5. SICK / SOVEREIGN with Darcy, Mo and H.G.

**Pauline**

I want to begin by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as the custodians of the land where 3CR community radio is situated and broadcasts from. I want to also acknowledge that this program is being recorded over Zoom, that I am joining from the land of the Boonwurrung people of the Kulin nation, and pay respects on behalf of myself and my ancestors, to Kulin nation ancestors, and elders past and present. I also want to acknowledge the lands from which the guests on this program today are joining the Zoom from. Waddawurrung country, Wurundjeri Woiwurring country and Turrbal and Jagera country.

The majority of the programs you'll hear on the Disability Day podcast have been recorded over Zoom because we're still in a pandemic, and the material conditions disabled and chronically ill, and especially immunocompromised and immunosuppressed people have to contend with often force people living this reality to connect with each other online.

I'm grateful for the technologies that allow us to ease our isolation in the present, while also looking forward to a time when we can congregate safely and respectfully on liberated and restored country with the consent of the traditional owners of wherever we are.

You're listening to SICK / SOVEREIGN, a program for 3CR’s Rest is Survival, Disability Day broadcast. I'm Pauline Vetuna, the Disability Day worker for 3CR. SICK / SOVEREIGN takes its name from the SICK / SOVEREIGN zine, a powerful collection of written and visual artwork by disabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about their experiences of COVID-19 published this year.

In this program, we're going to be hearing from the zines creator Darcy and two of the zines contributors, Mo and HG, who will be reading their pieces from the zine. But first a song request from our guests. This track is “Australia does not exist” by Dreaming Now.

**Dreaming Now**

Australia does not exist / Australia does not exist / Australia does not exist

1788 came upon this land / Washed into the base/ Stepped upon sacred sands / Didn't recognise there was governance at hand / Laws and conditions not based upon demand / Tribes, clans and families / That line with sacred chance / Song lines, stories, blessing woman, child and man / Stars, constellations, formulating plans / Bountiful planes of medicinal plants / Spells beyond the physical none of this dreaming afforded by chance (lyrics continue)

**Darcy**

As I write this, I struggle to recall the last time I left the house for reasons beyond taking out the bins, checking the mail, attending an appointment or going to the pharmacy. I struggle to recall the last time I socially engaged with friends. I don't even bother to remember the last time I felt safe in a social setting. It's hard to imagine that there was ever a time when being around people didn't involve constant assessment and reassessment of risk. Asking myself the same question over and over and over. Is this worth risking my life for?

I question the validity of my identity more than ever before. Physical presence and connection is an integral part of culture, of fostering and maintaining community and kinship. Am I really even mob if that’s something I can’t do? Do I have any right to claim Blakness at this distance? The divide between myself and everything around me feels bigger each day.

COVID would likely be a death sentence for me. Isolation is a safety mechanism I use to keep myself alive. But it is not a choice. It is a product of existing within structures of colonialism, capitalism and white supremacy that position people like me as better off dead.

But neglecting, ignoring, and even sacrificing oppressed communities during a crisis while positioning their illness and death as inevitable, even a relief? That is a choice. That is a deliberate and calculated choice. It is a choice that communities rendered insignificant and undesirable are forced to witness being made, again and again, every single day.

This is a snippet of what existing at the intersection of Blakness and disability amidst a global pandemic means for me. What it means for me, though, is not the same as what it means for the next disabled Blackfulla, or the one after that, or after that. There is, of course, no one, all-encompassing disabled Blak experience. Our perspectives are broad, complex, diverse, messy, undefinable, and distinct.

And yet...we rarely see any disabled First Nations experiences represented at all, let alone in all their nuanced glory. This is why I wanted to create Sick/Sovereign. Because disabled First Nations perspectives deserve and need visibility. Multiply marginalised people continue to be sidelined in discussions around and responses to COVID.

We are still finding ways to express how we fit into the pandemic world. We deserve for our expressions to be informed by our communities, not just the dominant colonial, capitalist, white supremacist perspectives that reduce us to a deficit, a nuisance, a problem to be solved. We deserve access to understandings of the world that have been shaped by lived experiences like our own.

In these expressions, we can find solidarity, connection, shared experiences, and language and representations to identify with. Sick/Sovereign exists to create a space that we have been denied. It is a collection of stories from young, disabled, First Nations people situating themselves in relation to COVID and vaccination. It is not an attempt to position any single perspective as factually or morally superior or correct. There is no wrong or right way to experience a global crisis.

These stories encapsulate experiences of pain, struggle, loss, isolation, joy, abundance, strength, uncertainty, confusion, excitement, apathy, numbness, regret, and so much more. They are unedited, unabridged, undiluted accounts of just some of the limitless possibilities of what it means to be young, Blak and disabled in a global pandemic. It is a great privilege to share this powerful collection of stories. I am endlessly grateful for everyone who made it happen. In particular, I would like to thank Jun and Laura for their tireless work and faith in me. And most importantly, thank you to each of the contributors for trusting me with your stories. Sick/Sovereign exists because of and in honour of you.

**Pauline**

Wonderful Darcy. Wonderful, wonderful, I love that foreword so much. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Darcy**

I can. My name is Darcy. I am a Palawa person. But I was raised culturally and otherwise on Yorta Yorta country in Shepparton. I moved to Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung country after high school and have lived here ever since. I am involved in mob and trans and disabled community spaces. And I'm very passionate about community, love and care and liberation and seeking those things beyond the confines of the colonial imagination.

I kind of do a lot of things across different spaces, like arts and education, health care, and justice and all of those things because we don't we don't work in silos - these community care things are holistic and can't really be separated from one another. And that's kind of the same with with our identities. So I say mob and trans and disabled community spaces.

But that's kind of just because those are the words that I have to express those identities, those aren't really siloed identities that can be separated from one another or anything, they exist together. And something that's really important to me is solidarity across those community spaces and breaking down those silos of identity. Yeah, so that's me.

**Pauline**

So Darcyy, could you tell us the process for making the zine, what was the process like and how did you connect with the other writers and artists who are in it?

**Darcy**

Yeah, so the zine was created as part of the YDAS COVID vaccination disability leaders campaign. So I saw an EOI, an expression of interest, go out from YDAS seeking people to be involved in creating media for young disabled people about COVID and vaccination. And I put in an expression of interest. I didn't really go into it with any expectations or ideas of what I wanted to do.

I just wanted to be involved in circumventing in some way, the inadequate education that people have received from the bodies that are responsible for keeping people up to date about COVID things, especially for communities like disabled folks where there hasn't really been any focus on our lens or what COVID means for us. So I was really interested in being involved in that.

But yeah, I didn't really have any preconceived notions going into it about what I wanted to do or what that was going to be like. I remember just talking about how community connection and representation was important to me, and things like that. And like, we kind of just, Jun, Laura and just went back and forth until the idea of what became SICK / SOVEREIGN was born. But from there, I put together an EOI for contributors. The idea going into it was just wanting people's perspectives, wanting to share people's stories around COVID and vaccination.

There was no specific question or prompt, it was kind of just like, your piece will explore the experience of being disabled and First Nations in the pandemic. I wanted to keep it intentionally broad, because I didn't want to try garner any specific responses. I just wanted people to take that and do whatever they wanted with that. It was important for that to be rooted in self determination. Wanting people to do that. However, they wanted to do that. Approach that idea however they wanted to. The EOI at first did not get all that much attention. And I remember at one point, I actually completely dropped the zine.

And I was like, okay, maybe I was wrong in thinking that this is something that anyone other than me wanted or needed. Because the reason that I wanted to create it is because I felt like I was missing something in not having representations of disabled mobs' experiences of COVID. You know, accessible or easy to find or anything like that. But yeah, at that point, I was like, Okay, well, maybe this is actually just isn't something that anyone really needs or wants, maybe I was wrong in thinking that.

And when those expressions of interest started coming in, and people started saying why they wanted to be involved and why it was important for them and then sending in their contributions, I realised how badly it needed to exist, and how important it was, I remember H.G's submission was I think the first one that I read.

And it like, gave me chills. And I was like, Okay, I know that I can't just drop this now this. At the very least other people deserve to feel what I felt reading this. So that was, yeah, how I came to meet the contributors, and have their stories shared with me.

**Pauline**

Well, now that you have created something, and you do recognise that not only is it meaningful for you, but it's meaningful for so many other people, and there is a need for it, and a need for it ongoing, I would say, what would you like to see more of for disabled First Nations writers and artists? I'm thinking particularly for those who are emerging, regardless of their age, like emerging can be you can be 40 and emerging. So going forward, what would you see? What would you like to see for emerging writers and artist?

**Darcy**

Visibility, unapologetic visibility. And it doesn't have to be neat or polished, or cohesive, it just needs to exist. In my experience, the intersection between Indigineity and disability is a really tense one. Disabled spaces are so white and Indigenous spaces, often really inaccessible. And yet, these experiences are directly connected to one another. It's not like disabled black fellas and other disabled First Nations folks don't exist. We're just not given permission to be loud or we're taught that we don't deserve to be.

But storytelling is our birthright. And we don't need permission or validation from the colony or from anyone to do that. Storytelling is something that I've found strength in for my entire life, whether that's through song or dance or acting or writing, or any other variety of mediums. But I still doubt my right to share what I create with the world. And I still talk myself out of things. I'm like, you know, is my voice really actually needed here? Do I really have anything new or different to say? But it doesn't, it doesn't matter, I really struggle to maintain that position and that confidence in my own abilities.

So it's, in a sense hypocritical for me to be saying it to other people. But if you are, you know, disabled First Nations creator, if you are a disabled First Nations storyteller, and you are looking for a permission to share your stories to create, I am giving you that permission. But I am also saying that you don't need that permission, because your creative outputs are your birthright. I really want to see more disabled First Nations voices at the forefront of disabled spaces, particularly in the arts, and not just when they align with the movements and narratives that are comfortable and familiar for disabled white folks.

Because in a lot of disabled spaces, including spaces that label themselves as disability justice spaces, which does a massive disservice to the history of the Disability Justice Movement, whiteness remains invisible and unquestioned. It's aggressively present, but it's not named. And so it remains unchallenged. It's just a norm.

And every time disabled First Nations people, and particularly in this context, disabled mob, assert an unrelenting right to exist, it disrupts and destabilises that invisibility of whiteness. And it's important for so many reasons, right? So like, no one wants to talk about how colonial violence has compounded in COVID responses and how that impacts mob.

No one wants to talk about the specific unique complexities of, for example, mob wanting to keep themselves and their community safe, but hesitating or refusing to get vaccinated because of the trauma of generations of continuing forced government control over our bodies, and how that trauma intersects and compounds when disabled, because disabled bodies, largely because of their perceived proximity to racialised bodies, are also subjected to eugenics, to paternalistic government interventions, that strip people of their autonomy and dignity.

And you don't you don't really hear those conversations. But disabled experiences of COVID cannot be separated from the broader contexts of colonialism and white supremacy and capitalism that they sit within. To do so just reproduces the same systems of oppression, but with a slightly extended membership of the oppressing force, that allows people with a close enough proximity to the oppressor to be able to gain conditional acceptance.

But that doesn't liberate anyone, that doesn't even liberate the people who have gotten closer to the oppressor that continues to oppress everyone involved in that situation. Centering the experiences of the communities that bear the brunt of existing at those intersections - that's an important first step in bringing the conversation back and firmly and clearly situating it within those broader contexts of colonialism and white supremacy and capitalism.

And every time a disabled First Nations person unapologetically exists in a space as themselves, that contributes to that disruption. So to kind of circle back to your question, just existing. I just want to see disabled First Nations people creating and unapologetically and without hesitation, putting the things that they create out into the world because that's powerful.

**Musical Break**

(Alice Skye) What have you got to be sad about? It might not seem like much but I'm crying now. Oh, I had you there, somehow I've got tears now. Don't tell me what I should...

**Pauline**

Next up, we're going to hear from 14 year old Mo, a young contributor to the SICK / SOVEIREGN zine. Mo is going to introduce themselves and then read their contribution.

**Mo**

Hi, my name is Mo. I'm 14 and a Dunghutti and Biripi person living on Wadawurrung Country. I enjoy video games, board games and programming.

Growing through my early teenage years in the pandemic was a very strange experience, as I felt a sense of uncertainty in almost everything that happened: when was the first case going to arrive? How long would these lockdowns last? When would everything open back up? It caused me to feel isolated from the greater world, like I had nothing to look forward to after all this was over.

The first two years of the pandemic feel like a blur. I struggle to remember the exact dates of what things happened, and what year of the two they happened in. Is that my fault for not writing down what happened on a day to day basis? Or is that just a by-product of the lock downs and having to self-isolate for days and sometimes months at a time.

The lockdowns contributed to this feeling of isolation no doubt in these first few years of the pandemic. Even when I had a persistent event in my week that would be on the same day each week, would often get cancelled, moved, or put online, which took a lot out of me. At the time, getting a vaccination felt strange at the time.

After almost a year and a half of this plague, just now we're getting access to things that stop us from getting it? It felt strange walking into that facility. How long would the side effects last? Would it actually help with anything, if I didn't talk to anyone in person? Would I even get COVID? Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic really disrupted and put a stop to all of people's plans and aspirations for years, and it’s unclear what will happen in relation to it, and the world at large.

**Pauline**

Thank you Mo. What I love about your piece is that you're just really honest about what it was like for you in those first two years. And I know the lockdowns were hard for so many of us, they were really, really difficult. I wanted to know how your year has been this year?

**Mo**

This year is a lot better than the last two years of a pandemic. This year was a lot more consistent. There was no lockdowns and I could get back to really focusing on the things that I want to do without feeling a sense of dread every time I do them.

**Pauline**

I would like to know what are some of the things that are helping you cope on a day to day basis that make you happy, that bring you joy and that help stay positive or try to get to a positive space?

**Mo**

I'm enjoying using computers, programming and playing Dungeons and Dragons with my friends. Seeing as this routine kind of carried me through last year, really. I'm sometimes able to dream about what I want to do generally, I didn't feel like I've already got anything pre-determined like the past few years. and it feels like I finally have the freedom to make choices for myself and define what I want to do and be.

**Pauline**

And finally, I just want to know, what do you think adults can do better to support young people like yourself who are still in school at this particular time?

**Mo**

I think there should be a better environment for young people to express themselves. A lot of the time you see young people have a new idea or new way of thinking and it just immediately gets shut down because it's new and it's not made by someone who's 60 plus years old. So I think we really need to listen to the young people a lot more and take their ideas on the same level we do anyone else's.

**Musical Break**

Instrumental funky but melancholic type beat plays.

**Pauline**

Finally we're going to hear from H.G, a poetry contributor to the SICK / SOVEREIGN zine.

**H.G**

My name is H.G Mancini. H stands for Henrietta, but I go by she/they pronouns, and I am a, Wiradjuri, Darug and Gundungurra (I can't pronounce it correctly. I'm so sorry) woman, but I've been mainly based in Meanjin, because that's where I was raised. And my poem that I submitted for the zine is called "Four", and it's about my multiple personality disorder or dissociative identity disorder and how I cope during COVID.

Hello, Hello, can you hear me? I would like to tell you a story, you see. A tale of things that have to be said, for all of you to understand the things in my head. I have a problem, a problem with me. A problem so hard, it's not I but we. There's not just me living inside my head, it's me, my friends and the dark instead. Not one or two, but three or four other me's hiding from the light on the floor. The floor where there's a stage to make quite clear which one of us is going to be here.

If it's bright in there as light, it might be me. But if it's dark, and in shadow, it'll be Two or Three. They're not so bad, but then there is Four - the most terrifying and saddest ever seen before. Four is lonely, Four is small, Four is dark and four is tall. Four's name is not mine. In fact, it is long, Four doesn't have my name. It's rather too strong. Four's name is weakness or sorrow or strife. I think it's all Three that it has in its plight. As he comes only during the time of night, when One, Two and Three have turned off the rest of the lights.

Four only appears when One has been bad, when One is lonely or tired or sad. Because unlike his friends, Two and Three, One does not ever fall asleep, you see. One stays awake in the dead of night, when it's dark out and he's turned off his lights. He's so tired, so tired, but can't close his eyes. For fear of just where Four always lies. For four will whisper "come play with me". And One cannot ever give in, you see. Once One gives in and turns on the light, Four will come out in a terrifying sight.

Four is angry, Four is mad, Four is uncontrollable and always bad. He makes one do things that he'll regret. He makes one do things he won't soon forget. But there is one thing that makes one sad. It is that Four is not truly always bad. Four is the problem that no one understands, 'til someone sees it with their own eyes and hands. Four is the excuse used by very much all, who want to be rude and make tears fall. These people do not truly know just what Four really does. But I do. I do a lot after all of this fuss. Four is a problem, a problem of mine. But I could see why you would deny that seeing in time. Too much, too much running around, can make someone distrustful of information found.

I've got Four stuck in my head, instead of helping he makes a mess instead. I realise this now while Four is gone, but I don't think this will last very long. I must ask that you take a moment at hand and ask that you try and understand. That though the insomnia and anxiety are not all I've really always had, that I cannot say forever that I am all bad. In these years of fear and strife, of sickness and masks and fancies of flight, I've got autism and allergies as well as to be had. Why? Because I can't compromise? Am I really that bad?

I'm not as mad as you make me out to be. You see, I'm only One, not Four, Two or Three. I can't help the way that I was made. I can't help the way that I will stay. I cannot help that I'm always sick. I cannot help that I have become that rather quick. So things I must wear and precautions I must take, in a braver world that within I strive to be great. You can be nasty and sneer all the more, but I must do what I must do and something even more. For I do not wish for death you see, for there are people needing and loving me. So while I avoid everything galore, while you shout and rave and rant at my door. There are so many other things to be said and to be had. But to reiterate, I'm really not that bad.

**Pauline**

Absolutely stunning piece. Thank you H.G. I was wondering if you would also read out the following page. That little description I thought it was just so beautifully written.

**H.G**

Yeah, no. I knew there would have to be a description along with it because I didn't think people would really understand this. At the time I wrote the poem, I'd only been diagnosed with four alters, as we call them, but at the time I finally wrote the dedication, I'd been actually diagnosed with the real number, which is seven. So it's gonna sound a tiny bit different to the poem, but that's okay.

So my experience with having COVID as being a First Nation person, and being disabled hasn't been a pleasant one. Hence why I decided to write down my feelings in this poem. It was unpleasant and hurtful as my DID (Multiple Personality Disorder) kicked in, and there wasn't just one person but seven people sick at the same time in one place, which caused a lot of confusion and terror leading to meltdowns.

Several uncontrollable personality switches and disassociation, including memory loss is also been a lot worse for myself, my roommates, as I call them, due to the host (being me), not physically being able to be vaccinated and berated for that particular fact. Leading to feelings of shame that I thought I had rid myself of years ago when I accepted my culture.

And it's also exacerbated my inability to use my motor skills, causing a ramp up of seizure activity and leaving me unable to drive my electric wheelchair and unable to move entirely on the worst days. Sadly, no one except maybe a few people, knows what it's like to be trapped in your own head with no way out. A maze with no prize, that slowly gets longer and longer without you knowing.

Four symbolises exactly what was going on at the time when personalities were shoving each other out of a way to be heard, and myself fighting through the strife ensuing from the pandemic, and other factors to come out of the other side in one piece, despite my roommates also fighting me. I hope that we can take a lesson from this text even if we can't relate to it, that not all people are bad because of circumstances that affect them. That is the true message of this.

**Musical Break**

Melancholic mix of acoustic and electronic instruments plays briefly.

**Pauline**

Darcy let the people know. Where can they find the zine?

**Darcy**

Yes. This unfortunately isn't a super easy answer. So these zine can be accessed via the YACVIC website. You can find PDF version of the zine, an accessible Word version of the zine and also an audio description and reading of the zine on that website. And I can share that link with you Pauline, if you would like to put that in the 3CR broadcast website or whatever.

But yeah, I will share that with you. In terms of physical copies of the zine, there were physical copies that were distributed to a few places. Those places were Sticky Institute, VAS - the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. Black Aboriginal Corporation, Hares ad Hyenas, the Koori Youth Council, and Footscray Community Art Center. I do know that all of the ziens that were sent to Sticky Institute have flown off the shelves, and they have asked for more zines and we have allocated more for them.

But beyond that, I don't have any oversight over stock levels. At places where physical zines are. We are running very low on physical copies. We printed 350 of them and thought that that would be way more than we needed. But SICK / SOVEREIGN has actually garnered a lot more attention than we ever anticipated it would get. So I am looking into options for another print run. But the first print run and the zine as a whole was funded by YDAS so I have to look into possibilities for how we might get another print run. If and when that happens, I will keep you updated Pauline.

**Pauline**

You've been listening to SICK / SOVEREIGN. We're going to close out the show today with another song request from our zine guests. This truck is called White Noise by Dancingwater.

**Dancingwater**

(White Noise by Dancingwater) The sadness runs deep, but the hate runs deeper / Look closely, you'll see by the way they treat her / Blinded by privilege, they can't even recognise / That Black boys and the Black girls are risking their lives to get by / To get by, to get by / All I hear is just, all I hear is white noise All I hear is white lies and all I hear is white silence

Don't say you've got my back then oppress me / Strip us of our strong life and you gave us to churches (With an evil plan and a sinister purpose) / All I hear is white noise, all I hear is white lies/ And all I hear is white silence / All I hear is white noise, sick and tired of the white lies / All I see is your violence, your violence / [Audio sample] The revolution will not be televised—

To colonise and dividе, it's a matter of Black lives / To thrive off thе pain of Black tears and Black cries / You've got the power coursing through your veins to just / Destroy Black homes and put us in chains / All I hear is white noise, all I hear is white lies / And all I hear is white silence / All I hear is white noise, all I hear is white lies / And all I hear is white silence / All I hear is white noise, all I hear is white noise / What is freedom to you? The freedom to take a life? Is that your freedom? / If being Black imparts a crime, then arrest me

**Voiceover**

3CR. Here to stay.

**BAARKA**

(Blak Matriarchy by Baarka) …(I am tired of begging and asking for our humanity. When is it enough?) / Can't colonise my Blak mind I'm from the Dreamtime, I go back / They committed genocide through my tracks / They raped our mothers, lessened my Black / They brought the violence when they attacked / I ain't here to start trouble, I'm just here to state facts / You can't paint me how you wanna paint cracks / And I'm tied to my mob, got my mob on my back (HAHHH)

Waratahs are covered in blood / White-washing our history to cover it up / Proof is all in the pudding cuz / This nation couldn't give a fuck about us / But we survive' unceded undivided / Our people stay fighting cause the flame is ignited / We stay righteous we cannot be silenced Cause silence is violence, the reason we're divided And they choose not to digest the truth /Instead they just go ahead and dilute our youth / You only like the system 'cause it just suits you / Give a fuck about the law, yeah I'd rather grassroots / Blak to the bone, Blak to the busy! Mob on my back, yeah they all rock with me / Baarka in my blood, that river flow through me I'm matriarchal bloodline 120

This is for the Blak matriarchs / This for my sisters who lived in the dark / This for my sisters who carry our past on their shoulders / This is for Blak matriarchs / This is all of our women / This for all of our children / Couldn't care less 'bout the monarch / I'ma set fire to the kingdom I'm coming for them / All hail to Blak matriarchs

I'm the pain and the proof / The history that lays out the truth / And they couldn't walk a mile in our shoes / Tell us to go bush when they all introduced / Fuck it, we've been here for too long / Matriarchy blood, yeah I been built strong / Song lines deep, yeah it got me singing songs / Cause I can't forget where I came from! / Barkindji country, Mungo man / Pass it to my kids, tell em this your land / I came from the dirt, go back in red sand / Desert river Nhuungku, I'm proud of who I am

Creator created me tough (HA) / And I'm calling out all your bluffs Saying the past is all in the past / Well that dark past still lives in my mum / I stay radical I know the truth / Couldn't kill my Ancestors, I'm the proof / I know I still got some screws loose / But my third eyes open and I'm looking right through / Looking at you Nhuungku right here gonna do what it do / So my little Blak seeds ain't got to prove shit to you / Ngayti sent me gone bud what do?! / 3% me hold it down for the few

This is for Blak matriarchs / This for my sisters who lived in the dark / This for my sisters who carry our past on their shoulders / This is for Blak matriarchs / This is for all of our women / This for all of our children / Couldn't care less 'bout the monarch / I'ma set fire to the kingdom I'm coming for them / All hail to Blak matriarchs

(Audio sample) ...You know I have a culture, I am a cultured person. Don't try and suppress me and don't call me a problem! I have never left my country. I am not the problem.