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Minority identity and counter-discourse: Indigenous Australian and Muslim-Australian authors in the young adult fiction market

Abstract:

This article traces the increasing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and Muslim-Australian authors in the Australian young adult fiction market. Using bibliographical data drawn from the AustLit database, the article first outlines the general parameters of young adult publishing in Australia since the 1990s, before specifically examining the works produced by Indigenous Australian and Muslim-Australian authors. These two groups share a significant characteristic: although they are often at the forefront of current Australian public discourse, they are more often the object of such speech than the speaking subject. This article examines the extent to which young adult fiction provides a platform for these authors.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Creative writing – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors – Muslim-Australian authors – young adult fiction – self-representation – Australian publishing

Introduction

In a recent guest post for Melbourne's Wheeler Centre, Ambelin Kwaymullina spoke about why readers need diversity in Australian YA fiction:

We need diverse books because a lack of diversity is a failure of our humanity. Literature without diversity presents a false image of what it is to be human. It masks – and therefore contributes to – the continuation of existing inequities, and it widens the gulfs of understanding that are already swallowing our compassion for each other (2015b).

Kwaymullina's focus is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) writers, but her argument applies to the range of voices available in Australian writing. In such spaces as Kwaymullina's article, 'diversity' has become a clarion call for both writers and readers. But for Australian writers of young adult fiction, what are the boundaries of the space that needs diversification?

This paper sets out to map young adult novels in Australia and the extent to which they act as a platform for particular examples of diverse voices. Firstly, using data drawn from the AustLit database, the paper outlines the boundaries of young adult publishing: how many young adult novels are being published in Australia, and how are these numbers changing over time? Secondly, the paper explores the extent to which Australian young adult fiction provides a voice for diverse Australian authors. In particular, it examines the novels published by two particular groups of writers: Indigenous writers and Muslim-Australian writers. These two disparate identities are the focus of a great deal of interpretation, discussion, debate, and vitriol in contemporary Australian discourse. But the dominant voices are rarely from within the communities under discussion – which, historically speaking, is not a new phenomenon. The latter part of this essay, then, outlines the ways in which young adult fiction offers a channel for Indigenous and Muslim voices.

Establishing the Parameters

To gain a broad understanding of the current nature of the young adult fiction market in Australia, it is necessary to first set out exactly what market is under discussion. What is young adult publishing in Australia? How great is the number of novels? Are the numbers of new novels increasing or is a rise in public debate about young adult fiction merely creating that illusion? What follows is an attempt to delineate the boundaries of the space under discussion when we talk about Australian young adult fiction, by using bibliographical data to analyse, firstly, how many young adult novels are being published in Australia by Australian authors and, secondly, whether that figure has changed over recent decades. The source for these figures is the AustLit database.

A database of biographical and bibliographical records on Australian writing from before colonisation to the present day, AustLit is unique as an attempt to map the entirety of a national literature, using data that is collected, assessed, and indexed by researchers. The database records the publication history of works written by Australian authors and about Australia, with a strong emphasis on fiction and literary

criticism. AustLit draws its content from a range of sources, including the deposit collections of the National Library of Australia (whose new acquisitions are added to the AustLit database on a monthly basis), pre-existing bibliographies (from the canonical, such as Miller and Macartney, to the highly specific, such as *The MUP Encyclopedia of Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy*), and original research by AustLit researchers. The database also includes works that are not always included in the current model of deposit collections, including ebooks, self-published works, and works published outside Australia¹. Unlike many generalised databases, AustLit records the cultural heritage of authors (where asserted by the author): in addition to the unique BlackWords dataset (a collection of records of works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors), AustLit has an ongoing policy of recording the heritage of non-Indigenous authors, a process that began in the bicentennial year of 1988.

AustLit's potential for enabling a combination of broad-ranging quantitative research and more traditional qualitative methods has formed the basis of a number of innovative research projects, from work on magazine readership in the 1930s to bibliographies of asylum-seeker narratives. Furthermore, the database has a strong record of mapping children's and young adult fiction. Early collaborations involved work with the LuRees Archives at the University of Canberra (Australia's largest and most complete archive of children's and young adult literature) under the auspices of Belle Alderman, Australia's first Professor of Children's Literature, including adding the contents of the archive's catalogue to the AustLit database. Later collaborations included work with the Children and Youth Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology under the auspices of centre director and children's literature researcher Kerry Mallan. AustLit's uniqueness as a database of national literature, its inclusion of the authors' cultural heritage, and the richness of its records in children's and young adult fiction make it an unparalleled resource for examining both the parameters of young adult fiction and the diversity of its authors.

Crunching the numbers

AustLit divides fiction for young readers into two genres: 'children's' (from preschool-aged picture books to fiction for readers in higher primary-school grades) and 'young adult' (works aimed at readers of high-school age). The division is bibliographical rather than critical: a means of enabling nuanced searches of the database's content, drawing from the self-identification of the works by authors and booksellers. A combined search of the AustLit database on the form 'novel' and the genre 'young adult' returns a result of nearly 3000 individual works. Organised chronologically, the results show how comparatively recent a genre young adult writing is: the vast majority of these young adult novels have been published since 1990. Furthermore, the figures support the generally held belief that Australian writers are publishing young adult writing in increasing numbers: more than 50% of the total young adult novels recorded on AustLit have been published since 2000. Those are what we might call the 'big picture' figures. They break down as follows: as at May 2015, AustLit records 2798 young adult novels by Australian authors. Of

these, 2290 have been published since 1990, or 81.8% of the total number of young adult novels. Indeed, 1450 were published between 2000 and 2014 inclusive, amounting to 51.8% of the total number of young adult novels.²

When the figures are broken down by decade, they show a steady but slow increase over the period of biggest growth. So while over 50% of the total young adult novels recorded in AustLit have been published since 2000, the difference in the average number of annual publications in the 1990s and in the 2000s is small: 840 individual young adults novels were published by Australian authors between 1990 and 1999 (an average of 84 new titles per year), compared to 861 published between 2000 and 2009 (an average of 86 new titles per year). The figures show a smooth, if not steady, increase until 2010: between 2010 and 2014 inclusive, 589 young adult novels were published by Australian authors, an average of 118 new titles per year.³

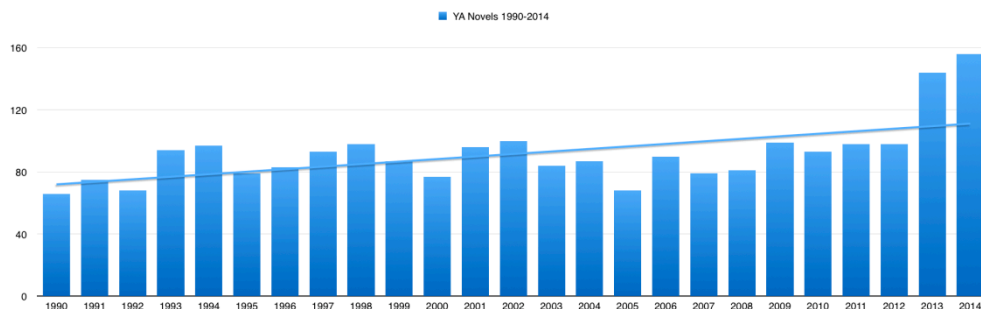


Fig. 1. Numbers of young adult novels published in Australia each year since 1990, including a trend line marking the gradual, steady increase in numbers.

Do these figures suggest that young adult fiction is dominating the Australian literary marketplace? Not precisely. In fact, young adult novels as a percentage of the total number of novels published by Australians has been dropping steadily even as the number of actual young adult novels being published is rising. Between 1990 and 1999, Australian authors published 3714 individual novels, including young adult novels; the 840 young adult novels represented 22.6% of the total. Between 2000 and 2009, Australian authors published 4446 novels; the 861 young adult novels represented 19.4% of the total. And between 2010 and 2014, Australian authors published 3940 novels; the 589 young adult novels represented 14.95% of the total. Young adult novels are rising in numbers, but novels other than young adult are rising even faster.

1990-1999			2000-2009			2010-2014		
Year	All Novels	YA Novels	Year	All Novels	YA Novels	Year	All Novels	YA Novels
1990	291	66	2000	485	77	2010	520	93
1991	314	75	2001	423	96	2011	548	98
1992	303	68	2002	442	100	2012	717	98
1993	314	94	2003	443	84	2013	1146	144
1994	370	97	2004	475	87	2014	1009	156
1995	381	79	2005	430	68			
1996	419	83	2006	413	90			
1997	430	93	2007	440	79			
1998	428	98	2008	430	81			
1999	464	87	2009	465	99			

Fig. 2. The numbers of novels published by Australian writers each year since 1990, based on AustLit data. The 'all novels' figure includes young adult novels.

But while young adult fiction is by no means dominating the Australian market numerically, the AustLit data indicates that it is a steadily rising literary bracket. That is not to say that this data represents the totality of Australian young adult fiction. No bibliography can (or should) claim to be entirely comprehensive. Of particular relevance to young adult fiction, for example, are the ways in which models of self-publishing often resist the traditional pathways of scholarly bibliography: authors of self-published works do not always send their works to deposit libraries, nor are they always reviewed in mainstream journals. While AustLit does include self-published works, an Australian author who publishes exclusively through a US-based self-publishing company (such as Xlibris or CreateSpace) can remain hidden from even rigorous bibliographical pathways. Such authors, however, will not be the majority, and the raw figures available via the AustLit database remain the most comprehensive available. These figures indicate that young adult fiction is a peculiarly current literary form and one that is flourishing in the Australian publishing industry.

Diversity and Australia's multiculturalism

As young adult fiction flourishes, the questioning of its diversity increases. In the larger US fiction market, this questioning process is leading to purpose-built collectives designed to actively facilitate change in the market, including the reader-driven We Need Diverse Books social-media campaign (founded 2014) and the author-driven Diversity League (also founded 2014). Similarly active reader-driven and author-driven debates are also evident in Australia's much smaller fiction market. Australian young adult readers are particularly active on Twitter, creating a community discussion around the #loveOzYA hashtag. In turn, the hashtag is connected to a curated Goodreads list ('Sharing the best that Australian YA literature has to offer'), allowing a community of readers to easily access, share, and review books.⁴ Indeed, the hashtag has gained such traction that Readings (a series of Melbourne-based bookshops, with a strong social-media presence and strong social outreach programs) now include a category on their online bookstore called 'LoveOzYA', enabling readers to browse a selection of Australian-written young adult novels, rather than to have to search for these among international and non-YA

books. While the #loveOzYA hashtag is not solely focused on diversity, it provides a space in which such discussions coalesce. Of the Australian authors who have been active in discussions of diversity, Ambelin Kwaymullina is perhaps the most prominent, but she is not the sole voice: novelist Justine Larbalestier, for example, has used her blog as a platform for such discussions (Bysshe 2014). Furthermore, as I will address in more detail in below, publishing houses, especially Indigenous publishing houses, are increasingly engaged with diversity. Discussions of the extent to which Australian young adult fiction represents the population's diversity are not being driven solely by readers or solely by publishers, but are beginning to permeate all aspects of the industry.

Despite the heading of this section, 'diversity' is not, of course, solely a question of ethnicity and cultural background. Discussions of diversity also include physical disabilities, neurodiversity, and diversity in gender and sexuality. In short, diversity counterbalances what public discourse presents as normativity, providing an umbrella term applying to all perspectives that are not part of a country's dominant cultural discourse. In one way, the very value of 'diversity' lies in its broadness as a term: 'diversity' is an easily grasped handle for a set of mobile critical perspectives that can be moved from country to country, from genre to genre, from difference to difference. So what does 'diversity' mean in Australia and in young adult fiction?

Ethnicity and cultural background have long been at the heart of Australian engagement with diversity. In discussions of Australian writing, 'diversity' is often shorthand for 'works by writers from backgrounds other than Anglo-Celtic (both English-speaking and non-English-speaking)'. As Ien Ang and Jonathan Stratton point out, Australian multiculturalism has been 'a centrepiece of official government policy' since the early 1970s (1998: 22). However, they also emphasise that 'multiculturalism is a policy that recognises and confirms cultural diversity, not non-racialism' (Ang and Stratton 1998: 31-32). That is, Australian multiculturalism and the increase in (primarily European) migration in the post-World War II period 'did not overturn the racially-based two-tiered structure which distinguished Europeans from non-Europeans, white from non-white, included and excluded' but rather served to 'introduce an element of diversity within the category 'white'' (Ang and Stratton 1998: 32). 'Multiculturalism' in Australia built up against a background of the White Australia Policy and the forced assimilation of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, a conflicted position that is reflected in a conflicted language.

Research into Australian multicultural writing began to accelerate in the 1970s—not coincidentally, the same period in which 'multiculturalism' gained official government traction. Since then, various terms have been in play, both simultaneously and independently, to describe this writing: multicultural writing, migrant writing, non-Anglo-Celtic writing, ethnic writing, NESB (Non English Speaking Background) writing, ethnic minority writing (see Ommundsen 2004). None of these terms is entirely satisfactory:

'migrant' does not accurately cover the experience and work of second-generation writers; 'ethnic' and 'multicultural' have been taken to suggest that only ethnic

minorities can lay claim to ethnicity and multiculturalism (the mainstream being somehow ethnically and culturally neutral) (2004).

Ommundsen also notes other anxieties evident in these discussions of terminology, including uncertainty about whether categorisation would instead prove to be ghettoisation, and the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors from terminology that is largely grounded in migration. Ang and Stratton, meanwhile, argue that even 'Anglo-Celtic' (often used as the 'neutral' base term) carries its own assimilationist history (1998: 26). The history of discussing diversity in Australian writing is also a history of divisive terminology.

Given this history, what concerns arise in combining Indigenous Australians and Muslim-Australians in one argument? The perspectives of the two groups could be seen as diametrically opposed, given that Indigenous Australians are the country's original inhabitants, while a majority of Muslim-Australians were born outside Australia. This paper does not argue that Indigenous Australians and Muslim-Australians approach a critique of mainstream Australian culture from the same perspective. But the two groups have one key similarity: the question of engagement in public discourse. For some years, Indigenous Australians and Muslim-Australians have been at the centre of an increasing whirlwind of national public discourse, triggered by events such as (for Indigenous Australians) the landmark land rights rulings of the 1990s and the Northern Territory National Emergency Response ('the Intervention') in 2007 or (for Muslim-Australians) the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005. More importantly, both groups are more often the *object* of such discourse, rather than a participatory subject.

Both Indigenous Australians and Muslim-Australians are sidelined by an Australian public discourse that Sharyn Pearce describes as 'an argument in which white racists and white multiculturalists both see their nation structured around a white culture which they control, with Aboriginal people and migrants as exotic objects – the ethnic and racial Other – within this space' (2006: 58). At first, a similar pattern seems evident in young adult fiction, with white Australian authors incorporating Indigenous mythology into their writing or providing the voices of Muslim characters. But, as a closer look at the works demonstrates, the increase in the young adult market is accompanied by an increase in the number of works by Indigenous and Muslim-Australian writers.

Indigenous authors and Young Adult fiction

Indigenous Australian characters and elements of Dreamtime mythology have long been topics for Australian children's and young adult fiction. But, historically, such works have rarely been written by Indigenous Australian authors and discussions of these works betray a long-standing concern that authors writing from outside the culture cannot help but display an anthropological distance from the subject. As Robyn Sheahan-Bright notes, Indigenous Australia as a subject for young readers accelerated in the mid twentieth century, and novels such as Kylie Tennant's *All the Proud Tribesmen* (1959), Judith Wright's *The Day the Mountains Played* (1960), and Nan Chauncy's *Tangara* (1960) began to dominate the Children's Book Council of

Australia (CBCA) Awards lists (2011: 6-7). But with very few exceptions—primarily *The Legends of Moonie Jarl* (1964) and the collaborative works of artist Dick Roughsey (Goobalathaldin)—the authors of these works were overwhelmingly not Indigenous. Tension developed between the desire to make Indigenous culture visible and the anxiety that it would be distorted by the non-Indigenous lens through which it was being viewed. But the situation was slow to change: as Sheahan-Bright notes, ‘as late as 1989, the CBCA commissioned a collection entitled *Dream Time*, in which leading writers created creatures such as unicorns and river serpents, but which included not one Indigenous writer’ (2011: 9).

Perhaps the chief example here is Patricia Wrightson. Her use of Indigenous myths and legends has been widely acclaimed: for example, by children’s literature academic Mark Macleod, who in his obituary of Wrightson praises her for ‘creating a new Australia of the imagination’ through her belief that ‘it might be possible to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian cultures and create a new kind of pan-Australian narrative’ (2010). But it has also been widely questioned: Clare Bradford, who has written a number of considered critiques of Wrightson’s work, questions whether such a ‘pan-Australian narrative’ is even possible: ‘the fantasy genre within which Wrightson works is so shaped and informed by European traditions that the characters, motifs and spirit figures that it deploys are drawn inexorably into Western frames of reference’ (2009: 297). The question is one of perspective: what kind of unwitting distortions will Indigenous subject matter take on when filtered through a non-Indigenous perspective? Other critics have also suggested that the use of Indigenous characters in white-authored children’s literature can serve less benign purposes: Brooke Collins-Gearing, for example, argues that since children’s literature ‘is understood to be purposive’, the placing of Indigenous characters within a paternalistic white narrative ‘provided a medium for the dominant society to articulate its ideologies, such as nationalism, and to justify its policies, such as invasion and dispossession’ (2006: 61).

Unsurprisingly, Bradford describes the increasing prominence of Indigenous authors as the single biggest factor in shifting Aboriginality from subject matter to viewpoint in young adult fiction, a point echoed by Robin Sheahan-Bright (2011) and Ambelin Kwaymullina (2015a). Bradford also notes that, since Indigenous publishing houses in Australia (like indigenous publishing houses elsewhere in the world, notably Canada and New Zealand) built their early lists on picture books, few young adult novels have been published by the time she is writing her analysis in 2009 (2009: 299). Bradford is correct: the AustLit database only records nineteen young adult novels by Indigenous writers. But these records also show the rapid expansion of Indigenous young adult fiction: of those nineteen works, nine of them (nearly half the total) have been published since Bradford’s chapter appeared. Her analysis, for example, pre-dates the rise of Ambelin Kwaymullina, whose first work appeared in 2007, but whose *Tribe* series (beginning with *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* in 2012) has made her the dominant figure among Indigenous young adult and fantasy writers.

A superficial glance at AustLit’s records suggests that, at this moment, the publication of Indigenous Australian writers is fairly evenly balanced between

Indigenous publishing houses and ‘mainstream’ Australian publishers, but this is not entirely the case. Among mainstream publishers, Walker Books Australia and Allen & Unwin are the most prolific, with six books between them. But these six books are the work of only two authors/collaborations: Walker Books Australia publishes Ambelin Kwaymullina’s *Tribe* series (2012-2015) and Allen & Unwin released Boori Pryor and Meme McDonald’s *Girragundji trilogy* (1998-2002). The current growth in Indigenous young adult fiction lies with the Indigenous publishing houses. This includes IAD Press (the publishing arm of the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs), which published Jared Thomas’s *Sweet guy* (2002) and Melissa Lucashenko’s *Too Flash* (2002), the latter under its Jukurrpa Books imprint. Similarly, Aboriginal Studies Press appears on the list: founded in Canberra in 1963, Aboriginal Studies Press is now operated by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). The press rarely publishes fiction of any kind, but it did release *Tammy Damulkurra* (1995), a ‘negotiated’ text written by Derek Pugh with a class of Indigenous teenagers. The increasing ease of access to self-publishing and print-on-demand options also enables emerging Indigenous authors to distribute their work: both Chaise Eade and Gary J. Lonesborough self-published their first novels through Bloomington-based Xlibris: respectively, *Second Life* (2011) and *Caterpillars and Butterflies* (2013). But the forerunner in the increase in Indigenous young adult novels is Broome-based Magabala Press, which has been increasing its young adult fiction list steadily in recent years.

Magabala Books first broached young adult fiction in 2006 with *Us Mob Walawurru*, co-written by David Spillman (former conductor of Indigenous Leadership Development programs for the Northern Territory Government) and Lisa Wilynka (a Luritja woman from the small community of Titjikala). Since 2010, their output has increased. In 2012, they published *Grace Beside Me*, a gently supernatural small-town tale by Sue McPherson, a visual artist and author, who followed this work with a children’s story as part of Oxford University Press’s *Yarning Strong* series. In 2013, Magabala published Teagan Chilcott’s debut novel *Rise of the Fallen*, a paranormal romance set in Brisbane. Jared Thomas’s Nukunu-boy-meets-Ngadjuri-girl romance *Calypso Summer* appeared from Magabala in 2014; Thomas had already published *Sweet Guy* with IAD Press and, like Sue McPherson, would go on to be involved with Oxford University Press’s *Yarning Strong* series. The most recent publication is the June 2015 release of *Becoming Kirrali Lewis*, the debut novel from Jane Harrison. New to young adult fiction, Harrison is better known as a playwright, particularly of *Stolen* (1998) and *Rainbow’s End* (2005).

Magabala’s increasing focus on young adult fiction indicates the centrality of Indigenous presses to the expansion of Indigenous voices in Australian writing. While Indigenous presses are not the sole outlet for Indigenous Australian authors, who continue to be published by ‘mainstream’ Australian presses, they represent a significant space for Indigenous voices, a vital means of expanding the diversity of Australian writing, and nowhere is this suggested more explicitly than in Magabala’s current embracing of the vibrant, expanding trend of young adult writing. But specialised publishing houses are only one means of expanding the diversity of young adult fiction.

Writing Australian Muslim teenagers

Generating a list of young adult novels by Muslim-Australian writers is a more complicated process than generating a list of works by Indigenous Australian authors. In the case of the latter, AustLit's BlackWords dataset records the works of authors who have identified their Indigenous cultural heritage. However, AustLit does not record the religious affiliation of Australian authors, meaning that the same raw figures are not available for Muslim-Australian authors. Such data as the AustLit database does reveal, however, suggests that Muslim-Australians occupy a similar position in young adult fiction to Indigenous writers. That is, until recently, they more likely to be the focus of a text rather than its creator.

Just as authors such as Patricia Wrightson adopted Indigenous mythology and presented it to Australian readers, non-Muslim Australian authors were among the first to foreground Muslim characters in young adult fiction. One of the earliest and most prominent novels to address the question of growing up Muslim for young Australian readers was Christobel Mattingley's *No Gun for Asmir* (1993). Published in the middle of the then-ongoing Bosnian War (1992-1995), *No gun for Asmir* was marketed as the true story of a Muslim family's flight from the conflict and subsequent life as refugees. It was successful enough to warrant a sequel (*Asmir in Vienna*, 1995) and a companion volume (*Escape from Sarajevo*, 1996); was translated into German, Spanish, and Italian; and was nominated for both a Young Australians Best Books Award (YABBA) and a Human Rights Award for Children's Literature. But it is a novel written at a remove. The Bosnian conflict directly affected a portion of Australia's population, which is part of what makes it a marketable subject for an Australian writer. But the novel does not touch on that aspect of the conflict: it keeps the war and the refugees firmly in Europe. *No Gun for Asmir* presented Muslim experience *to* Australians, but it was not Muslim experience *in* Australia. Furthermore, it was the experience of Muslims as mediated by a non-Muslim writer.

It was not until the attacks on New York City and Washington DC on 11 September 2001 (9/11) that young adult novels about Muslims in Australia began to proliferate.⁵ Writing by way of Stuart Hall's definition of 'identity', Jo Lampert suggests that if 'identity is a strategic, positional construction, produced in specific historical and institutional sites, within specific discursive formations and practices', then it is no surprise that '9/11, as a pivotal historical event, altered aspects of cultural and ethnic identity' (2006: 51). Since 9/11, upheavals across the world have included bombings in Bali and London, the consequent news focus on Al Qaeda, the uprisings of the Arab Spring, the increasing activity of Boko Haram in West Africa, and, more recently still, the rise of ISIS. These events have helped make the complex identity that we call 'Muslim' the centre of a frequently polarising debate that, at its worst, revisits the type of Orientalism that Edward Said deconstructed three decades ago, a process that Sharyn Pearce describes as 'the sensationalised connotation and reductive stereotyping of the Muslim as the homogenised, dehumanised, violent and/or exoticised pariah/Other' (2006: 58).

Even after 9/11, the earliest works on Muslim-Australians came from established Australian authors who were writing *into* the culture, rather than *out* of it. In 2006,

when Debra Dudek reviewed a number of young adult novels about Muslim experience in Australia (concentrating on the detention-centre narratives that were flourishing in the period), the novels in question were all written by non-Muslim Australian authors: Alwyn Evans's *Walk in my shoes* (Penguin, 2004), Rosanne Hawke's *Soraya the storyteller* (Lothian, 2004), and Steve Tolbert's *Dreaming Australia* (Ginninderra Press, 2004). Some of these authors continue to publish works with a focus on Muslim-Australian experience: Steve Tolbert, for example, later published *O'Leary, JI terrorist hunter* (Ginninderra Press, 2010) and Rosanne Hawk published *Marrying Ameera* (Angus and Robertson, 2010). But they still remain works written from outside the communities themselves. Early works written by authors who did identify as Muslim were often non-fiction: journalists Nadia Jamal and Taghred Chandad, for example, published *The Glory Garage: Growing up Lebanese Muslim in Australia* in 2005.

In Australia, both terminology and debate are complicated by the conflation of 'Muslim' and 'refugee' in public discourse, as conflicts in the Middle East increase the number of refugees fleeing Muslim countries (a situation that also helps obscure the presence of other Muslim populations in Australia, such as Slavic and African communities). Muslim-Australians are a minority population: the 2011 census shows that Australians who identify as Muslim make up 2.2% of the overall population, a population in which 61.1% of respondents identify as Christian (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Furthermore, the majority of that 2.2% of the population were born in a country other than Australia: 61.5% of Australians identifying as Muslim were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). This can be a difficult position to occupy in a country with as complicated a history of multiculturalism as Australia.

In 'Multiculturalism in Crisis', Ang and Stratton outlined the strong ties between 'multiculturalism' in Australia and the notions of 'belonging' and 'sameness':

multicultural policy – ie the recognition of 'cultural diversity' – in Australia implied some degree of commonality, some possible degree of 'community' between the cultures concerned, signalled by the term 'European'. No similar implication was there for the cultures of later 'non-white' migrant groups (1998: 33).

Debra Dudek, following the thread of Ang and Stratton's argument, argues that:

Their argument here takes discourses of commonality and sameness and connects them to familial sites and markers of visible difference, that is, those differences located on the body, such as gendered and racial difference (2007: 43).

To this, novels by Australian Muslim writers such as Randa Abdel-Fattah add the element of visible *religious* difference: as Amal Abdel-Hakim (the protagonist of *Does my head look big in this?*) points out in her chatty self-introduction on the back cover, 'Try wearing a veil on your head and practising the bum's up position at lunchtime and you know you're in for a tough time at school'.

In her non-fiction, Abdel-Fattah makes this distinction even more explicit:

I don't think the divide that has made Muslims feel like 'the other' is based on race, colour or culture. It is a divide based on religious observance. Italians and Greeks may go to church on Sunday or wear a cross around their necks, but most date, enjoy a

drink and have the appearance of religious anonymity. The religious observance is not explicit, and that is why their ‘integration’ is perceived as a success of multiculturalism, whereas the Australian-ness of a non-drinking Muslim bloke who steps out of work to go pray at lunchtime, or a woman at the bus-stop with a suit and *hijab* on, is circumspect (2007: 239-40).

This is, Abdel-Fattah suggests, a different problem for the already problematised concept of multiculturalism in Australia. And these visible markers are also the concepts around which much of the post-September 11 discourse around Muslim identity in Australia has coalesced: for example, the controversial and short-lived dictate that women who visited Parliament House while wearing *burqas* or *niqabs* would need to sit in separate glassed enclosures (a ban both enacted and scrapped within October 2014). When these kinds of passionate and long-running debates arise in public discourse, it follows that they also make their way into fiction.

Many currently active Muslim-Australian authors write in forms other than young adult fiction. Hanifa Deen specialises in narrative non-fiction, with a particular focus on the experience of Muslims-Australians, such as *Ali Abdul v The King: Muslim Stories from the Dark Days of White Australia* (UWA Publishing, 2011). Saba Hakim published a children’s book, *Blue with Little White Stars* (2004), through the organisation Australian MADE (Australian Muslim Adolescent Development & Education). Keysar Trad publishes poetry, most recently *Forays of the Heart* (A Sense of Place Publishing, 2013). Kooshyar Karimi has published two autobiographies: *I confess: Recollections in Exile* (Wild Dingo Press, 2012) and *Leila’s Secret* (Penguin, 2015). This is by no means an unusual pattern for a group working to tell the stories that others are telling for them. Indeed, a similar pattern (at least superficially) is evident in Indigenous writing, beginning with poetry (for example, the works of Oodgeroo) and non-fiction (especially post-Stolen Generation memoirs, such as *Follow the Rabbit-proof Fence*), and only later permeating the young adult market. The Muslim-Australian writers who are most currently active in young adult fiction are Randa Abdel-Fattah, a Sydney-based author born and raised in Melbourne, and Amra Pajalic, a Melbourne-based writer.

Both Randa Abdel-Fatah and Amra Pajalic are active public proponents of a broad-reaching and multivalent understanding of Muslim identity: Abdel-Fattah, for example, is a frequent guest on television programs (such as *Q&A*) that explore questions of Muslim-Australian identity, while Pajalic managed the government-funded ‘What a Muslim Woman Looks Like’ project. Both have also explored Muslim-Australian identity in more than one young adult work. Abdel-Fattah made her debut as a novelist with *Does my Head Look Big in This?* in 2005. Its protagonist, Amal Abdel-Hakim, is a seventeen-year-old ‘Australian-Palestinian-Muslim still trying to come to grips with my various identity hyphens’ (back cover blurb). Her second novel followed in 2006 with *Ten Things I Hate about Me*; at school, Jamilah Towfeek calls herself ‘Jamie’, bleaches her hair blonde and wears blue contact lenses, a deliberate and long-term attempt to obscure her Lebanese heritage. Amra Pajalic’s *The Good Daughter* (2009) follows fifteen-year old Sabiha, as she negotiates the pressures of her Bosnian family, especially their desire for her to be a more observant Muslim. In a way, Pajalic’s novel writes back to Christobel Mattingley’s earlier *No*

Gun for Asmir, in terms of recounting Muslim-Australian experience from the perspective of Slavic Australian Muslims. This is even more explicit in Pajalic's novella *Amir: Friend on Loan* (2014), which follows the friendship of a Bosnian Muslim boy and his Serbian Orthodox friend in Australia at the outbreak of the Balkan War. While post-September 11 anxieties about Al Qaeda and ISIS have increasingly forced a false collapse of 'Arab' and 'Muslim' into a single category, the work of these authors helps demonstrate the breadth of Australian-Muslim experience and make that experience visible.

The 'white-washing' of book covers—the downplaying or absence of protagonists of colour on front covers—is one way in which diversity in children's and young adult fiction is elided. For example, Ambelin Kwaymullina includes this in a list of ways in which publishers can increase their Indigenous representation:

If the story is about a brown kid, put a brown kid on the cover. And don't show that character in shadowed silhouette (while all the covers with the blue-eyed blondes have them standing in the sunshine of the eternal spotlight). This is a global issue and I know that many Australian publishers would never whitewash a cover. But this is an issue of such sensitivity and importance that it would be terrific to see more publishers joining the voices of authors, teachers, bloggers and readers to speak out against it (2015c).

Does My Head Look Big in This? was translated into at least eleven languages,⁶ and every territory followed the same basic cover design: a young woman, in relative close-up, wearing a *hijab*. On the Australian cover (copied for the Turkish edition), the girl is in full face: she maintains eye contact with the reader and smiles, while adjusting one of the pins holding her *hijab* in place. On the cover used across Europe, she is visible only from the bridge of her nose up: she ignores the reader, casting her eyes up at either her *hijab* or at the title text. Precisely because it is by no means an unusual pose for a YA novel, the cover image is a slippery and clever piece of sleight of hand: combined with Abdel-Fattah's chirpy title, it foregrounds the visible differences in which the novel deals while simultaneously evoking a sense of familiarity in the regular reader of contemporary young adult fiction. Interestingly, the Indonesian cover is the only one of the multiple translations to adopt a distinctly different tone. The protagonist is again only visible from the nose up, but she looks sideways at the viewer, a challenging look; although her mouth is invisible, is it not a look that suggests a smile. The title, too, is different: *Memangnya kenapa kalau aku pakai jilbab?* translates (roughly) as *So What if I Wear My Hijab?* But Islam is a majority religion in Indonesia; the marketing of works by Muslim-Australian authors in Australia eschews the challenging pose that this cover adopts for one that simultaneously foregrounds normativity *and* diversity.

Conclusion

As this discussion indicates, novels by Indigenous Australian and Muslim-Australian writers are still a minority among the burgeoning field of young adult fiction. But they are an increasing number, and there is still much to be said about them. This paper has touched on the reader-response-driven dialogues (such as Twitter and

Goodreads) that are so significant in modern publishing but this, as well as further analyses such as sales figures, remain for future analysis. What will be of even greater interest is the shape of the young adult publishing market in the next few years. Debates about diversity are occurring now, but the nature of the publishing industry is such that any novels written in response to these debates will not appear immediately. We know that the debate drawing an immediate response from authors and editors: as an isolated example, the recent crowd-funding campaign for the anthology *Defying Doomsday*, which a focus on the roles of differently abled protagonists in an apocalypse, was one direct response.⁷ This discussion of the participation of Indigenous Australian and Muslim-Australian writers in young adult fiction may look quite different if re-visited in the near future.

Endnotes

1. Changes to the Copyright Act passed by the Australian Parliament in late June 2015 addressed these concerns, extending legal deposit to cover digital publications. See, for example, 'Collecting Digital: Legal Deposit Extended for the National Library', *Australian Libraries Copyright Commission*, 1 July 2015 (<http://libcopyright.org.au/news/collecting-digital-legal-deposit-extended-national-library>)
2. The parameters of the search on the AustLit database (which operates on FRBR, or Functional Requirements for Bibliographical Data) were as follows: novel (form) + young adult (genre) + single work (type). This returns all individual novels that were identified as young adult when they were entered into the AustLit database. It excludes novel extracts (such as are published in newspapers and periodicals) and the container works for series: so, for example, while all four of the novels in Robert Hood's 2001 *Shades* series were included in the count, the overall record for the series itself was excluded. The AustLit database includes works written by overseas authors if they are set in Australia or include Australian themes (for example, Charles De Lint's young adult novel *Dingo*): this search was set to exclude both international works and international authors, returning results on only those works written by Australian authors. The same parameters were applied to the searches for novels as a whole: individual novels only, excluding extracts and the container works for series, and not including international works or authors, even where those works were set in Australia.
3. As with any analysis of figures drawn from a single source, it must be noted that the increase could be a function of a number of factors, either within the organisation from which the figures originate (e.g., changes in staff or in process) or in the publishing industry generally (e.g., greater visibility of self-published works and ebooks). The sudden increase circa 2010, however, is of a pattern with the slow increase in young adult publishing across the previous decade.
4. The hashtag can be accessed here (<https://twitter.com/hashtag/LoveOzYA?src=hash>) and the Goodreads list here (<https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/89913.LoveOzYA>).
5. Nor is this exclusively true of Australian fiction: the same pattern is apparent in American fiction. See, for example, Jo Lampert, who compares one of Randa Abdel-Fattah's novels with a contemporaneous work by an American writer.
6. AustLit records the following translations: Swedish (2006); Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, German, and Indonesian (2007); Spanish, Italian, Catalan, and Turkish (2008); and Russian (2009).
7. See the now-closed Pozible campaign here: <http://www.pozible.com/project/188146>

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