

After empire, after colony,
after white supremacy ...
twelve diverse writers imagine
an alternative Australia



After Australia

'This book challenges and enthrals
in equal measure. It is dynamite!'

CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS

Edited by Michael Mohammed Ahmad

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians on the lands on which we work and on which this book was produced, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. Always was always will be. Aboriginal land.

We embrace the principle of 'First Nations First': re-centring Australian history with Indigenous histories. We recognise that Australia's migration history began, and continues, on stolen land that has not been ceded; and that it is untenable to talk about race in Australia without situating it in the histories of dispossession and colonisation of Australia's First Peoples.



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The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.

— Malcolm X

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Black Thoughts

Unreconciliatory Futures

Hannah Donnelly

I'm gonna educate you gronks. I get pissed off when white people wear the Aboriginal flag. Hey you, yeah I'm talking to you. At protests, at exhibition openings, in selfies on Invasion Day, or because you lived in the Northern Territory for five years. I don't think there is ever a time in space for white bearers of the Koori flag. I should say Aboriginal flag cause south-east Aboriginal people, we don't own the flag. I had a Noongar housemate once who would always get annoyed when it came up and say, 'Yeh, you mean the Noongar flag.'

I used to have a sticker of the flag on my old red two-door Holden Barina. At the bottom, it said: one mob. I remember this footy head I hooked up with at the Koori Knockout laughed when he spotted it. 'Why do you have that sticker on your car?' Maybe, like so many others, he decided he was more black than me so he could laugh at my existence. Maybe he was just freaked out that I was parking my car out the front of his place when I stayed over and now his cousins knew he was sleeping with an Aboriginal woman and his masc Aboriginal self was disturbed. I don't know. He probably just wanted to make a Bob Marley reference, *one love one mob*.

After he pointed it out though, whenever I jumped in the car, the flag loomed large. It weighed on me so much that I started to think it must be weighing on everyone, and that a redneck with Southern Cross mudflaps would see it one day and try to run me off the road. Months after I stopped sleeping with Footy Head cause he was too much of a bitch, I was driving down to Coffs Harbour. I parked in a standard concrete residential parking lot with hedges and steel fences. I was gonna leave my car there and get a lift with another friend further down the coast. As I started getting out, I heard a wheelie bin rumble. I saw this older guy in double plugger thongs and Union Jack boardies taking his bins out right next to the boot of my Barina. I thought nah I gotta peel that sticker off, this fucker is gonna do some shit to my car if he sees the flag. Once Double Plugger was gone, I picked at the edges of the sticker furiously with my nails and it came off in flaky pieces. There was a dusty, sticky outline of where the flag had been. That outline never went away.

Everyone thinks that the flag belongs to them, to us the people, but that's not really true. Since 1995, it's been recognised as an official flag of Australia under the Flags Act, but only one person owns the copyright: Luritja artist Harold Thomas. It was the era of the Tent Embassy and land rights activism, and it became a symbol of the black power movement here in Australia. The flag is what those activists

needed for a united Aboriginal movement of many nations. Powerful stuff. Nowadays, the company that has exclusive rights to use the flag on apparel is co-owned by a man who got done for selling fake Aboriginal souvenirs through yet another company. That's capitalism in the colony for you: making money on what's real and what's fake without sparing a thought for the culture it represents.

It's as simple as etching three lines into any surface: one horizontal line, a circle followed by a horizontal line, some people might add two vertical lines to bracket the meaning. Either form is a secret message to the next blackfella who finds your scratchings. I was here. You are here. We are still here. And that's why the flag feels like ours when you wear it, no matter the copyright, or who profits, it's a pan-Aboriginal thing, not a tribal thing.

I read a rant on the internet that said Harold Thomas stole the design off another blackfella, let's call him Mr B, who was his student at a community college. Harold was eventually declared the owner of the copyright of this flag by the Federal Court. Two other people came forward to claim ownership of the copyright in 1997. Of course, one was a culture vulture white art student, and the other was Mr B. Over twenty years later Mr B was still trying to get what he thought was his due on the internet. When I read this viral post on Shitbook, I couldn't tell if it was just some right-wing troll on the other

end of the flag rant. See, the internet is the place where the undefinable cultural authorities and the right-wing Nazis can become the same thing. Would you ever expect a black person and Andrew Bolt to say the same thing? No, but fuck me dead it happens – what happens when an emu and a lamington walk into a bar? Crickets.

I don't dispute that Harold Thomas designed the flag. I just find the internet does remarkable things to the truth. *Standing on sacred ground* living on syndicated capitalist time. *Solid Rock* was written by white people. Out of all the various possible realities, Australia is just a glitch.

There are t-shirts you can buy that say 'Free the Flag' cause Aboriginal people get cease-and-desists from the fake art company. There are still local councils that won't fly the Aboriginal flag and I haven't even mentioned the Torres Strait Islander flag yet – the TI flag is another official flag of Australia, designed by the late Bernard Namok, and the copyright is held by the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. The TI flag and the Aboriginal flag are like cousins when they fly proud together over rooftops and entrances.

I remember when I asked my high school principal if we could leave the Aboriginal flag up after NAIDOC Week finished, he choked on his reconciliation scone and said, 'We'll have to think about it,' while licking jam and cream from his lips. In my last year of school, the principal

conceded to fly the flag outside of NAIDOC Week, but only on the condition that an Aboriginal student had to learn how to ceremoniously raise and lower the flag, and be responsible for doing it every day. I would get to the flagpole and raise my flag before the groundskeeper was able to raise the Aussie flag because I knew it was improper protocols and it would annoy the teachers. Black flag is black pride. I wear the black flag. I don't know what people see when I do. Possibly that I'm some unidentifiable minority with a Koori flag on. Maybe she's a quadroon. Maybe she's born with it. Maybe she's black black black.

It takes a village to write the future....

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magazine and The Street.

Climate catastrophe, police brutality, white genocide, totalitarian rule and the erasure of black history provide the backdrop for stories of love, courage and hope. In this unflinching new anthology, twelve of Australia's most daring Indigenous writers and writers of colour provide a glimpse of Australia's past, present and future as we head toward the year 2050.

FEATURING Claire G. Coleman,
Hannah Donnelly, Future D. Fidel,
Roanna Gonsalves, Ambelin Kwaymullina,
Kaya Ortiz, Michelle Law, Zoya Patel,
Sarah Ross, Omar Sakr, Khalid Warsame
and Karen Wyld.

