and red rectangular abstract forms overlay the article. The mouth of a photo of a brown person with naked breasts is covered with one of these red rectangles.]** “*Arsipelago*” demonstrate.

It is understood from the beginning that the work of archiving arts and culture in [*Arsipelago*] is not merely a technical, bureaucratic, economic or political matter, but cultural work with a long breathing span. We do not see archives and archiving as mere products, or merely a matter of collecting, storing and preserving arts and cultural texts, but also as a breathing energy that lives and enlivens the work of individuals, communities and citizens(hip) (ibid., xi; my translation).²²

[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]

Red thread here, throughout, is my interpretation of this breathing energy, one that exhales the importance of anti-colonial, disability justice work.

Despite the diminishment disability studies receives in academia, in my personal observation, as a ‘marginal’ or ‘niche’ category of inquiry, it must be understood that anti-colonial disability studies is about violence and the vulnerability of people to violence—physically, emotionally, holistically. In other words, anti-colonial disability studies, particularly as applied to archives, is of fundamental importance to decolonisation, if not an an ontology of decolonisation itself. Access—to spaces, to care—is about dismantling overarching structures that segregate **[Moving**

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to become larger, in centre of frame: photocopy of an advertisement for The People’s Gallery 1985 exhibition of ANC Private Collection, at Nelson Mandela Studio. It contains a ‘Whites Only’ sign. It peeks from behind an abstract curtain of red thread.] bodyminds, and has to be baked into the fabric of anti-colonial action, and, crucially, disability-led and grounded **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** in an understanding of pluriversity and thus many multiple archival interpretations. The pluriverse being a concept that arose from indigenous Zapatista movement work, all of us inhabiting a world with plural understandings of that world, plural cosmologies (Kothari, et al, eds, 2019).²³

Speaking to this plurality, Julietta Singh writes, in “No Archive Will Restore You”,

How we think about ourselves as material and emotional beings turns out to be a style of thought, one that emerges from a specific place (Europe) at a specific time (modernity). [...] A monumental worldview swept in and tried—with brute force, with discipline, with pedagogy—to make us each one self. But there is a prolific past that tells a different story of the body as an infinite collection of **[A folder entitled ‘Black Artists [in white lettering on a black background] and ‘White Institutions’ [in black lettering on a white background], ringed in red paint, with red thread criss-crossing a white background.]** bodyings. And the grand historical force of producing the singular self has made these pasts difficult to gather, difficult to archive. (2018, p. 31-32)²⁴

[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] However, I take issue here with Singh describing pluralities as past, rather than very much present as well, with many thousands of (endangered) indigeneities. Further, what Singh describes as a difficulty of archiving is, I believe, a beautiful potentiality of subterfuge, a simmering-underneath of ‘abled’ **[The words**

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“Europeans”, “free”, “reasonable”, “black-cum-mad”, “unfreedom” and “unreason”, “madness”, “modernity”, “blackness”, “anti-blackness”, “reason” and “Reason” are handwritten in red in the lower part of the frame, in their previous positions in the aforementioned Bruce quote, and connected by thread.] understandings of art and archives. Right there before us—for those of us attempting, reaching towards—an attunement of frameworks **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** for archives rooted in anti-colonial disability justice. A ‘difficulty to archive’ might actually be commensurate with an ableist, **[The words ‘process’ and ‘joy’ painted in red cursive, connected as one red thread, against pink and a white background.]** ocularcentric view that is not attuned to different registers of perception, the aforementioned hum in red thread of anti-colonial, disability justice readings of the materialities before us. Indeed, of the materialities *within us*. The pluriverse, which includes ancestral bonds that transcend space-time, archiving and archival spiritualities, ontologies, epistemologies. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**

The African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive should be made available as material for a repudiation of, not an extension into, various futures of persistent colonialism. **[“African-Caribbean”, “Asian” and “African Art” in red handwriting against a white background.]** This is an archive of the art of people who have been, through political and economic violence, displaced from their homes, and/or their families. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]**

This is an archive of distance and proximity. This is an archive of privacy imploded and “algorithms of oppression” (Noble 2018).²⁵ And all of these interact in flux with all of our bodyminds that are so fluid in their lives’ journeys.

This is an archive of, as Sara Ahmed’s **[The words**

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“Europeans”, “free”, “reasonable”, “black-cum-mad”, “unfreedom” and “unreason”, “madness”, “modernity”, “blackness”, “anti-blackness”, “reason” and “Reason” are handwritten in red in lower part of frame, in their previous positions in the aforementioned Bruce quote, and connected by thread.] The Cultural Politics of Emotion, 2013, declares, the ways we are pushed to feel or not feel [Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] empathy about different artefacts, different archives and archived people’s works. [Red cursive ‘thread’ spelling “benang merah” as one connected word, against a white background.] It is about disability in relation to queerness as the possibility of futurities José Esteban Muñoz (2009) declared it to be, in an era where it is still so new in many colonised societies’ history that homosexuality is not deemed, as colonisers instilled it to be, a psychiatric aberrance that must be wiped out.²⁶ In [Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] other words, queerness as a disability according to eugenicist models.

This is an archive in dialogue with our acceleration toward extinction of languages and cultures. This is an archive in dialogue with our acceleration towards extinction of languages and cultures, the slow pull towards extinction of traditional arts and practices that are meant to be interwoven in communal life as a source of [Frame shows illustration of a red thread, spelling out the cursive-and-connected words “benang merah”, above ten grey folders at the top of a shelf, with a white background behind the cursive.] spiritual strength. Including D/deaf and/or disabled languages, D/deaf and/or disabled art forms, ways of feeling, of being—crucially, of surviving. This is an archive [Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.] of the imperceptible-to-some persistence of indigenous textual cultures (Ballantyne, Paterson, and Wanhalla (eds.), 2020), and a history and present of their diminishment or uplifting.²⁷ Internal, inherited, ancestral, materialities. This is an archive of colonialism as brute force, and of a circumscription of millions under UK-backed dictatorships.

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This is an archive of prevention and push, interwoven with legacies that prevent communal archiving practices **[Image of red cloth, moving in a close-up.], specifically D/deaf-and/or disability-led archival practices in the [Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** majority world. The grace of the red thread is for us to continue reclamation of D/deaf and/or disabled histories from the majority world, regardless of whether or not colonial institutions acknowledge them.

I will see you beyond the nation state as colonial invention, with in-built logics of disciplining disability, of violently reproducing it. **[Image of ten grey folders on a top shelf, with the roof on the upper half of the screen.]** I will see you beyond the physical confines of an archive as architectural blueprint of a room — **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** I will see you as the red thread of connections between this room and everything outside of it. Everything that is also within it—presence is absence. Absence is presence.

This text is written as a beginning: **[The words “process” and “joy” painted in red cursive, connected as one red thread, against a pink and white background.]** Against the simplistic ways in which even the “social model” of disability (Shakespeare 2006) is not granular enough, specific enough, in the ways in which it treats decolonial, anti-colonial models—against Western-centric, Eurocentric **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** understandings of disability that erase pre-existing communal models in which disability was, can still be, exalted.²⁸

These are D/deaf and disabled archives—archives of potentiality, of rich reclamation, waiting—whether or not they are ever acknowledged in what counts as the official.

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But these journeys of reclamation may deliberately not be made available or apparent to you, if you live outside certain communities. Communities who have the right of refusal to be translated, to be studied, to be spoken aloud. To be defined according to what Intan Paramaditha (2019) calls Western “narratives of discovery” of atrocity and violence.²⁹

This is an archive of cruelty. And an archive of the supposedly impossible: survival. It is an archive of D/deaf and disabled histories—as all archives are, all—that has not been recognised as such. There is a politic of claim here. There is a politic of access. The spiritualities of survival, of D/deaf and/or disabled survival here, do not depend upon others’ perception that they exist—in fact, these modalities of survival may depend upon going undercover.

I speak to you as a disabled artist whose soulbody has navigated, circumvented and continues to maneuver through, the violences that colonial, capitalist ableism has wrought upon a person and her communities. The majority world has often had to hide suffering in a world not bent towards care. And has also had to hide glorious, pluriversal (Kothari et al (eds.) 2019) celebrations of being what colonial frameworks for art cannot bring themselves to respect.³⁰

This is ours. There are secrets here, dialogic, soulbody-spiritual dynamics here, reaching out to pluriverse diasporas of ancestral resistance, **[Photocopy in black and white of an image of a dark-skinned man sitting wearing Western clothes, playing an instrument, alongside light-skinned, Asian musicians in traditional dress. Red thread connects them at their feet, and around the small table between them.]** nurturings on a molecular level, that you may not be privy to, that you may not have the right to. Soulbody-mindbody solidarities, pluriversal disability justices. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB for just a second.] [The words “process” and “joy” painted in red cursive, connected as one red thread, against a pink and white background.]** The processes of reclaiming archives are

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that of a return to joy, that deserves to be private for myriad communities, that may **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** well object to these processes being exposed. Here lies the right of refusal.

[Quote on screen, in red, in which “cannot” and “captor” are both connected to a tangle of red thread:

I cannot talk about the place I came from

I do not want it to exist

The way I knew it

In the language of my captor – Shane McCrae]³¹

I cannot talk about the place I came from

I do not want it to exist

The way I knew it

In the language of my captor – Shane McCrae

This is a beginning point. **[Back to monochrome video-animation of KB.]** Here lies the path to D/deaf and disabled futurities, as well as pasts and presents. These are D/deaf and disabled archives with anti-colonial impulses embedded—vibrancy, red thread, crimson hum that was always here.

[Image of red cloth, and end of the video.]

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¹ Please note that the variable formatting in this piece is deliberate, as a work of creative non-fiction. This text functions as a caption in at least two ways: 1) As a caption of the UAL archive in question. 2) It also functions, as evidenced by bracketed lines, a caption of my presentation in pre-recorded video form, of a performance lecture at the UAL Decolonising Archives Symposium, December 3, 2020. Note that in-text citation conventions, i.e. (Barokka 2020) are not read out in the video, though they do appear in this text.

² P. Berne, A. L. Morales, D. Langstaff and S. Invalid, “Ten principles of disability justice”, *WSQ: “Women’s Studies Quarterly”*, 46(1), (2018): 227–230.

³ K. Barokka, “Annah, Nomenclature” (2018); K. Barokka, “Selected Annahs” (2018); K. Barokka, “Annah, Infinite and ablenormativity as imperial duress: relations, assumptions, power and abuse in crippling” “Annah la Javanaise» (Doctoral dissertation, Goldsmiths, Univ. of London), 2020; and K. Barokka, “Hurt and Words: On Language and Pain in Public”, *Feminist Review*, (August 27 2020). <https://femrev.wordpress.com/2020/08/27/hurt-and-words-on-language-and-pain-in-public/>.

⁴ L. Webster, “Coronavirus: Why disabled people are calling for a Covid-19 inquiry”, *BBC News*, (July 4, 2020). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53221435>

⁵ S. A. Thohari, “Disability in Java: Contesting conceptions of disability in Javanese society after the Suharto regime” (LAP, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013).

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⁷ R. Peet, “Unholy trinity: the IMF, World Bank and WTO” (Zed Books, 2009).

⁸ J. Sadler, “War Contaminants and Environmental Justice”, in “Disability studies and the environmental humanities: Toward an eco-crip theory”, (2017): 353.

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¹⁰ R. McRuer, “Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability” (vol. 9) (NYU Press, 2006).

¹¹ Z. Todd [Zoe S. Todd], «[...] Indigenous is neither wholly a racial category or wholly an onto-epistemological one. It refracts them both & represents easily thousands of different cosmologies from around earth.» (October 21, 2020). <https://twitter.com/ZoeSTodd/status/1318954986819051523>.

¹² A. L. Stoler, *Duress: Imperial durabilities in our times* (Duke Univ. Press, 2016).

¹³ L. M. J. Bruce, “Mad is a place; or, the slave ship tows the ship of fools”, *American Quarterly*, 69(2), (2017): 304.

¹⁴ L. M. J. Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Duke Univ. Press, 2020).

¹⁵ S. Schalk, “Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction” (Duke Univ. Press, 2018).

¹⁶ T. A. Pickens, “Black Madness :: Mad Blackness” (Duke Univ. Press, 2019), xi

¹⁷ Pickens, “Black Madness”, 3.

¹⁸ S. A. Annamma, “The pedagogy of pathologization: Dis/abled girls of color in the school-prison nexus” (Routledge, 2017), and L. A. Hill, “Disrupting the trajectory: Representing disabled African American boys in a system designed to send them to prison”, *Fordham Urb. LJ*, 45, (2017): 201.

¹⁹ E. Tuck and K. W. Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”, in “Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society”, 1(1), (2012).

²⁰ F. Wardani and Y. F. K. Murti, “Arsipelago: Kerja Arsip & Pengarsipan Seni Budaya di Indonesia [Arsipelago: Archival Work & Archiving Art & Culture In Indonesia]”, (Indonesian Visual Art Archive, 2014), vi.

²¹ Wardani and Murti, “Arsipelago: Kerja Arsip & Pengarsipan Seni Budaya di Indonesia”, vii–viii.

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²² Wardani and Murti, “Arsipelago: Kerja Arsip & Pengarsipan Seni Budaya di Indonesia”, xi.

²³ A. Kothari, A. Salleh, A. Escobar, F. Demaria, and A. Acosta, eds., “Pluriverse: A post-development dictionary” (Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019).

²⁴ J. Singh, “No archive will restore you” (Punctum Books, 2018), 31-32.

²⁵ S. U. Noble, “Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism” (NYU Press, 2018).

²⁶ J. E. Muñoz, “Cruising Utopia: The There and Then of Queer Theory” (NYU Press, 2009).

²⁷ T. Ballantyne, L. Paterson and A. Wanhalla, eds., “Indigenous Textual Cultures: Reading and Writing in the Age of Global Empire” (Duke Univ. Press, 2020)

²⁸ T. Shakespeare, “The social model of disability”, *The disability studies reader*, 2, (2006): 197–204.

²⁹ Paramaditha, “Narratives of discovery: Joshua Oppenheimer’s films on Indonesia’s 1965 mass killings and the global human rights discourse”, in “*Social Identities*”, 25(4), (2019): 512–522.

³⁰ Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, and Acosta, “Pluriverse”.

³¹ S. McCrae, “In the Language of My Captor” (Wesleyan Univ. Press, 2016)

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<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2019/02/01/access-is-love/>.

Biography

Dr Khairani Barokka (Okka) is a Minang-Javanese writer, artist, and researcher from Jakarta, based in London, whose work has been presented extensively, in sixteen countries. Her work centres disability justice as anti-colonial praxis. She is currently Research Fellow at UAL Decolonising Arts Institute, as well as Associate Artist at The National Centre for Writing. Among Okka's honours, she was an NYU Tisch Departmental Fellow, "Modern Poetry in Translation" 's Inaugural Poet-In-Residence, and a UNFPA Indonesian Young Leader Driving Social Change. Her interdisciplinary work as part of the series Annah, Infinite has been an Artforum 'Must-See'. Okka is writer-illustrator of "Indigenous Species" (Tilted Axis), co-editor of "Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back" (Nine Arches), and author of debut poetry collection "Rope" (Nine Arches Press). Her next book is poetry collection "Ultimatum Orangutan" (Nine Arches Press).

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