

# *Introduction*

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This is a book of ‘Own Voices’\* stories — stories about marginalised peoples told *by* people from those marginalised groups. The genesis of this collection was conversations across 2015 and 2016 where the two of us shared our frustration at the massive under-representation of diverse Australian voices in children’s and young adult (YA) literature and the lack of a formal movement in Australia to focus attention on, and tackle, systemic bias — or what we like to call *problems with the filter*.

We decided to do something about it. So we founded *Voices from the Intersection* in 2016 — a purely volunteer

\* This term was first coined by author Corinne Duyvis as a way of referring to stories about diverse characters written by authors from that same diverse group.

initiative with no funding or resources other than ourselves, our time, and our contacts across the writing and publishing industries.

*Voices* aims to support the creation of Own Voice stories through establishing publication and mentorship opportunities for emerging YA and children's writers, illustrators and publishing professionals who are First Nations, People of Colour, LGBTIQ+ or living with disability.

After successfully holding our inaugural publisher pitch day for almost forty emerging marginalised creators (writers and illustrators) in March 2017, we reached out to our contacts in publishing with the idea of creating an Own Voices collection for young adults.

The wonderful Fremantle Press embraced the anthology with enthusiasm. We were soon joined by a host of fiercely talented emerging and published writers from a spectrum of diverse and intersectional backgrounds. We were not surprised at the urgency and energy of the voices — for we knew the stories were out there. But even we couldn't have anticipated the degree to which we were awed and inspired by the tales in this anthology. To sit with these stories was to sit amongst stars; every one shining a light on to different experiences, and each a point of insight into the diversity — which is to say, the strength and truth — of Australia and its peoples.

Although we have put the stories in this anthology into

groups, we recognise the impossibility of confining these narratives, many of which speak to multiple aspects of identities and experiences. We are each enriched by our experiences but greater than our exclusion. Gathering stories into groups provides an entry point into the narratives, but once you enter the narratives themselves, you will find yourself in worlds that cannot be reduced to labels.

Our collection starts with the cover. This is Ambelin's contribution: a painting which tells the tale of this anthology — the strength of diverse voices, the links we make with each other; and the intersections of oppression that prevent us being heard. But these intersections can also be points of connection as we reach out to each other and the world to share our stories. Some of the intersections present in this anthology are mapped in this Introduction, but we don't presume to know them all. We hope that the readers of this collection will be inspired by both the experiences that are like their own and the ones that are not. We hope that they will reflect upon the many intersections within this book, and find their own points of connection with the stories told.

We begin the written contributions to this collection in the same way that Australia began — with the stories of First Nations peoples. Ellen van Neerven (Yugambeh) writes of dreams and football, of the complexities of being Black and Queer, and of fighting for your future. Graham Akhurst (Kokomini) speaks in poetry of culture and resilience, the

terror of colonisation and the great strength of First Peoples. Kyle Lynch (Wongi) writes memoir, a story told through dialogue of his search for a job that offers a powerful insight into life, hope and family in the Kurrawang Aboriginal Christian Community. Ezekiel Kwaymullina (Palyku) tells of being Aboriginal, dyslexic, and ignored, by the teachers supposed to teach him to read.

Ezekiel's story offers a point of connection with the next group of stories in the anthology: those of Australians living with a disability. Olivia Muscat relates the experience of losing her sight, a vanishing of written words and a changing of worlds. Chinese-Australian writer Mimi Lee tells of culture, family and coming to terms with mental illness. Jessica Walton writes a poignant tale of finding connections from the perspective of a character who is (like her) Queer and living with the phantom pain of a missing limb.

This brings us to stories from LGBTIQ+ writers that speak through time and space. Kelly Gardiner sets her tale in the 1950s, writing of the meeting of young Queer women against a backdrop of espressos, Frank Sinatra and motorbikes. Jordi Kerr pens a magical speculative fiction tale of difference and acceptance in rural Australia. Yvette Walker reaches through time to provide comfort and wisdom to her younger self. Melanie Rodriga writes about assembling aspects of identity across generations, bringing together what it is to be Eurasian and Queer. Rafeif Ismail contributes her award-winning story of identity,

hatred, and the power of love through the ages. And Omar Sakr pens a stark, powerful memoir of connection and disconnection, sharing with us a moment of his life as a Queer Arab-Australian.

Our last group of stories offers perspectives from People of Colour and writers of diverse cultural backgrounds that are grounded in little written-about migrant experiences. Muslim author Amra Pajalic, child of Bosnian migrant parents, writes about struggling to acclimate to monocultural Australian high school life. Wendy Chen shines a light on the lives of Chinese-Australian migrants at the time of Federation. Michelle Aung Thin, Burmese by ethnicity, Canadian, then Australian by circumstance and a migrant many times over, interrogates the process of negotiating who you are in the context of where you are. Alice Pung challenges us to step into the shoes of a teenage boy who comes to question everything he's ever known, or been told, about Asians. Rebecca's contribution rounds out the collection by highlighting what mainstream Australia rarely experiences — what it means to be without privilege, or language, in a new country.

We are the voices too often unheard, the people too often unseen. But we are here; we are speaking. And through this book, we invite you into our worlds.

Meet us at the intersections.