

**THE  
BIG  
BLACK  
THING**

***CHAPTER. 1***



# THE BIG BLACK THING *CHAPTER. 1*

***Edited by***

Michael Mohammed Ahmad  
and Winnie Dunn

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander writing edited by***

Ellen van Neerven

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# Production Team

**Editors** / Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Winnie Dunn

**Editor: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writing** / Ellen van Neerven

**Assistant Editors** / Tamar Chnorhokian and Mariam Cheik-Hussein

**Project Photographer** / Socorro Cifuentes

**Layout and Design** / Nadine Beyrouti

**School Workshop Facilitators** / Winnie Dunn, Ellen van Neerven, Emma Hicks, Mariam Cheik-Hussein, Socorro Cifuentes, Tamar Chnorhokian and Michael Mohammed Ahmad

**Special Thanks** / Michael Campbell, Executive Director, WestWords / Anthony Uhlmann, Director, Western Sydney University Writing and Society Research Centre / Anne McLean, Manager, Western Sydney University Schools Engagement / Kate Clarkson, Creative Arts and ESL Teacher, Lurnea IEC and High School / Rosemary Ferris, ESL Teacher, Lurnea IEC / Helen Lee, Head Teacher, Lurnea IEC / Maha Adler, Head Teacher English, Languages and ESL, Sir Joseph Banks High School / Augusta Supple, Senior Manager, Engagement, Partnerships and Development, Create NSW

# Foreword

People are always asking me why our organisation is called Sweatshop. ‘Where are the sewing machines?’ one writer scoffed when she visited my office for the first time.

The origin of the word ‘text’ is from the Latin meaning ‘woven’. No person who works in Sweatshop comes with a needle and a thread but there is a lot of stitching. The goal of Sweatshop is the same as that of any sweatshop, to weave. And just like a sweatshop, most of the people that become involved with us identify as marginalised: young writers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that struggle to have their voices heard and their experiences valued amongst Australia’s dominant White culture.

It is only the outcomes of Sweatshop that differ from what we consider to be a *real* sweatshop. While sweatshops are spaces that disempower and dehumanise people, Sweatshop: Western Sydney Literacy Movement aims to provide Australians from Indigenous, migrant and refugee backgrounds with the tools to counteract racist, sexist, classist and homophobic narratives that are often encoded in mainstream media, film, television, computer games and literature.

This model draws its influence from African-American author, feminist and social activist, bell hooks, who recognises that freedom and justice in any culture are always connected to mass-based literacy movements.

In this publication, young and emerging writers from non-English speaking backgrounds reclaim narratives about their identities with stories and poems that push the English language to its linguistic limits. This includes eight works of short fiction from the Western Sydney Writers Group. Louisa Badayala's prose is haunted by the Aboriginal-Muslim spirit. Winnie Dunn speaks to God and Tonga in the urgent and exciting new voice of Pasifika-Australian literature. Monikka Elish and Shirley Le explore the complex social interactions of 'funny ethnic chicks'. Stephen Pham and Jason Gray detail the confusing dynamics between women and underclass boys of colour. Nitin Vengurlekar introduces us to Non-Resident Indians and Peter Polites gives us a taste of the queer-suburban noir with an excerpt from his debut novel, *Down the Hume* (Hachette, 2017). The poets in this collection blend the languages of their ancestors with contemporary Australian English to create new and hybrid cultural identities – Jessica Mensah mocks White sentimentality with the colours of Ghana and Maryam Azam fashions the hijab with a re-examination of 'East meets West'.

This anthology also features the work of young writers from Sir Joseph Banks High School and Lurnea High School. Students

from first, second and third generation Arab, Asian, South Asian, African and Pasifika backgrounds between the ages of twelve and seventeen years old take us between the local and the international, the ordinary and the extraordinary. From fighting for crabs with chopsticks in Bankstown to bombs that drop on the house of Jamila Street in Baghdad, these storytellers reveal the eclectic and resilient fabric of contemporary multicultural Australia.

Alongside the contributions of so many new Australians, this anthology is blessed with a major contribution from First Australians – a collection of stories by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers from Western Sydney. The collection, ‘Work Talk Later’, was edited by award-winning Yugambah author, Ellen van Neerven, who shares her insights into the development of the works with an introduction on page 71.

Lastly, Sweatshop is delighted to be showcasing the photography of lina Kastoumis with her graphic feature called #commutorama. This is a rare compilation of Instagram images and captions that lina produced while commuting on public transport throughout Sydney. I have always admired lina’s eye – her ability to recognise the beauty, diversity and absurdity of the anonymous human animal. One photograph she calls ‘The Big Black Thing’, a name that we have respectfully borrowed from lina for the title of this book.

It is troubling times ahead as fantasies of White supremacy begin to reveal themselves throughout Australia with the re-emergence of One Nation, and throughout the world with Brexit in Europe and the rise of Trump in the United States of America. We push up against the racists, xenophobes, orientalists, colonialists and imperialists with this diverse collection of stories and poems, this big black thing...

*Michael Mohammed Ahmad / Sweatshop Director*

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# What Makes An Asian Feel Good

*Ricky Tran*

---

I live in a family that consists of brother, my mum and me. We live in an area that mostly consists of Muslims. The exterior of our house is run-down. That's on purpose so we let ourselves get purposely looked down on. The reason for this is because we never looked for help or money. This makes us feel good. I don't understand why but it does.

I remember a time where our electronic automatic garage had broken down. This was when I was six. I couldn't do much, so we asked our neighbour to take it down. Ten years later, I took a look and after putting it back on, I realised the timing was off so I fixed that. A couple of days passed and my neighbour, a different one from the one who took it down, asked my mum where she bought it.

# Cloth of Roses

*Jessicca Mensah*

---

The origami curves of the petals that  
French kissed and hugged tightly  
Are never desiring to me  
The Gold Coast girl

Roses mean nothing  
Nothing to the coastal girl  
She smells the remains of gold  
Not the sunny feels of joy

Frail old woman of roses  
Smiling gravely, I kissed her  
Fixing my graduation hat  
I smelled the rose  
in her hand

I'm from the West  
Red, yellow, black and green  
In stripes of unity  
*Kente* is richest Love

Valentine to girls  
Royalty to boys  
Power to men  
Fertility to women

# God Said Different

*Alex Aditia*

---

I lived in Indonesia, correctly in Kalimantan East. In my age, five year olds, my mum took me from Java East to Kalimantan East by plane. I didn't really enjoy the trip because the car was bad and the road was terrible and long long long long long so many long away and it felt like one year to waiting to get in to airport. I solved this with one thing it was asleep. When I got to airport I felt the trip like flashlight. My mum and I were getting ready to go into the room where people waiting for their planes to go. I waited and felt unlucky in my life because my father died when I was baby. My dad was working in mining company. My mum said he was a good person and worked hard, that he never gave up to get what he wanted, but God said different. He took my father away while he was in the truck. I don't really know what was going on with him. My mum hasn't ready yet to tell me about my dad's face.

I didn't know I have to give the ticket to the security in the waiting room and I got shocked because he torn my ticket and I was so angry I was still young but I wasn't scare to fight with big guy.

I punched him and I said, 'What's wrong with you sir, why did you torn my ticket?'

'It's okay, kid, I helped you to go in plane faster, because your mum brought children so I helped you to get in plane faster,' said security. The plane took off and I was sitting next to the wing of the plane. I saw so many different shape of land. I went go to city called Sangatta, small city in Kalimantan East. If you check on map perhaps the city is disappeared.

My mum woke me in our new house. It was state houses. The houses were built in big land and bought from the mine company where my father worked. It was a treasure from my dad to my mum. The house that I stayed in was small and it big enough for me and for my mum and for one shop where we get income. Two days after I came to the house I got started to school in SDN 002 SANGATTA UTARA, which was primary school. I was fast to making friends with the student in SDN 002 SANGATTA UTARA.

I was playing in front of my house and I saw one kid. I called after him and his name was Hannan. He was quiet person and shy to meet new friends. We played together like going on adventure. Hannan's house had little farm where we played around it. After we played, a kid came after us. I was so curious who is this boy

and I didn't know his name. He came to us and he introduced himself as Edo.

'Edo, let's play with us?' said Hannan. He comes and we were now play chase a monster, where one person has to chase other player.

'I'm so trusty. I'm away to get drink,' Edo said.

'Can I get free water?' I replied him.

He came back with three bottles syrup water. We were so happy and after few hours a kid called Mamman comes. 'Guys, what are you doing? Who is this guy?' said Mamman.

'He is Alex, he is new in here,' Edo and Hannan said.

'Anyway I don't care about him. Hey you poor!' shouted Mamman to me.

I couldn't say anything. I didn't know what to say.

'Do you have a toy?'

'Nope.' I said. I felt crying.

I don't know why people making friends depends on the level of rich.

# Campeões

*Masen Guerreiro*

---

For the first time ever my country Portugal won the EuroCup 2016 for *Futéball*. The game was on at five o'clock in the morning. I was really tired but I had to cheer on Portugal. Mum's rules. I was really nervous about the game. My mum was yelling, 'Ô *Masèn* put your jersey on. Avo and Avo are waiting at Petersham.' So I rushed and put my jersey on and went in the car. When I entered the area I could hear car horns and people screaming: '*Força Portugal, Vivè Portugal!*' I bought my flag out and started swinging it side-to-side with the wind pushing the flag to full stretch. Everywhere I looked was green and red. We had flares, drums and air horns. I thought we were gonna lose when Cristiano Ronaldo got injured after twenty-five minutes of playing time. The game went to extra time with ten mins to go. Èder scored and I went crazy screaming with a bit of tears. When the *Poliça* closed the street for us everyone was too drunk to realise. My mum was on ABC News and I was on Channel 9. My whole family was in the newspaper. We are the *campeões* of European League.

# The Burning Chicken

*Teddy William Owuor*

---

I used to live in Mombasa. I used to hang out with my friends in Kiembeni to Bamburi. In Kiembeni there were three estates. The first estate was called Red Estate because it was a red tiles roofing and single and cheap. Second estate was called Green Estate because it was green roofing sheets, double decker rooms and a little bit expensive. The third estate was called Blue because it was blue roofing sheets and two top floors and very expensive. I was living in Red Estate in a small trap house together with my mum because she can afford it.

When my mum got a job opportunity for a manager in Tanzania for three months, she decided that she goner leave me with one of my aunty daughter, my cousin Doreen. Doreen was tall, thin and black beauty looking and she was twenty years old. She lived with her mum in a town called Kisauni and she used to have night

shift job for a waitress in a hotel in a city called Shimber Hills. I was going to a new Baraka High School in Form One after my mum travelled and left me with Doreen. I was sixteen years old. Once I went to high school, I met one boy who was called Stanley. He was tall, skinny, black round face like a koala. He became my best friend.

One day Stanley came at my home to pick me up. We were going to school but we made a u-turn on our way. Stanley decided that we goner meet up with some of his friends who lived in Blue Estate. We didn't even step on the school compound at all. We strolled down the street with our black and white school uniform while Stanley made jokes of anybody we bumped into like, 'His face looks like old granny ass.' We laughed so loudly like hyenas. Blue Estate was near an ant hole police station. For me since I was a junior I didn't like the police because they were so greedy and selfish and I was afraid of them because I don't even pray to be sent in that miserable boot. We crossed the road and then we turned left in narrow path. Next to it there was a small ground that I used to play soccer when I was still a junior. Opposite to the ground there was a house where we used to smash up the roof and windows with a ball and the owner got so angry and she started chasing us out of the estate with a big bamboo stick.

We got to the old, rusty, creepy gate and it seemed like Stanley knows to open it already. I asked Stanley what are we doing around here but he told me to hold my horses so I chilled and watched

Stanley play the captain. When we were in the bushy compound Stanley started whistling like crow that has seen a prey, signalling somebody. I saw somebody peeping on the houses window like a big rat hiding from the wild, hungry cat with one eye shut. He made me feel like I was being haunted by the owner spirit ghost. Stanley's friend was wearing black clothes all over his body like *Men in Black*. He opened the door, threw the key to Stanley and told Stanley to lock the gate once we get in. When we got to the veranda I waited for Stanley to lock the gate to get in with him at the same time. Stanley pushed the door wide open and a weird smell banged my face straight to my nose like someone was roasting a chicken with butter oil. Stanley went straight into the room but I was frozen. The room was so foggy so I couldn't see through very properly. Stanley came back and grabbed my hand and pulled me inside the room. I didn't have a choice but to get into the hot cooking pan.

Inside the house I saw a lot of statues placed on the table every single corner and the wall pictures were looking at me with eagle eye until I was filled with cold. The house was looking like small maritime museum. There were three strange people sitting in the sitting room and they were all looking at me wondering who I was. Stanley introduced me to Henry. Henry had an oval head and a little bit tall and slender with a brawn timber half-cast skin and a shaggy afro. Henry was the one lived in that big mysterious house all alone because his grandmum travelled to Holland and left him to take care of the house. Next, Stanley introduced me

to Mathew. Mathew was short, normal body size and black short hair and he looked older because his face was like gorilla being pissed off by poachers. Finally, the last guy Stanley introduced me was called Eric. Eric was a little bit short, medium body size and warthog face. Stanley and I sat down and relaxed like we were in our house. I asked Henry to check the kitchen because it looked like something was burning but then they all started to laugh at me like a crazy mad guys. They all said nobody was in the kitchen and nothing was burning. Eric bent under the chair and removed a big plate filled with marijuana particles rolled with white pieces of paper. My eyes popped out like a grenade and my heart started pumping like a horse racing to be the world champion. A little sweat dropped down on my face like a River Nile at the things what they were doing. It was above the law. I had seen many people arrested and sent to prison for ten good years with my own two naked eyes. The house made me worry much more because it was near the police station and I didn't want to be arrested. I asked Henry if he could show me where the bathroom was and he pointed right at the corner near the kitchen. I walked very quickly into the loo and locked myself inside and sat down, think what should I do next.

I heard the main gate been banged very hardly with a strong icon. Stanley was yelling at me to open the toilet door. I let Stanley in and locked it again. When I looked at Stanley he was frozen like ice bag. I asked Stanley who was that banging the gate so hard and he said it was the police officer and no one wanted to open

the gate. I looked up to the top of the ceiling. There was a space that Stanley and I could fit very nicely where nobody can notice us. I gave Stanley a boost and he climbed up. I unlocked the toilet door and Stanley lifted me up to the ceiling. We remained quiet. The police broke the gate with their big guns and got into the house and started searching the room. Henry, Eric and Mathew got caught where they were hiding. The house was still filled with marijuana smoke. Stanley and I could hear the police asking them if anyone is still hiding but Henry, Eric and Mathew thought we had escaped through the back door. The police found the evidence. Before they left one of the police officers came to pee. Stanley and I could see him holding the big gun and big army jacket. I held my breath for long until my face turned red.

The police arrested Henry, Eric and Mathew and they were taken to the police boot. Stanley and I walked out of that big disaster house and we never go back. Henry, Eric and Mathew were released with ten thousand each.



Teddy William Owuor, Lurnea High School, photo by Socorro Cifuentes



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The Big Black Thing: Chapter. 1 is the first issue in a new series of prose and poetry by emerging and established writers from Indigenous, migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Featuring Peter Polites, Winnie Dunn, Stephen Pham, Shirley Le, Jason Gray, Maryam Azam, Louisa Badayala, Jessica Mensah, Nitin Vengurlekar, Monikka Eliah, Socorro Cifuentes, Iina Kastoumis, Ricky Tran, Alex Aditia, Masen Guerreiro, Teddy William Owuor, Hisham Mallah, Eteroma Hunt, Mohamed Lababidi, Nancy Huynh, Kyaw Kyaw Phyo, Kelvin Yu, Ali Haydar, Jessica Tran, Kane Harrington, Kiarna Evans, Mark Streeter, Courtney Miller, Hamani Tanginoa, Adina Aslett-Robertson, Shanae Hajsinger, Taylah Hansen, Mary Al-Nashy, Omar El-Ali, Dani Mejbek, Samer Mejbek, Gilbert Tran, Breeze Makiri, Hanane Elnajjar, Matati Hunt, Maryian Nagib and Idarosareen Soalo.



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