



# ritual

*A Collection of Muslim  
Australian Poetry*

*Edited by Sara M Saleh  
and Zainab Syed  
with Manal Younus*

# First Nations First

We start as we always do, paying our utmost respect and reverence to the custodians of the land on which we respectively live and write.

We would especially like to acknowledge with eternal gratitude Dharug land — parts of it known as Western Sydney — which has grown us as the artists we are today, and where critical parts of this project took place.

The custodians of this place have been telling stories since time immemorial; they are our original Storytellers. Through a deep connection to this land, its spirits and songlines, they continue to carry the knowledge that is webbed throughout the traditional lands of the First Peoples. It is an honour to be part of that heritage.

*Always was, always will be.*

# ritual

*A Collection of Muslim  
Australian Poetry*

*Edited by Sara M Saleh  
and Zainab Syed  
with Manal Younus*

First published in 2025 by  
Sweatshop Literacy Movement Inc.  
PO Box 250, Fairfield NSW 1860

[www.sweatshop.ws](http://www.sweatshop.ws)

Text copyright © to the authors  
Printed and bound by Ligare Book Printers  
Distributed by NewSouth Books

A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the National Library of Australia



ISBN 978-0-6457179-2-1 (paperback)  
ISBN 978-0-6457179-3-8 (ebook)

No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any  
form or by any means electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying or otherwise without the prior  
permission of the publisher. The moral rights of  
the authors have been asserted.

Cover art: Hadia F Bangash  
Design and typesetting: Julien Ortiz 2025



The paper this book is printed on is in accordance  
with the standards of the Forest Stewardship  
Council®. The FSC® promotes environmentally  
responsible, socially beneficial and economically  
viable management of the world's forests.





To the poets we've lost and the ones yet to come:  
*there is no people who are smaller than their poem.*

**Sara M Saleh**

Baba; for lighting up every room inside my heart,  
till the very end.

**Zainab Syed**

# Production Team

**Editors:** Sara M Saleh & Zainab Syed

**Commissioning Editor:** Manal Younus

**Sub-Editors:** Winnie Dunn & Michael Mohammed Ahmad

**Cover Artist:** Hadia F Bangash

**Cover Design & Typesetting:** Julien Ortiz

**Retreat Facilitators:** Eugenia Flynn, Abdulrahman Hammoud,  
Fatimah Asghar & Manal Younus

## Acknowledgements

The Muslim Poetry Project has been proudly supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW, and the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its arts funding and advisory body. Additional support for this project was provided by Red Room Poetry and NewSouth Books.

Sweatshop Literacy Movement is proudly supported by DARTS (Diversity Arts Australia) and PYT (Powerhouse Youth Theatre).

# Table of Contents

<i>Foreword</i> .....	13
EUGENIA FLYNN	
<i>Introduction</i> .....	17
SARA M SALEH & ZAINAB SYED	
<i>Please don't let it be a Muslim</i> .....	21
NADINE NASSER AGHA	
<i>A Woven Reverence</i> .....	25
AMMARAH AHMED	
<i>Names</i> .....	26
MUNIRA TABASSUM AHMED	
<i>Melancholy's Sway</i> .....	27
FATIMA ALI	
<i>Frankincense</i> .....	29
IDIL ALI	
<i>Qasida</i> .....	30
JUNNADE ALI	
<i>spooky</i> .....	32
PREMA ARASU	
<i>Swarms</i> .....	33
MOHAMMAD AWAD	
<i>An Ode to Dede's Rage</i> .....	34
MUALLA AYDOĞAN	
<i>Different types of congregation</i> .....	36
FERDOUS BAHAR	
<i>Prayer to my ancestors for my writing</i> .....	40
AYAH DARWICH	
<i>Desert Dweller</i> .....	42
YASMIN ELBOUCH	

<i>Barzakh: The In-Between Realm</i> .....	44
MARYAM EL-KASHOUTY	
<i>Invisible Bloodstain</i> .....	46
RADHIYA FANHAM	
<i>Lethologica</i> .....	48
LAMISSE HAMOUDA	
<i>Branched Out</i> .....	53
ALI AL HAJ HUSSEIN	
<i>Nomad's land</i> .....	55
RONIA IBRAHIM	
<i>Seasons</i> .....	57
SARAH IMAN	
<i>Inside My Head</i> .....	58
MEYRNAH KHODR	
<i>I Ate My Mother's God</i> .....	60
PRINCESS R LAKSHMAN	
<i>Worms</i> .....	63
AMANI MAHMOUD	
<i>My Motherland of Revolution</i> .....	65
LEILA MANSOUR	
<i>In the matter of Lattouf v Australian Broadcasting Corporation</i> .....	67
SARA MANSOUR	
<i>Meet Me Under the Odaa (Sycamore) Tree</i> .....	69
MABRUKA MARGASA-OBSA	
<i>In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful</i> .....	71
ADRIAN MOUHAJER	
<i>I do not write love poems</i> .....	75
MARIA MUBEEN	
<i>Language</i> .....	77
RASHIDA MURPHY	

<i>Water &amp; Waswās</i> .....	78
OMAR MUSA	
<i>Crystal Thread</i> .....	83
SARA MUSSA	
<i>Backward</i> .....	85
MAIRA NGUYEN	
<i>Prayers of the Pilgrim</i> .....	87
ABDULLAH NOMAN	
<i>I Went to the Olympics Once</i> .....	91
HABIBAT OGUNBANWO	
<i>Bearings</i> .....	93
RANIA OMAR	
<i>A letter to my ten-year-old self</i> .....	98
YAHYA TRESOR DJOMANI OUSMANE	
<i>Unborn Memories</i> .....	102
KHADIJA (HATIZAH) RASHID	
<i>Afkaar</i> .....	104
NIDAL SAEED	
<i>Remember me when I am gone</i> .....	106
FATIMAH ABDULGHAFUR SEYYAH	
<i>Palm</i> .....	107
AISYAH SUMITO	
<i>Be</i> .....	108
SYARISA YASIN	
<i>The Editors</i> .....	III
<i>The Contributors</i> .....	II3



# Foreword

*In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*



I begin my foreword with this Islamic phrase of beginnings, of openings, of dedication, as a Muslim forever in the grip of journeying to practice. I begin my foreword in this way, also, as a reminder of what binds the poets in this book together: Islam. Whether practicing or non-practicing, cultural or religious, each of the poets presented in this anthology connect to a Muslim identity — however they may choose to define ‘being Muslim’.



*I pay respect to the lands on which this anthology has been written and published, to the Ancestors and Elders of these lands, and acknowledge the Sovereign Owners of the lands and waterways now known as the country of Australia.*



I begin my foreword with this acknowledgement, with this respect, as an Aboriginal woman forever tied to my sovereign lands and living by my sovereign ways of being and doing. I have written this foreword on the lands of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nations, and pay my respect to Boon Wurrung Country, Ancestors and Elders.



*What does it mean for you to write in ‘this place’?*



In 2023, I was invited to travel to Dharug Country and run an opening workshop for a Muslim poetry retreat that would serve as a precursor to this anthology. At the end of my workshop, I posed this question to the assembled poets, inviting them to use the question as a prompt for their own writing.

As an Aboriginal creative practitioner, I often pose some variation of this question to non-Indigenous creatives. What does it mean for them to create on Aboriginal land? Whether artists, writers or performers, I use this question to both drive home a point about what it means *to be* and *to create* on stolen land. I also use this question with genuine interest in the answers that such a question generates.

While not all the poets presented in this collection attended the retreat; while not all poets that attended the retreat are represented in this collection; while not all poets who attended the retreat and who are presented in this collection used my prompt for their poems: this anthology is a collection uniquely of this place. It presents poems that could not have been written if not for the unique experience of being Muslim within or in relation to the context that is Australia.

For me, *this*, is the most salient point to make in this foreword.

While some may read with an Orientalist eye to Othering the poets and their words; while some may extol the Islamic traditions of poetry and recitation, tracing lineages that may or may not be there; while Islamic lineages of poetry tradition may exist or may not within these pages: this anthology is a collection uniquely of this place. Only a Muslim, living and being and experiencing within the context that is Australia, could write the poetry of this anthology.

Edward Said writes in *Orientalism*: ‘The Orient and Islam have a kind of extrareal, phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert. From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself. Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed through and been made firm by the refining fire of the Orientalist’s work.’

The power of this anthology lies in the ability of each individual writer to represent themselves as who they are. Through the interplay between what they want to express. How they want to express the *what* through words. The poems in this collection demonstrate a dedication to the pursuit of exquisite expression on behalf of the writers. Here, each poet is agonisingly purposeful in the aesthetics of their writing, aiding in the conveyance of ideas, imagery, the interiority to an experience, to future imaginings, and more.

Through this anthology, readers become witness to the careful crafting of each poet as they represent themselves on the page — as Muslims writing within, through and in relation to Australia — unencumbered by the ‘refining fire’ of the Orientalist.

But it is not just the forming of the words and the presentation on the page that makes this collection of poems so satisfying for readers. What is being voiced is also of utmost importance. While it would be onerous to comment on each individual poem, I want to draw attention to what this anthology constitutes, when the poems are read collectively, and as a whole. Here, the collection becomes inward facing due to each poet’s ability to represent themselves — their imagery, their ideas, their experiences and their imaginings — without falling into the trap of diversity narratives, which can be Othering when they veer toward representations of cultural and religious difference.

Importantly, each poet writes without an obvious aim to teach non-Muslims about Islam or Muslims, or to represent ‘the Muslim community’. Their poetry just *is*. Anything we learn as readers is incidental but also inherent to that ephemeral moment of reading poetry, where the *what* being expressed combines with the beauty of *how* it is being expressed. When read collectively, each individual poem demonstrates that there is no singular representative voice to the ‘Australian Muslim community’ (whatever that means anyway); each voice in the collective makes a contribution to a vast breadth of poems, voices and perspectives.

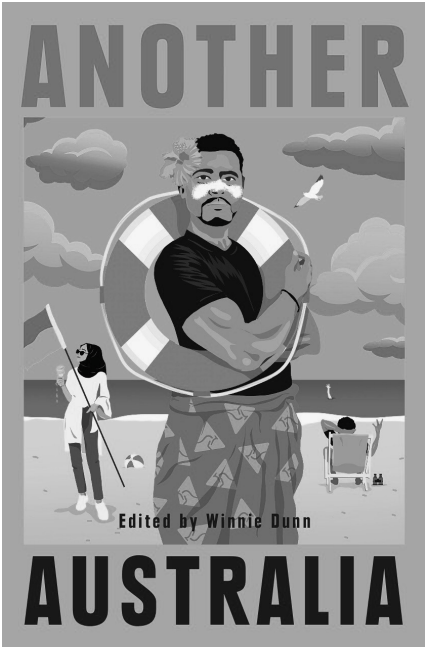
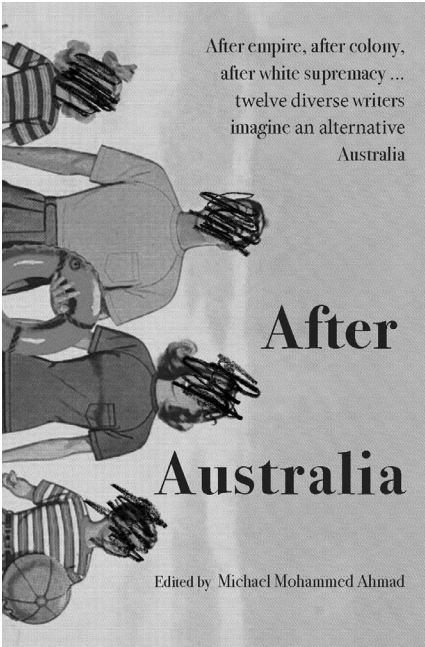
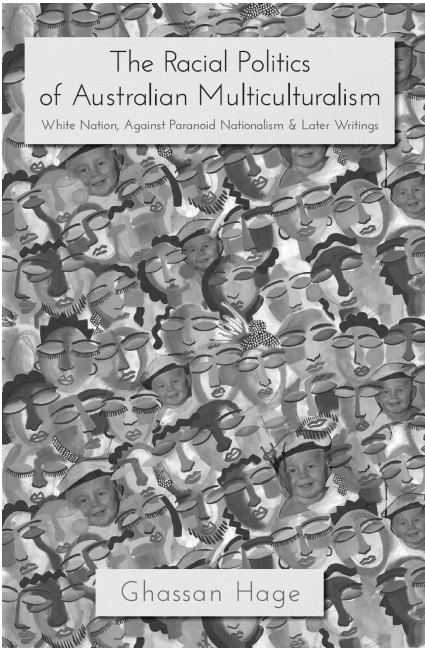
*Eugenia Flynn*

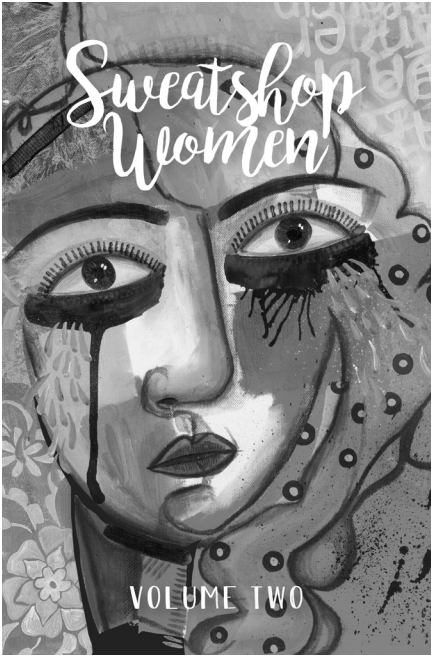
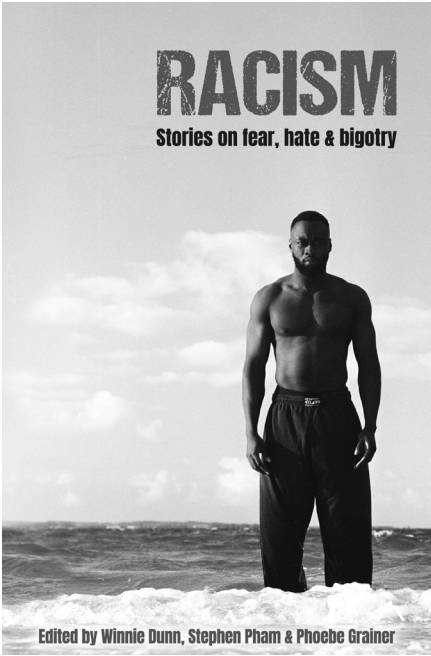
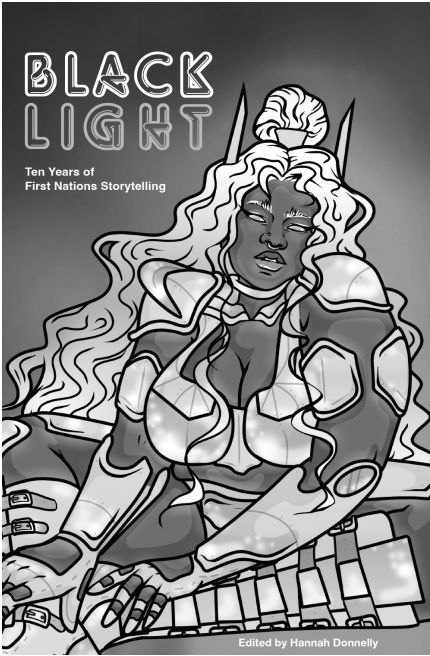
*More from Sweatshop*

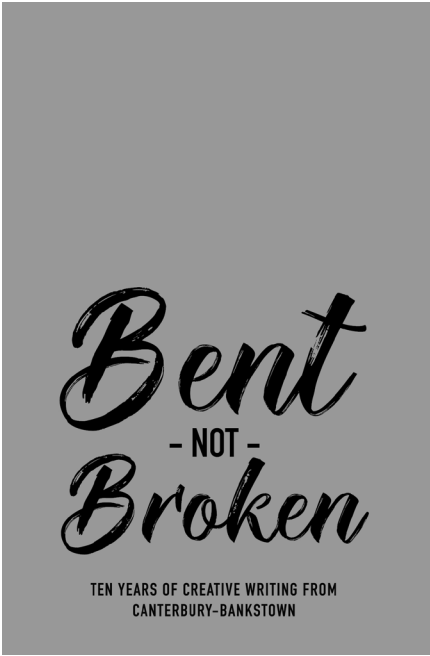


*[www.sweatshop.ws](http://www.sweatshop.ws)*









فلسطين حرة



# Evocative. Unsettling. Unafraid.

Ritual is a ground-breaking new publication which centres and celebrates the diversity of contemporary Muslim-Australian identities and experiences through the timeless power of the written word. As Australia's first anthology to showcase the work of Muslim-identifying poets, the collection offers an urgent and necessary contribution to the global tradition of Islamic-inspired poetry.

FEATURING: Nadine Nasser Agha, Ammarah Ahmed, Munira Tabassum Ahmed, Fatima Ali, Idil Ali, Junnade Ali, Prema Arasu, Mohammad Awad, Mualla Aydoğan, Ferdous Bahar, Ayah Darwich, Yasmin Elbouch, Maryam El-Kashouty, Radhiya Fanham, Lamisse Hamouda, Ali Al Haj Hussein, Ronia Ibrahim, Sarah Iman, Meyrnah Khodr, Princess R Lakshman, Amani Mahmoud, Leila Mansour, Sara Mansour, Mabruka Margasa-Obsa, Adrian Mouhajer, Maria Mubeen, Rashida Murphy, Omar Musa, Sara Mussa, Maira Nguyen, Abdullah Noman, Habibat Ogunbanwo, Rania Omar, Yahya Tresor Djomani Ousmane, Khadija (Hatizah) Rashid, Nidal Saeed, Fatimah Abdulghafur Seyyah, Aisyah Sumito and Syarisa Yasin.

Foreword by Eugenia Flynn.

*I was taken by their wit, their vigour,  
their sense of play and the deep way that  
they listened to themselves and others.  
That's what these poems do: require  
listening, require tending. A deep  
tending to self, a deep listening to  
the voice within, a deep charting  
of the truth of many voices,  
linking together, to push  
for a new possibility.*

— FATIMAH ASGHAR

