

## **A Room of One's Own - My feminist manifesto Lian Low**

I have on my bookshelf and by my bedside:  
A list of Australian women's literature that I wrap around  
like a safety blanket.

The list includes:

*Dreaming in urban areas* - Lisa Bellear  
*I'm not racist but..* - Dr Anita Heiss  
*Talkin' up to the white woman* - Dr Aileen Moreton-  
Robinson  
*Love dreaming & other poems* - Ali Cobby Eckermann  
*Ruby Moonlight* - Ali Cobby Eckermann  
*Comfort Food* - Ellen Van Neerven  
*Heat and Light* - Ellen Van Neerven  
*Otherland* - Dr Maria Tumarkin  
*"I'm a feminist but... 'other' women and post national  
feminism"* Dr Ien Ang's essay  
*From Victims to Suspects: Muslim Women Since 9/11* - Dr  
Shakira Hussein  
*Car Maintenance, Explosives And Love And Other  
Contemporary Lesbian Writings*  
[Cathie Dunsford](#), [Susan Hawthorne](#), [Susan Sayer](#) (eds.)  
*The Other Shore* - Hoa Pham  
*Wave* - Hoa Pham  
*Tapestry* - Dr Maria Pallota-Chiarolli  
*Stroppy Dykes* - Jean Taylor  
*Notes to my sisters* - Dr Moni Lai Storz  
*Eat first, talk later* - Beth Yahp  
*Anguli Ma* - Chi Vu  
*Locust Girl* - Dr Merlinda Bobis

*White Turtle: a collection of short stories* - Dr Merlinda  
Bobis

*Banana Bending: Asian Australian and Asian Canadian  
Literary Cultures* - Dr Tseen-ling Khoo

*Unpolished Gem* - Alice Pung

*Her Father's Daughter* - Alice Pung

*Laurinda* - Alice Pung

*Original Skin* - Maxine Beneba Clarke

*Nothing Here Needs Fixing* - Maxine Beneba Clarke

*Gil Scot Heron is on Parole* - Maxine Beneba Clarke

*Carrying the World* - Maxine Beneba Clarke

*Foreign Soil* - Maxine Beneba Clarke

*The Hate Race* - Maxine Beneba Clarke

I was 19, when I softly tapped on feminism's door. My  
friend Eugenia, academically brilliant, led me to the  
sisterhood. Then left. She left me at feminism's door,  
because she thought this was the lesbian room and she  
wanted to give me space.

The door opened to white faces (except for one) gazing at  
me, then a friendly, "Come in!", I'd interrupted a Women's  
Collective meeting.

I sat on the floor shyly wishing that the beanie covering my  
newly shaven bald head would swallow me whole.

But I kept returning because I wanted to connect / I was  
tired of being invisible.

I wanted belonging, a home in the sisterhood.

Since I can't find belonging in a society that humiliates me  
as a sexual pervert, a moral deviant.

I'd moved continents, settled into Kulin Nations country just  
as Australia's legal fiction of *terra nullius* was overturned,  
and hope for a new nation was stymied, stunted,

bludgeoned by the fury of anti-political correctness campaigns. Howard. Hanson. Racist rhetoric.  
For the next four years, I wrote in my room, graffitied my desk and walls, to write myself into existence.  
“I live here, not somewhere else, but here”  
But where was here? I kept asking. Who am I in this new home Australia?  
Where I live, whether I know *or care* whose land I’m on, can mean whether I’m complicit in reinventing white Australia’s invasion history  
Australia spits Ching Chong Chinaman /  
Where are you from? Go back to where you came from /  
Go back to where you came from / Go back to where you came from.

Straight male hate “Chicks with dicks” / “Fucking dyke”

I wanted to find belonging, a home in the sisterhood.

But, when my white sisters looked for me in the Women’s Room, if there were new faces, and they didn’t know how else to distinguish me, they would often revert to ‘the Asian one’  
The Asian one, the quiet one in the corner, beanie over her head, silently absorbing white women’s feminisms.

When Kim Busty Beatz Bowers, of Hot Brown Honey Burlesque, said,

“As a black woman, why do I know more about white men than I know about myself?”<sup>1</sup>  
I asked myself, as an Asian Australian woman, why do I know more about white women’s lives and stories than I know about myself?

I still hold that pen,  
To write myself into existence,  
I read books that reflect a reality that I connect with, that represents a diverse humanity.

My struggle is to articulate a self into existence, an anti-racist feminist politic that’s led and centred on First Nation Australian’s sovereignty of country,  
White people often forget, Anglo-Celtic is just another ethnicity, not the norm.  
But forgetting is privilege.  
If this sisterhood is to belong to me  
I need to know we’re on the same page and she has my back.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote can be found in Candy Bower’s essay, ‘Gone Daddy Gone’: Brown Girl Seeking.. ‘ in *The Lifted Brow* , 5<sup>th</sup> August 2016  
<http://theliftedbrow.com/post/148465643257/gone-daddy-gone-brown-girl-seeking-by-candy>