

BoVo



**Edited by
Adam Novaldy Anderson**

Povo

Povo

**Edited by
Adam Novaldy Anderson**

First published in 2024 by
Sweatshop Literacy Movement Inc.
ACE (Arts & Cultural Exchange)
8 Victoria Road, Parramatta NSW 2150,
Australia

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 978-0-6457179-0-7 (paperback)
ISBN 978-0-6457179-1-4 (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.

Design and typesetting by Duane Leewai 2024

**Sweatshop Literacy Movement
acknowledges the Traditional
Custodians of Country throughout
Australia and their connections to
lands, waters and communities. We
pay our respect to Elders past and
present and extend that respect
to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander peoples today. We honour
more than sixty thousand years of
storytelling, art and culture.**



Acknowledgements

Sweatshop Literacy Movement is proudly supported by ACE (Arts & Cultural Exchange), DARTS (Diversity Arts Australia) and the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its arts funding and advisory body.

The contents of this publication have been developed in partnership with the Asylum Seekers Centre and Campbelltown City Council as part of the Campbelltown Youth Literacy Initiative.

Production Team

Editor: Adam Novaldy Anderson

Project Manager: Winnie Dunn

Commissioning Editor: Sara M. Saleh

Copy Editor: Michael Mohammed Ahmad

Proofreaders: Patrick Cruz Forrest and Yasir Elgamil

Design and Typesetting: Duane Leewai

Special Thanks: Lena Nahlous, Diana Chamma, Paula Pfoeffler,
Dom Ellis, Danielle Townsend and Anne Loxley

Table of Contents

Introduction Adam Novaldy Anderson	9
Francis Street Forever Tupou	17
One day, under my Troye Sivan Banksia Victor Guan Yi Zhou	22
Driving Me Loca Natalia Figueroa Barroso	27
There is Always a Kebab Shop Somewhere Guido Melo	38
Discarded Stalks Meyrnah Khodr	43
Driving a Mercedes but Living in a Rental Adrian Mouhajer	47
There are no Beaches in Bankstown Rayann Bekdache	49
How to Buy a Car Daniel Nour	52

FENCES 59

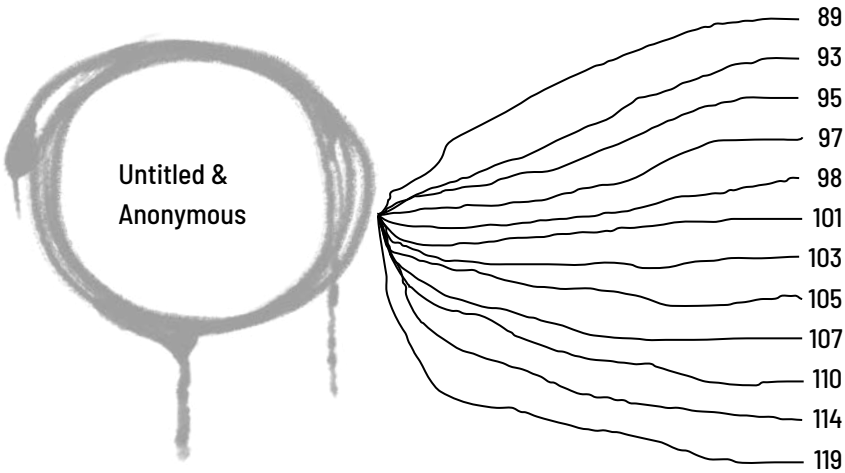
Detention Centre Arash X	61
About Freedom Khaled Elkady	65
The Cook Up Sangee X	71
Dreams Thouraya Lahmadi	73

ESHAYS 81

Land of the Long White Cloud Lexus Katipa-Poa	83
Tama o la'u tama Brennae Danielson	84
Them Zo'e Laufoli	86

GUTTER

87



CRUMBS

121

The Bus Fahad Ali 123

Theotokos Nadia Demas 124

The Guy with the AMG Jenanne Ibrahim 125

The Doktor Leila Mansour 127

Mealtime Priyanka Bromhead 129

Skittles and Rice Helen Nguyen 133

Ecologically Sustainable Household Yasir Elgamil 137

Sand Paradise Jessicca Wendy Mensah 140

The Song that Fills the Valley Katie Shammass 141

Some of the Sun Phoebe Grainer 145

Introduction

Adam Novaldy Anderson

During a shift at a certain fast food restaurant (let's call it Scamm'd), I was people-watching from the open kitchen. I noticed that the number of Anglo and Asian couples eating at the faux picnic tables was well into the double digits. The Sydney CBD location was pumping on a Friday night. Collared shirt yuppies downed twelve-dollar Coronas and rich Chinese travellers were sampling the exotic Western cuisine.

I pointed out the couples to another worker — a fellow Indonesian whose curly hair suggested he was from an Eastern Island — and asked him for his opinion on why this was so common. I suggested romantic racism and the emasculation of Asian men, which made us less desirable than men from other cultural backgrounds.

Before I finished my out-loud pondering, my co-worker paused his deep-frying, turned to me and rubbed his upturned finger and thumb together — making the money gesture so vigorously it might have ignited a little fire. I dismissed it as an oversimplification and went back to the eye-stinging work of running the char-grill. However, I have to admit, his succinct, wordless analysis was more accurate than mine.

In her essay collection *Writing Beyond Race*, bell hooks introduces us to the term 'imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy'. This concept identifies the interlocking systems of colonial, racialised, economic and gendered hierarchies that exist across the globe and how they 'work together to uphold and maintain cultures of domination'. Back at the fast food restaurant, the 'ethnics' in these relationships weren't just dating 'White people', they seemed to be stepping through the door to a higher social class. At least, that must have been the plan.

Years later, I came across the works of Indonesian novelist, historian and political prisoner, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. In the four novels that comprise his *Buru Quartet*, a similar dynamic can be observed in the character Nyai Ontosoroh, aka Sanikem. Set in the Dutch East Indies at the turn of the century, Nyai's father — assistant to a cruel colonial administrator — married his daughter off to a Dutch entrepreneur. He gloated to his wife, 'Sanikem is now richer than the Queen of Solo', not knowing that the Dutchman was, in fact, a failure. Nyai's father was unaware that the Dutchman had fled for Holland after legally dispossessing Nyai of the land and business she had worked her entire life to make profitable, as well as the custody of her own daughter.

Reading this, I sensed an obscure connection to the story of my own parents, whose international-intercultural relationship carried class expectations that didn't manifest in the way either had expected. Dad — the eldest child of a working-class, White, convict-settler family in Gosford — worked as a carpenter. In 1990, he had saved enough to afford an international boat trip to France with a layover in Indonesia. Mum was a hotel housekeeper when she met Dad in a Yogyakarta nightclub.

Dad never made it to France. After a few dates, Mum returned to the kampung with news that an Australian man had proposed to her. My grandparents — conservative Muslims who had only ever left Indonesia for Hajj — were confused. *What was this bule doing in Java? Why did he choose their eldest daughter?* However, the economic opportunity in Australia was too great to pass up. Wanting the best for their grandchildren, they accepted his proposal.

When Mum arrived in Australia, it wasn't the 'Diamond Life' she had imagined it would be. To make ends meet, she started a childcare centre from the back of our three-bedroom house in Tamworth — a business which she runs to this day.

My parents eked out a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle for me and my brothers. We had plenty of food, a computer with internet, two cars, and a holiday each year. On the occasions we returned to Indonesia, my eldest aunty would line up my cousins and instruct me to give them each the same amount of red 100,000-rupiah bills. This would create extra family time, as no one needed to pester me to buy them this or that, or squabble over who gets what. But no matter what strategies my aunty used, resentment and envy seemed inevitable. My uncle still made comments about how freely my dad's family spent money and my three teenage cousins gasped at the cost of my sunglasses.



In 2021, the World Economic Forum announced that the poorest half of the global population owned just 2% of the global wealth, while the richest 10% owned 76% of all wealth. Our current economic system uses the practice of artificial scarcity (having capacity to produce enough for everyone but restricting access to products for profit) and spreads an ideology of individualism (the idea that opportunity is equal and people arrive at their achievements through hard work alone). As a result, we get a society where community connection and solidarity are replaced by a violent mess of competing needs.

Capitalism produces disconnected bands of suspicious humans, afraid to help each other for fear of losing their own share. Sometimes, I have days where my only interaction with the community is someone giving me the middle finger out a car window or catching a sour whiff of the guy with the dog that sits outside Bankstown TAB.

Late capitalism has led us to a period in history fraught with economic and existential crisis. This generation is likely to be the first in Australia's history not to do as well as their parents: a 2019 report by the Grattan Institute found that 'economic pressures on the young have been exacerbated by

recent wage stagnation and rising under-employment’, concluding that ‘living standards have improved far less for younger Australians’.



While collecting cooking oil from my unused mie goreng bumbu sachets, I had the uplifting privilege of working with Sweatshop’s incredible community of First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse writers. Together we produced *Povo*, a new anthology devoted to empowering marginalised writers from low socio-economic status. Through stories that reflect their own experiences, these writers resist the White-dominated Australian literary community and the classism which plagues literature down to its flowery purple prose; the kind people generally associate with the idea of ‘good writing’.

Kicking off the anthology is Indigenous-Tongan writer, Forever Tupou, with a debut short story that left me awe-struck. In her writing, the present effect of colonial history pervades almost every sentence; examining the social influence of hardcore Christianity, alcohol’s ever-present role in the colony, the domination of patriarchy, and the problem of gambling — all in simple, direct and detail-packed prose that elegantly depicts the complexities of her community and relationships.

Like Tupou’s piece, many of the stories in this collection revolve around accommodation and property — an appropriate theme for a country experiencing an ever-worsening housing crisis. In August 2023, *The Guardian* revealed a report that found 1,600 Australians are pushed into homelessness each month. Many of the stories in *Povo* mimic these findings. Yasir Elgamil calls out Australia’s poor housing standards with a grim sense of humour. Victor Guan Yi Zhou gets down and out in Sydney’s north side — his character forced to choose between his aspirations and his identity. Rayann Bekdache chronicles the misfortunes of a woman who fights to protect her own space and time.

Out on the streets, Daniel Nour, Adrian Mouhajer and Natalia Figueroa Barroso write stories about cars — machines that act as visual signs of our current economic conditions and extensions of our identities. This is especially true in Western Sydney; a city that hums and growls with engines. Lines of brake lights snaking beyond the horizon; a WRX or a Skyline or an Evo are the key to standing out. Some blast their exhaust with custom bodywork and surfboard-sized spoilers. Others prefer to prove their individuality surreptitiously; literally getting ahead in their high-performing vehicles — anything to stick out from the tradies in their trucks and HiLuxes, broke boys in the backseats of the family Tarago or, god forbid, the poor souls riding the bus.

Accompanying houses and cars in this book is the theme of labour. Meyrnah Khodr subverts the myth of meritocracy with a working-class tale of loyalty and tragedy. In contrast, Helen Nguyen reveals the downside to upward social mobility; expressed by a story of guilt and longing for the people and experiences she's had to leave behind.

Palestinian-Australian writer, Katie Shammas; Afro-Brazilian-Australian writer, Guido Melo; and Ghanaian-Australian poet, Jessica Wendy Mensah contribute pieces that describe poverty as the force behind migration — linking the colonialism of the past with the poverty of today. Each of these pieces offers a new perspective on the journeys so many of us have made and continue to make throughout Australia: leaving the place and community where all our connections and familiarities lie to take a chance on an unknown future — language and memory the only tools left in the struggle to survive.

Alongside the contributions of these 'Sweatshop Writers', this publication is also gifted with the stories of newly arrived Australian storytellers. In May 2023, Sweatshop collaborated with the Asylum Seekers Centre — a Sydney-based organisation that provides support services, community engagement and legal advocacy for people seeking asylum in Australia.

Sweatshop General Manager, Winnie Dunn and I were fortunate to sit down with four incredible people — Khaled Elkady, Arash X, Sangee X and Thouraya Lahmadi — and collaborate with them to commit their stories to writing. We called the result *Fences*: a series of stories that range from heart-warming affection to unimaginable horror, each delivered in the distinctive, idiosyncratic voice of a writer still learning to navigate, among many other things, the English language.

I was also honoured to receive contributions that were commissioned and edited by award-winning author, activist and human rights lawyer, Sara M. Saleh. The collection — titled *Crumbs* — features five unique and incisive voices who write from diverse communities across Greater Sydney: Leila Mansour, Jenanne Ibrahim, Fahad Ali, Priyanka Bromhead and Nadia Demas. As a daughter of migrants from Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon, I could think of no one better than Sara to curate stories from such an eclectic array of emerging and established writers.

Further contributions include two collections of throw-ups we produced in partnership with Campbelltown City Council during workshops in Western Sydney high schools. The first collection is written by students of Leumeah High School. Labelled *Eshays*, these pieces are overflowing with teenage rage, love and anxiety as they struggle to discover their identity, endure migration and find their place in the world.

The second collection is from Macquarie Fields High School. Titled *Gutter*, these pieces remain untitled and anonymous due to the dangerous and illicit worlds that their all-too-young writers find themselves in. What's interesting here is that class is not only the subject of these stories, it's the style — each word loaded with the broad spectrum of socio-economic conditions throughout Western Sydney.

The final piece in *Povo* is by Kuku Djungan, Muluridji, Wakaman, Tagalaka, Kunjen, Warrgamay and Yindinji writer and actor: Phoebe Grainer. Her story depicts the dust and deprivation that drives young

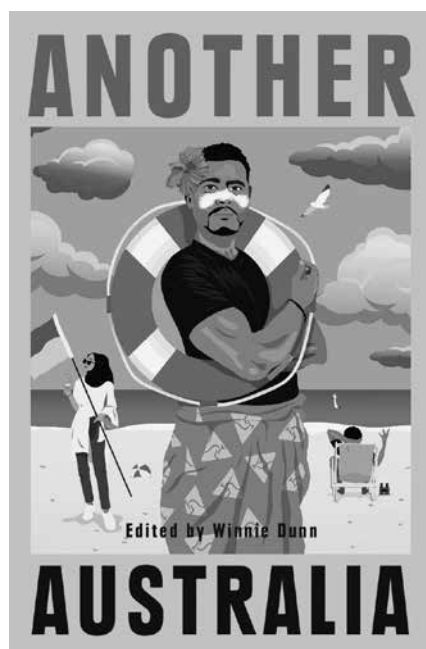
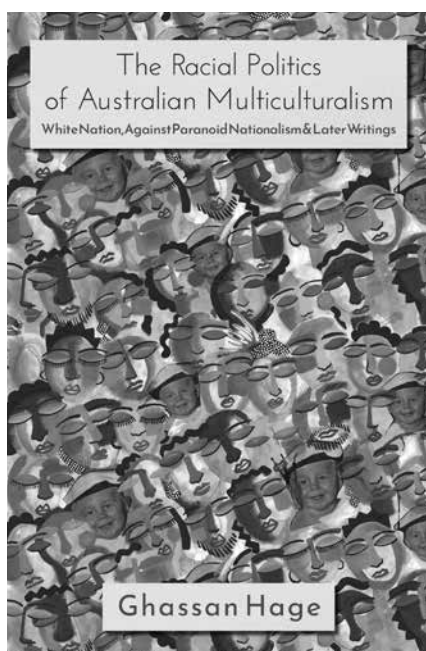
people away from country towns — the material realities that displace Indigenous youth from their families and communities. This compounds with the ongoing colonial violence that disconnects Indigenous people from Country. Writing from the less vocal side of Australia's city-country divide, Phoebe's writing acts as a counterpoint to Forever Tupou's opening depiction of urban poverty.

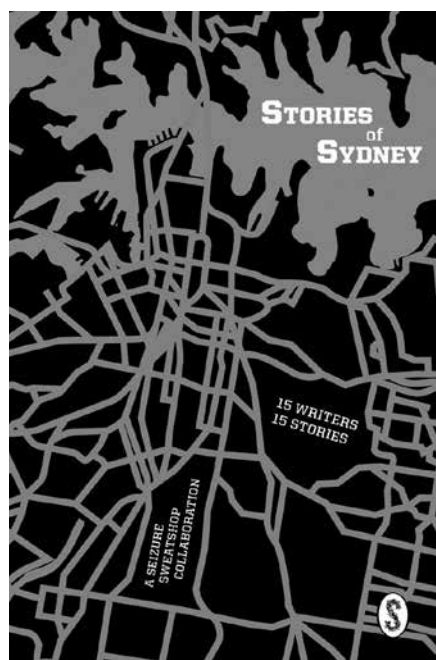
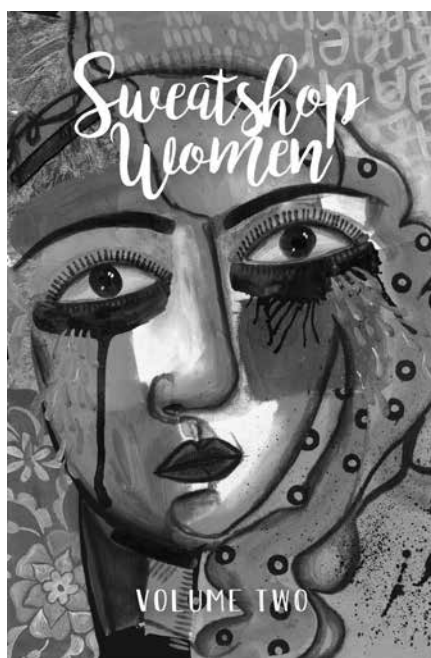
Addressing socio-economic difference in First Nations communities is of utmost importance when poverty continues to push young Indigenous people into a carceral justice system which has again and again proven lethal. Aboriginal deaths in custody are beyond measure; a terrible, ongoing horror that continues to plague and shame our country. This anthology is book-ended by two First Nations writers because it has been created on land that always was and always will be.

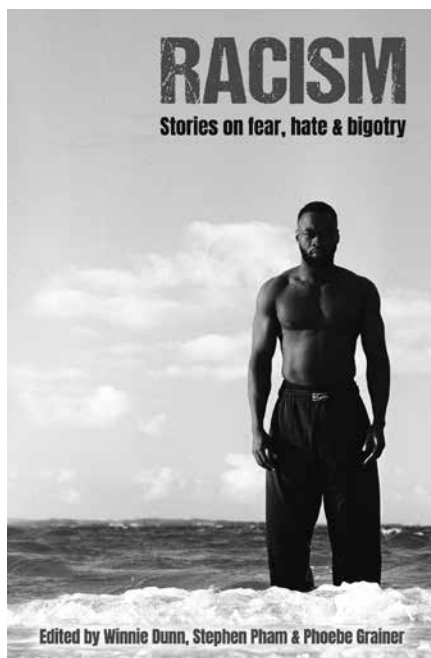
The stories in *Povo* are overflowing with the histories of nations, struggles for identity, family drama, unlikely triumph and profound tragedy. My hope for this anthology, like so many of our emotions, can be related to an aphorism once written by James Baldwin: 'You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read.' I hope this book falls into readers' hands at their loneliest of moments. Perhaps on break from a job they loathe having to do. Maybe hiding out at a library because they can't afford to heat or cool their home. Or stranded on a platform waiting for a train that may or may not come. I hope this book inspires people of low socio-economic backgrounds to see past class barriers and feel entitled to a safe and prosperous future. There's enough for everyone; as long as we dismantle the imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy that tells us otherwise.

More from Sweatshop

www.sweatshop.ws









Australia is often referred to as The Lucky Country – a land of economic opportunity and vast natural resources. But how does this myth square up against the true experiences of Indigenous and culturally diverse Australians living in our nation's most densely populated regions?

In this original and eclectic new anthology, emerging and established writers from First Nations, migrant and refugee backgrounds reveal the true wealth and beauty of Australia's cultural melting pots.

Featuring Forever Tupou, Victor Guan Yi Zhou, Natalia Figueroa Barroso, Meyrnah Khodr, Adrian Mouhajer, Rayann Bekdache, Daniel Nour, Arash X, Khaled Elkady, Sangee X, Thouraya Lahmadi, Lexus Katipa-Poa, Brennae Danielson, Zo'e Laufoli, Fahad Ali, Nadia Demas, Jenanne Ibrahim, Leila Mansour, Priyanka Bromhead, Helen Nguyen, Yasir Elgamil, Guido Melo, Jessica Wendy Mensah, Katie Shammass and Phoebe Grainer.