

7 November 2015

Submission 881

Senate Inquiry into Arts Funding

Dear Senators Lazarus, Macdonald, Bilyk, Collins and Ludlam,

Owing to the emotional pressures of the panel at which we spoke, the derogatory style of questioning by one committee member, the interjections and phone call interruptions, aspects of our submission were left unclarified. We would like the opportunity to do so now before the Senate Committee reports. We greatly appreciate your time and interest in our submission.

Following our appearance at the Senate Inquiry into Arts Funding, it was alarming to read in *The Australian* "Witnesses called to the Senate's arts inquiry were accused of hamming it up for effect after the penultimate hearing in Parramatta, in Sydney's west, yesterday was adjourned when a witness became upset under questioning from Queensland Liberal senator Ian Macdonald."

No such accusations were directed at us during the panel. It is unethical and unprofessional when a political source uses media connections to distort proceedings before they are tabled in the Hansard. The article serves only to reify reductive stereotypes and to digress publicity from the issues which *Mascara* tried to raise: namely that our sector is not sustainable and that we are navigating institutional racism that goes against this country's democratic principles. It demonstrates our argument that cultural dialogue about diversity is not protected or safe.

Secondly, we attach the article on racism in Australian literature which appeared in *Cultural Weekly* which was referenced in the evidence given by Ms Cahill on 4 November 2015 at the Parramatta hearing. We would appreciate if this is tabled as evidence.

To clarify what we mean in our Submission by Strategic Initiatives:

- They do not necessarily need to involve large financial grants. They may include small administrative grants or publishing grants (even \$5000 would enable our magazines to be in operation, or may be sufficient for an existing literary publisher to publish a migrant writer.)
- They may include partnership grants to foster development, innovation and expansion of the sector.
- They may simply include diversity statements and special programs. At present as a result of our advocacy we are attempting to negotiate such an arrangement with Australian Poetry, whose new management have been receptive to this, with hopeful outcomes for a CALD and First Nations program in 2016 and beyond.

Strategy and initiatives for the Non-Indigenous Culturally Diverse Sector would signal to the entire

community that our constituents are no longer exploited members but that they are equal members of the literary community. This would have wide-reaching beneficial effects. At present migrants are, as we tried to convey to the committee, marginalised or tokenised in our representations within mainstream Australian literature at festivals and in mainstream publishing. When 25% of Australians are born overseas, 10% are Asian and up to 44% have a parent who was born overseas, we consider this to be a public matter, important enough to bring to the Senate's attention.

It is very difficult to explain the complex dynamics of institutional racism or to responsibly reveal to the inquiry the subjective filters and veiled discriminations operating currently within the literary sector. **We believe the issues raised in respect of non-Indigenous culturally diverse writers reflect structural racism that cannot be remedied within the industry itself and needs political solutions.**

As editors, our expertise is not in political or legal representation. We bring this to the Senate's attention because **this issue is fundamentally about the basic right of migrant Australian citizens to participate in the Arts with equality.** This is an opportunity for the Senate to influence democracy in a tangible and historical way, sign-posting to the literary community the end of decades of cultural oppression and silencing of migrant writers. We ask you to consider our colleagues, who have suffered as a result of this oppression from family breakdown, loss of employment, from mental illness or just creatively withered, a fate which is even worse, destroying the soul of a writer.

If the Senate makes one progressive recommendation in its reporting from this inquiry into Arts Funding, we hope it will be the recognition that the CALD sector requires long-overdue and urgent Sustainable Strategies at the level of peak organisations for migrant literary participation.

Yours Sincerely,

Michelle Cahill

Editor

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Cc Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Minister for the Arts

Cc the Honourable Paul Fletcher MP

CC Shadow Minister for the Arts, Mark Dreyfus