BORN IN THE EMPIRE, RAISED IN ITS MARGINS

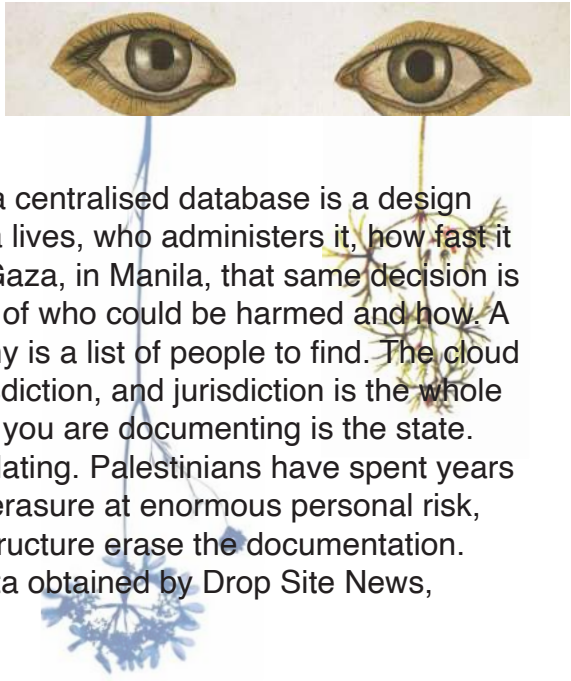
[RAZALI SAMSUDIN]

I was born in Britain. I was raised in London, Johor Bahru, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Manila, Lingayen. My blood runs through Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and the Philippines. I am not the person from the province who entered the empire. I am what happens when the empire's borders run through your own body.

It is the condition I work from: a permanent doubling, inside and outside every room I enter at once, and it is why I can see a thing in the room that most of the room cannot.
On World Kufiyah Day, 11 May 2026, I stood at the corner of Rue de Palestine in the 19th arrondissement of Paris with three textiles on me at once: a Paliroots kufiyah bandana

on my head, a Hirbawi kufiyah from occupied Hebron on the railing beside me, and an INKAA resist-batik handkerchief from Kuala Lumpur in my hand. Resist is the name of the wax technique. It is also just the word. Three colonised geographies met on one body, at one street corner. I did not have to arrange that meeting. It is simply where the lines I was assembled from happen to cross. Through Threads of Solidarity, the artivism project I created, a Hirbawi scarf, woven by the last Palestinian manufacturer still at the loom in Al-Khalil since 1961, has travelled through over a dozen locations across three continents, from Hebron, and now in Goma in eastern Congo.

Here is what the doubling lets me see. I have sat in rooms in Brussels, Paris and London with policymakers, financiers, tech executives and think-tank directors theorising about digital governance, and in the same months in rooms in Southeast Asia with NGOs, ministries and communities for whom those same policies arrive not as theory but as the terms of survival.



In a comfortable office, a centralised database is a design decision: where the data lives, who administers it, how fast it queries. In Al-Khalil, in Gaza, in Manila, that same decision is a threat model, the map of who could be harmed and how. A centrally stored testimony is a list of people to find. The cloud is not neutral. It is a jurisdiction, and jurisdiction is the whole question when the thing you are documenting is the state. We are no longer speculating. Palestinians have spent years documenting their own erasure at enormous personal risk, then watched the infrastructure erase the documentation. According to internal data obtained by Drop Site News,

Meta complied with 94 percent of the Israeli government's takedown requests after October 2023, removing more than ninety thousand posts at an average of thirty seconds each, faster than any human could read them, because no human did. The Palestinian digital rights group 7amleh recorded over five thousand one hundred cases of censorship in the first year alone.[1] The same reporting names the part that should keep every tech worker awake: the AI being trained on those takedowns will base its future decisions on the successful erasure of a genocide. The machine is being taught what to forget.

This is the harm the tech labour movement is worst at naming. We are good at naming the harm that flows upward, the surveillance, the burnout, the oligarchs and their deranged gambit. We are worse at the harm that flows outward and downward, through the supply chains and the moderation queues, into people who will never be in our rooms: the content moderator in the global majority metabolising the worst of the war for a wage that would not cover a London week; the Gazan whose witness is deleted in thirty seconds. A solidarity that does not name them is not global. It is solidarity among the better-paid, and it speaks with a comfortable accent.

I am not pointing at that movement from outside. I am inside it. The critique is a household one, the kind you only earn by staying. But I make it because I have watched privacy treated as a feature rather than a precondition, watched we'll consider alternatives, encryption and data sovereignty later pass unchallenged in meetings. For the people I build for, later is the interval during which someone is taken, or deleted, or both.

So the infrastructure my team and I build is not an ideological preference dressed as architecture. Manifest, a privacy-first archive and campaign studio developed with

human rights defenders across Asia-Pacific, and HRDAO, governance for distributed rights networks, are survival arithmetic. Offline-first, because connectivity is the first thing severed. Decentralised, because one server is one warrant, one raid, one point at which a movement's memory can be seized and fed to the machine that learns to forget. This is heavier to build and harder to fund than a clean centralised product. We carry the weight because the alternative assumes nobody is hunting the user. For the people I build for, somebody always is.

And here the fault line stops being a figure of speech and becomes an address. The cloud that deletes Gaza's witness has to live somewhere physical, and increasingly it lives in the global majority, on land near rich markets. Malaysia has become Southeast Asia's fastest-growing destination for AI data centre investment, drawn by low costs and proximity to Singapore. In Gelang Patah, in Johor, less than a kilometre from people's homes, a data centre is being built so close that residents say they can no longer dry laundry on their balconies for the dust, and their air purifiers read dangerous. In February this year more than fifty of them held the country's first data centre protest, worried about the dust and their water.[2] That is an area where I have family. The grid the British drew across Johor in the eighteenth century is still there. Now the hyperscalers lay a new grid on top of it, and the resource extracted this time is water, electricity and air, so that someone far away can run a model. This is what digital colonialism looks like before the word reaches the news: a substation and a cooling tower beside your cousin's house.

I am not writing this from despair. For a long time the fault line was something only those of us assembled across it could feel. From inside the empire you could almost believe infrastructure was neutral, that a network was just a network. That belief is dissolving in real time. The mask has slipped.

And the targeted are doing what the targeted have always done. They are building the record. In Germany, the European Legal Support Center and Forensic Architecture have built the Index of Repression: 766 verified incidents of anti-Palestinian repression since 2019, now extending to Britain and the Netherlands.[3] It documents what the kufiya already knew, that the repression is not a reaction to October 2023 but a structure, premeditated and exported, what succeeds in one jurisdiction replicated in the next. Notice what that database is. It is the same instinct as the kufiya and the archive: evidence, gathered by the people it is about, held somewhere it cannot be quietly deleted.

The repression and the counter-infrastructure grow from the same soil. That is the work: Threads of Solidarity, Manifest, and Archive of Resistance, which I built to bring these strands under one frame I organise everything around. Decolonise, Decentralise, Democratise. Three verbs, one refusal: that memory will not be erased, that power will not stay concentrated, that the people a system was built against will hold the record of their own lives.

I will not pretend this is sustainable the way a traditional career is sustainable. To do this work as a parent, inside a system that would rather I burn out quietly, and to stay present for my family while doing it, is not a given. It is a discipline. There is a version of this fight that consumes the person fighting it, that asks you to burn your own decency for someone else's sunrise and leaves you hard to tell apart from what you opposed. I have watched it happen to good people. The point of routing around domination is to build something a person can live inside, not a colder copy of what I set out to oppose.

So I will leave the room with a question rather than a banner. When we organise as tech workers, whose threat model are

we building for: our own, or that of the person three supply chains down who will never reach our meeting? The test of our solidarity is not whether we can name the oligarchs. It is whether we will build for and with the people the system was never built for, and whether, when later is proposed for the thing that keeps them alive, we are willing to say no.
The fault line is not a wound to be healed. It is a place to build from.

Who is building there now? And who will build there next?

