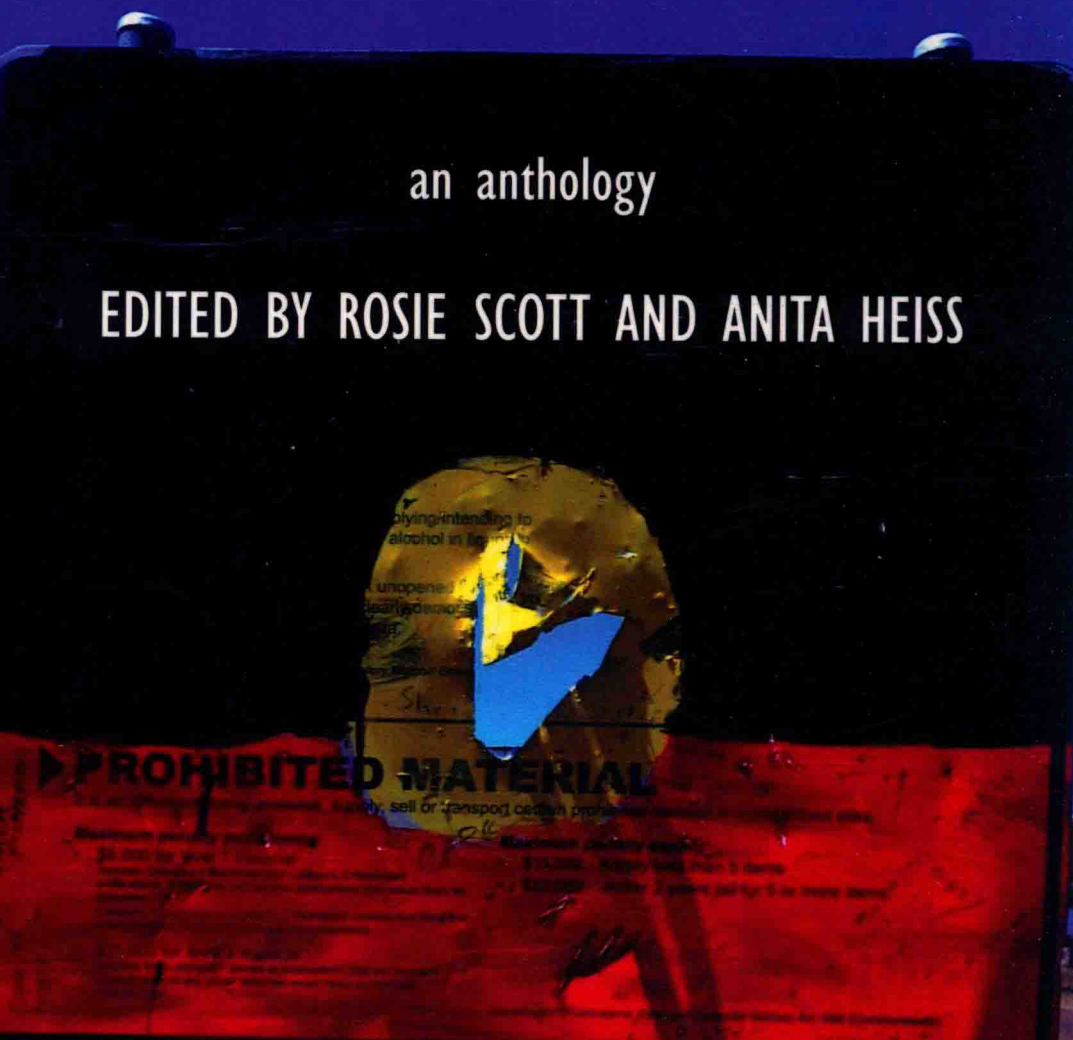


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RACHEL WILLIKA, ALEXIS WRIGHT, YALMAY YUNUPINGU, ARNOLD ZABLE

# THE INTERVENTION

an anthology

EDITED BY ROSIE SCOTT AND ANITA HEISS



'An indispensable contribution to the debate.' Anna Funder

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Published by 'concerned Australians' 2015

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Ngurnalu pina karrinyana kutitij  
Ngurnalu kutij karrinyana  
ngantipany-ja yumi-ngka  
We know where we stand  
We stand in our law

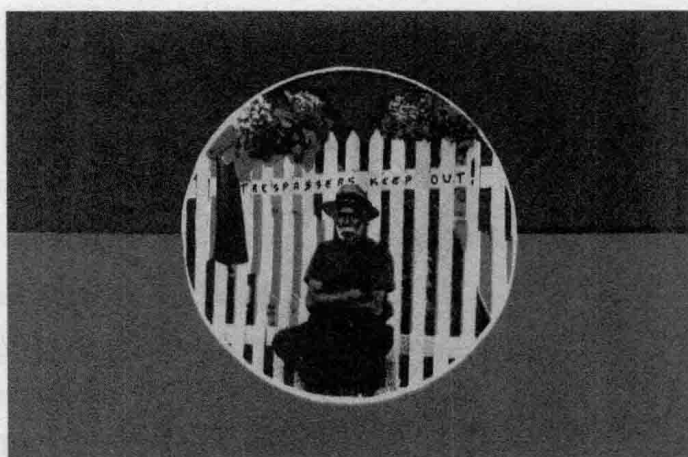






# THE INTERVENTION

EDITED BY KARE VOLT AND JANA KOL



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**ROSIE SCOTT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Anita Heiss and I decided to published an anthology gathering together some of Australia's best writers and thinkers to analyse and illuminate one of the most invasive, puzzling and unprecedented actions by a government in Australian history – the 2007 Intervention by the Howard Government.

We think that these writers and Indigenous leaders will bring a new perspective and urgency to an issue that has remained largely outside the public radar.

We believe that the basic premises of this intervention are deeply flawed, resulting in a serious breach of human rights. It has never been fully debated nationally nor has there been significant consultation with the Indigenous communities most affected.

In June 2007 Prime Minister John Howard announced after the tabling of the 'Little Children are Sacred' report,

'It is a disgrace that a section of the Australian population, those little children should be the subject of serious sexual abuse.'

A week or so later the Howard government staged a massive military and police Emergency Response costing \$587 million, as outlined in the NT Emergency Response Act.

This Act prescribed a number of drastic measures which appeared strangely irrelevant to their stated aim of combating child abuse. Some of these measures contravened the Racial Discrimination Act and several revolved around land use. Nowhere in this very extensive legislation was there a significant mention of a child or children.

Since then there has been little or no change in the figures of child sexual offending in the Northern Territory.

This extraordinary, costly and largely unexplained action has had immense and long-reaching effects on the very cornerstones of Indigenous community and identity. There has now been substantial evidence gathered that much of this change has been negative.

As the Intervention has morphed into Stronger Futures for another ten years in a disgraceful bipartisan agreement, many commentators have been asking what the justification for this continuation is, given the alarming figures of increasing suicide rates, child health problems and unemployment.

The fact is the real motives of this intervention have never been fully explained or justified and in spite of constant opposition by Indigenous communities, most significant Elders, peak human rights organisations as well as other Australians across a broad spectrum, the situation remains the same with only a few cosmetic touches.

We have published the voices of the Elders and other Northern Territory Indigenous community leaders in their many communiqués, media releases and statements issued throughout the period. As time goes on, the tone of these statements becomes angrier, more despairing and anguished as their very reasonable requests are simply ignored by the authorities and the Intervention is kept in place.

We believe this collection of essays, fiction, poetry, and memoir by leading Australian writers and statements by the Elders will give a new perspective, power and clarity to an issue that will continue

to be highly controversial. And most importantly, we believe the role of the writer in this instance is to make Australian readers think about the plight of other largely voiceless Australians.

Many voices both Indigenous and non-Indigenous have been raised in eloquent protest against the Intervention ever since its first announcement by John Howard. Contrary to the carefully managed spin that there is deep disagreement within the Indigenous community, the fact is there is strong consensus about the Northern Territory Intervention amongst most experts, people on the ground and organisations.

Most importantly, the majority of Elders and community leaders in the Northern Territory oppose it, some of whom have petitioned the United Nations. These include Rosalie Kunoth-Monks of Utopia, Djiniyini Gondarra of Galiwin'ku, Harry Nelson of Yuendumu, Djapirri Mununggirritj from Yirrikala, Yananymul Mununggurr from the Laynhapuy Homelands, Diane Stokes at Muckatty Station, Maurie Ryan and John Leemans at Kalkarindji, Reggie Wurridjal and Helen Williams at Maningrida, Joy White with the Larrakia mob in Darwin, Barbara and Walter Shaw in the Alice Springs Town Camps, Harry Nelson at Yuendumu, Dhanggal Gurruwiwi from Wallaby Beach and Matthew Dhulumburrk Gaykambayu from Ramingining, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann of Nauiyu, Rachel Willika, Yalmay Yunupingu and George Gaymarani Pascoe of Milingimbi.

Local groups like Stop the Intervention Collective, Sydney and Intervention Rollback Action Group, Alice Springs which have worked so hard to publicise the facts, organisations representative of local Indigenous people like Yolŋuw Makarr Dhuni, eminent Indigenous and non-Indigenous figures like Tom Calma, Lowitja O'Donoghue, the late Malcolm Fraser, Alastair Nicholson, Chris Graham and Olga Havnen as well as international organisations like the UN, Amnesty and church groups have all stated their strong opposition.



One dissenting voice had a particularly powerful effect on me personally. Rachel Willika, a Jaowyn Elder from the remote community of Manyallaluk spoke at a protest meeting we at Women for Wik convened in 2007 in Sydney when news of the Intervention had broken. This meeting was chaired by Dr Anita Heiss and addressed by eminent Indigenous women we'd invited from the Territory. These women included Olga Havnen, the then national Indigenous leader from the newly formed Combined Aboriginal Organisations, Eileen Cummings, and former advisor to the Chief Minister of NT on Aboriginal and Women's Affairs, her daughter Raylene Rosas and Rachel Willika. An emotional and attentive audience packed the hall and spilled out into the foyer.

Rachel Willika had never been on a plane before, or to Sydney but she stood in front of us with quiet dignity and grace. Her speech was one of the most eloquent and powerful I've ever heard and moved many of the audience to tears. And, in my case anyway, to action. Her description of the fear in their community when the soldiers came has stayed with me permanently and so in part inspired this anthology.

In a statement to *The Guardian* at around the same time she said, 'That John Howard has no heart. This intervention is hurting Aboriginal families.'

It is no coincidence that eloquent speech has the power to spur people to political action.

And as always, writers, filmmakers, painters and other artists have been major players in this history of analysis and dissent.

There are some towering examples of this; *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright and the movies *Charlie's Country* by David Gulpilil, *Our Generation*, a superb documentary film by Sinem Saban and Damien Curtis, and John Pilger's *Utopia*.

All of these have received serious recognition, mostly internationally. David Gulpilil received a standing ovation and the prestigious prize for best actor in Un Certain Regard competition

in Cannes, also winning best lead actor for the Australian Academy Cinema Television Arts awards. *Charlie's Country* won best film and best director at the Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards. It's safe to say this film will receive more awards.

*Our Generation* was voted Best Campaign Film in the London International Documentary Festival, and Pilger's *Utopia* was voted by the London Film Review as one of the five best films of the year.

Alexis Wright's critically acclaimed book, which I believe will become an Australian if not international classic, was shortlisted for all the major prizes including the Miles Franklin, the NSW Premiers, the Stella and the Voss. A review in the Sydney Morning Herald described *The Swan Book* as possibly 'one of the most important Australian novels yet,' another in the Sydney Review of Books '... and perhaps the first truly planetary novel.'

Other more direct examples of eloquent voices raised are those of people like Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, Djiniyini Gondarra, Pat Dodson, Jeff McMullen, Tom Calma, Jon Altman, Judy Gurruwiwi, Barbara Shaw, Paddy Gibson, and many others. Their passionate speeches around Australia are a powerful example of inspiring oratory when all too often dumbed down, evasive, clichéd and impenetrable bureaucratic language is the norm for the authorities defending the Intervention.

These people are true Australian heroes. They spend many hours travelling around Australia speaking and campaigning about what the Intervention actually means to the people who are suffering through it.

When we decided to compile this anthology we were delighted with the calibre of writers who agreed to contribute and felt very confident about putting our proposal forward to publishers. Six months later not one publisher took the project on, though most said it was a great project with an excellent list.

But thanks to heart-warming support from the community – a dedicated group of women, who called themselves Women

Inspired to Action, or WITA for short, raised funds for us through crowd-funding – with generous contributions from people all over Australia; a generous grant from the CAL Cultural fund; keen interest and support from Michele Harris and the members of ‘concerned Australians’, an extraordinarily generous offer by Graeme Jones and Tracey Kirby of Kirby Jones to do our typesetting and design free, the committed work of Tara Wynn of Curtis Brown and people like Pamela Hewitt and Danny Vendramini who have donated their time and expertise; we have been able to continue with our plans to publish this book in 2015.

So this is our hope for the anthology – that our distinguished list of Australian writers and Elders will join in with these other artists, supporters and community leaders to provide an in-depth, eloquent and thoughtful dimension to this urgent debate, so long neglected by mainstream Australia. We believe that the truthfulness, clarity and passion of their language will provide an inspiring antidote to the spin and disinformation which has been the official language of the Intervention up until now.

Above all we intend this anthology of eloquent Australian voices to take the debate to a wider audience and through this unique compilation prove that the abuse of human rights by the Northern Territory Intervention has no place in this country.

*The Intervention: an Anthology* is an extraordinary document – deeply moving, impassioned, spiritual, angry and authoritative – it’s essential reading for anyone who wants to understand what lies behind this passionate opposition.

## **ANITA HEISS**

# **WE ARE MANY NATIONS BUT WE ARE ONE PEOPLE**

I was in the Northern Territory at a writer's event in June 2007 when the Howard Government with the support of Labor and the Democrats rolled out the NT Intervention. Two months later I chaired a public forum organised by Women for Wik at Australia Hall in Sydney on 14 September. It was there I heard first hand from Northern Territory Aboriginal women about what was happening in their affected communities. Olga Havnen, Eileen Cummings, Raelene Rosas and Rachel Willika shared stories to a packed hall of concerned Australians wanting to know how they could help get the power back into the hands of those who had lost control over their own lives. It was one of the most emotional gatherings outside of funerals I have ever attended.

I remembered those women as I wrote my first blog 'Rallying the Troops to Get Out of the NT'. It was 12 February 2008 and the evening before the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. But the much-awaited 'Sorry' would follow a day when thousands of Australians converged on the capital to demand the human rights of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory be reinstated.