

**“A sacred duty”: How Australian micro- and small presses
publish and promote silenced and under-represented writers –
and what their authors think about the process**

Jodie Lea Martire

**Part 3: What small-press publishers and their under-represented authors
say about working with each other**



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Introduction to the series

Micro- and small-press publishing sits at the intersection of literature, art and politics. It is acclaimed for championing unheard voices, acting as “research and development” for new writers, styles and writing communities, and serving as a vital component in a very complex publishing ecosystem.

Australia’s book industry is very slowly coming to the realisation that it has a responsibility to publish works and authors who represent the full range of Australian lives, who express different experiences, backgrounds and knowledges. What we shouldn’t forget is that micro- and small presses (MSPs) have long been making this a reality. Perhaps instead of the industry attempting to reinvent the wheel in publishing “diversity”, it could learn from the decades-long experience of successful small presses who have routinely elevated the creations of neglected, silenced and unheard voices.

This was the purpose behind my master’s research, which I completed in 2020. I wanted to learn from experienced small presses and share their knowledge and practices with the wider Australian publishing industry. I completed my thesis on the strategies that small-press publishers use to raise and amplify the voices of traditionally excluded authors. My research also aimed to learn what authors published by small presses thought of their publishers’ performance, and to discover their suggestions for the industry. Writers of difference from many backgrounds have frequently (and fairly) lambasted their systematic and systemic exclusion from publishing, so I wanted to learn the details of their ideas around specific publishing practices—and thus offer something of a roadmap to an industry which says it is now listening to “diverse” authors. (I use “writers of difference”, or “WOD/s”, for creators, rather than “diverse authors”, following the work of Merlinda Bobis (2017).)

The two publishing houses I worked with in my project were Spinifex Press and Wild Dingo Press (WDP), which both have long histories of publishing and publicising under-represented writers. Spinifex has just celebrated 30 years in business and Wild Dingo has been operating for over a decade. I conducted nine interviews with publishers and staff of both presses and with two writers published by each press. Authors’ contributions were provided anonymously; the names given for them here are pseudonyms. The research was framed by appropriate ethics approvals from the University of Queensland.

In this collaboration with the Small Press Network, I am beyond delighted to share the results of my research in the knowledge that it provides a range of potential practices for the Australian publishing industry. It should be especially useful for publishers and presses who strive to increase the range, variety and volume of writers whose voices we have missed out on for too long.

Introduction to Part 3

The first instalment of this SPN publication collated the publishing strategies used by Spinifex Press and Wild Dingo Press, and their authors' responses to them, into one expansive table. You can download it from [the SPN website](#).

The [second instalment](#) shared a literature review of the academic and industry literature on micro- and small presses (MSPs), writers of difference (WODs), and the relationship between under-represented writers and their publishers.

This third instalment shares the results of this piece of research. What did the two presses have to say about the Australian publishing industry, and their own processes to increase the range, volume and styles of WODs in our book trade? And how did their authors judge their presses' efforts, and what suggestions can they offer the Australian bibliosphere?

Results and discussion

My research aimed to elucidate the publishing strategies used by Spinifex and Wild Dingo to publish and promote under-represented writers, to learn how those authors assessed their presses' performance, and to discover authors' suggestions for the industry.

Publishers

Principles and/as praxis

It would be impossible to overstate the strength of the two presses' motivations or the degree of alignment between principles and practice, and how this relates to them strategically publishing silenced voices. Both Spinifex and WDP, like the presses in Ramdarshan Bold's studies, are driven by passion; this also directs manuscript selection (Poland, 1999a). Catherine Lewis (WDP) publishes because "It's my passion to give voice to the disenfranchised and the disempowered and those who would be silenced. It's 100% that; it always has been."

Producing a book

is a big project ... You're cutting down trees, you're using up lots of energy, not only in terms of electricity/power to make the book, but ... intellectual energy ... high expectations. A book is not just a sausage ... it needs to be sort of sacralised ... Publishing is like a sacred duty.
(Lewis)

Lewis is fully aware that

Independents can't say they do it solely for the money. ... If they can just break even, that's terrific. If they can make money out of it, that's a bonus because it means they can expand. And you can bet your bottom dollar they won't buy a bigger house or an expensive car, they'll churn it back into publishing—and that's the sign of the passion that underpins independent publishing.

For Susan Hawthorne, co-publisher of Spinifex, "one of our ways of deciding whether we really want to publish a book is that we feel passionately about it ... Because there's no point spending all this time on a book you don't feel passionate about". In addition, the manuscript must fit the press' principles. Spinifex co-publisher Renate Klein states,

It's really important for us that our political views as radical lesbian feminists inform our publishing ... we wanted Spinifex to be an international publishing house of international women's voices, and ... we certainly wanted to have as many different voices as we could find from women around the world.

But Spinifex would not publish, "whoever the author is, a white woman or a black woman or an Indigenous woman" (Klein), anything supporting pornography, prostitution, surrogacy,

environmental vandalism, genetically-modified plants/food or right-wing views; or denigrating lesbians, gays or mothers.

To choose manuscripts, Susan Hawthorne said, “we think, ‘So, what is this writer saying? What new experience or voice or perspective is she bringing that is not really available in the main market?’” Spinifex aims for innovation in fiction and poetry and controversy in non-fiction that will create public discussion: “We definitely believe in social change, that people can change, men can change. And so we really hope that our books actually contribute to social change” (Klein).

Principles influence more than acquisition strategies. This seems almost a truism, but I don’t believe the vital relationship between principles and individual publishing strategies has been addressed in the scholarly publishing literature. For Klein, Spinifex started with aims and principles that then guided their evolving publishing strategies. These led Spinifex and WDP to:

- Place primacy on their relationships with staff, freelancers, designers, typesetters and printers;
- Establish and cultivate a wealth of collaborations and inherently political networks with industry groups (Australian Publishers Association [APA], Small Press Network [SPN] and International Alliance of Independent Publishers [IAIP]); political, activist or academic allies (individuals and organisations), networks and media; and social or cultural communities and groups;
- Give all authors (not just “big” ones) the final say on the text and (for Spinifex) the cover of their books, to the point of not publishing a book unless the author approves;
- Take risks and stay flexible in order to achieve their publishing goals (e.g., Spinifex publishing a man’s book on radical feminism); and
- Make un-commercial decisions to ensure their titles reach the right market (e.g., cut-rate sales at refugee conferences, discounted rights sales to publishers in the Global South).

And finally, both Spinifex and WDP emphasised their strong, sincere connections with all or nearly all of their authors, over the many years of their association. Lewis stated that, with her authors, “it’s a much more intense relationship” than it would be for most publishers,

it goes on for years. So ... Najaf [Mazari, the subject of Lewis’ first book in 2008] and his family and I are as close as family. Before we got locked down again [in 2020 Covid lockdowns], we’d share a meal at our place and if we’re not having a meal at our place, it will be at his place. And that is the way it is for virtually all my writers.

JLM: So stronger community but higher stakes?

Lewis: Exactly. ... if, for any reason there’s a loss of trust, that’s very complicated.

Lewis stressed that trust issues are particularly important in “the nature of [working with] disenfranchised voices”. Her refugee and immigrant authors come from non-English speaking background (NESB) communities, have sometimes emigrated from countries experiencing conflict or social breakdown (where trust is hard earned) and often have had little or no knowledge or experience of Australian business/publishing norms. In order to prevent misunderstandings or

unrealistic expectations about timelines, readership and royalties, Lewis takes pains to communicate simply, clearly and frequently with her authors (through an interpreter if needed).

Both presses' commitment to communicating well with their writers demonstrates not only their commitment to promoting *voice* **externally**, but to enabling *voice* in their own internal practices.

Publishing writers of difference

One Spinifex title provides a detailed example of publishing WODs. *Karu: Growing up Gurindji* is about the traditional child-rearing practices of Gurindji women, from the Northern Territory's southern Victoria River. Three senior Gurindji women, Violet Wadrill, Daisy Wavehill Yamawurr and Topsy Dodd Ngarnjal (2019), with nine others, shared stories which were translated by their long-time collaborator, Brisbane-based linguist Felicity Meakins. The book has text in Gurindji and English, plus four-colour photos of medicine plants and the community's paintings. (The colour printing was made possible through government funding; other stages of research had received funding from various sources.) QR codes link to recordings of the speakers recounting the book's stories in Gurindji.

According to Susan Hawthorne, Meakins pitched the manuscript via email "and I looked at it and went, 'Wow, this looks amazing!'". Hawthorne explained that the Gurindji women wanted to do the book to gain credibility, because "their work is not taken seriously when they go to hospital to have babies". In Hawthorne's view, "I thought it was wonderful to be able to do this book because it ties in with our themes of women and of reproduction. Women's culture, traditional culture, ecology, all of that."

Publishing *Karu* deployed numerous strategies so the Gurindji women could express their stories as authentically as possible: a translator who had collaborated with them over almost two decades; a bilingual text supplemented by multimedia to connect with an oral culture; copy-editing of the Gurindji text by a second linguist; images and artwork providing community context; and organisational collaboration to finance a better publication.

These all constitute variations on publishing's "business as usual"; all vary from those in Stewart, yet are also effective. *Karu*'s importance to the Gurindji community, seeking to maintain its traditions despite settler-colonialism, made it worthwhile in Spinifex's eyes and manifests Rankin's (2014) point about stories having greatest value among their own communities. It also shows *voice* operating as a value (Spinifex's respect for the Gurindji women's stories) and a process (the steps taken to facilitate the elders' voices).

Both presses emphasise that their aim is to amplify voices and stories that are valuable or ignored. However, neither authors nor topics are chosen because of publishing fads or a "diversity checklist", and the presses' commitment to quality never wavers. It shows disrespect to an author to issue low-quality work just because they represent a (currently) trendy group and will definitely sell (per Araluen's critique). Rigorous editing demonstrates respect, so an author can "have the best book possible—and not a book that would fit into the mainstream, that isn't the point of it—it's rather to make the sound of her writing much stronger" (Hawthorne). For Lewis,

if I just start throwing any old story out there, but it's not a good quality, that'll count against [all] the people I publish who are ... disenfranchised voices. ... the next one may not be looked

at, because the last one wasn't of a high-enough quality. So I'm letting down my disenfranchised voices of the future. That's really clear to me.

As for "disenfranchised voices", my project documentation initially referred to MSPs "seeking" "marginalised voices", believing this described the work of the publishers selected. Klein unequivocally rejected my premise:

We don't work like that. I think that would be very patronising. A new form of colonisation. Publishers decide who gets published and so we "kindly" select "marginalised writers"? If we do that then the power has not shifted; on the contrary it gets re-enforced.

Klein added,

I think what I love about our authors, and that's why I reacted so badly to the "marginalised voices"[, is] how many of them are such in-depth thinkers and have been thinking and writing and teaching and publishing for decades of their lives ... to then be able to publish another book by them is a great privilege.

These concerns about in/accurate terminology were echoed when a writer invited to participate in my research replied that she was neither "marginalised" nor "excluded". However, others involved in publishing do choose these terms (LeClerc, 2020). Gloria, an author interviewed in this research, spoke of being doubly designated a "marginal writer" because of her identity and her publisher (cf. Gilbert): "a writer from a small press (unless the publisher has a good network/cliq of journos and critics) will never become part of the mainstream. You're always a marginal writer despite your track record of books and awards".

As a researcher and an engaged political subject, I hold that neither the literary nor the public sphere grant all voices the space, influence and representation they inherently deserve. I consider this research an action in solidarity with those creators, an attempt to enable *voice* in my industry. The at-times heated discussions with participants around terminology led me to change the language I used in my research (e.g., updated interview guidelines) and that I continue to use in my life and scholarly work. I consider this a personal if unexpected finding of this research.

Another difference arose around sensitivity readers, "who have an insider perspective of a particular marginalised experience [and are] hired by editors to ensure that characters from that marginalised background are represented correctly" (Wasafiri Editor, 2020, para. 12, original emphasis). This description criticises the normative function these readers can serve, linked to Cañas' "palatable diversity", although sensitivity readers are widely perceived in a more benign light and their use is increasingly standardised throughout the trade. For Lewis, this recent uptake "just shows you how lagging behind most publishing must be". By contrast, she reported that she'd considered sensitivity readers long before she started WDP, as a sociologist who "was ultra-committed and ... campaigned for a decentred approach to our view of the world, for [a] cultural and diverse approach".

For Hawthorne, though, sensitivity readers are superfluous:

it doesn't matter whether it's because they are speaking Aboriginal English or because their first language is not English, or something else. It's the same level of sensitivity that you apply to anybody ... Any good editor should not need a sensitivity reader or else they're not an editor worth paying.

Overriding commitment to quality

Both presses were matter-of-fact about their unwavering commitment to quality, achieved through a long, careful, proactive editorial phase which prints only the very best manuscript (in line with Poland [1999a]). Additional costs related to editors' workload, repeated processes (e.g., three Spinifex editors proofing a book before printing) and infinitely flexible production schedules were considered par for the course, and the presses ultimately pay for high quality with hours of labour. This also reflects industry studies by Poland (1999b), Ramdarshan Bold (2015, 2016) and others.

Lewis shared the highly engaged process of publishing her first book, *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* (Mazari & Hillman, 2008, 2011), which is worth describing at length. After protesting for refugee rights at the Woomera detention centre, Lewis and her late partner were seeking a refugee who had come to Australia and wanted to share their experiences. A friend met Najaf Mazari, an Afghan who had been held at Woomera. Lewis met him, and "We talked over litres and litres of green tea at his shop. He absolutely trusted ... I wanted to tell his story to the world ... to maybe help change Australian hearts and minds". Biographer Robert Hillman was then commissioned to write Mazari's story, as his English was quite limited. "Robert just sat with Najaf for hours, over very many weeks, and he recorded his voice" on tape and in notes. Lewis also suggested anecdotes to Hillman that she heard on her own regular visits to Mazari's shop. Hillman then wrote the manuscript,

and we got someone to read each chapter so that Najaf could listen to it because he couldn't read English very well, but he could sort of understand the heard word much better. He carefully went through, listened to everything, corrected ... we sat in his rug shop for many, many hours, through 18 months ... Then we got it checked with Afghan academics to make sure everything was factually 100% correct, we even had it checked with his old case officer from [the] Immigration Department, so that we got all of that right.

The freelance editor tried to flatten out Mazari's lyricism, so Lewis and her partner took over, "and it is the most authentic representation of his voice. Everybody says so, including Najaf and his family". The book "became a massive bestseller because it was the first full-length account of the modern refugee in [a] detention centre". It has sold over 40,000 copies, extraordinary for an Australian micro-press, and was adopted on numerous textbook lists.

Even with native English speakers and experienced writers, both presses favour active editing:

You don't necessarily leave a manuscript just as you get it, in my view ... You help that writer to become the best they can be so that manuscript can be the best it can be. That's our role as editors and publishers. (Lewis)

Spinifex named several authors whose work had been guided, restructured, rewritten and heavily copyedited, always with their participation and consent. For writers with limited English, “We rewrite what they have said, and then check it with them, and then rewrite again, and then check in again, and rewrite again ... most authors are really happy to have such detailed attention to their work” (Klein).

These sensitive editorial practices show both MSPs collaborating carefully with their authors, not only to facilitate the access of NESB and low-literacy writers to publication (cf. Butler), but to enhance the quality of their work and the clarity of their *voice*.

Playing the long game

Both Spinifex and WDP hold a long-term commitment to social change. Throughout Spinifex’s 30-plus and WDP’s 13 years of operation, both presses have been dedicated to publishing significant voices and perspectives to initiate, enrich or advance political developments. Again, this behaviour is well-documented in the sector (Poland, 1999b). Lewis set out WDP’s aim of helping Australians by “publishing stories of people who live here, whether they’re Australians by birth or not. I think that’s a big commitment I have, to use stories to ... contribute to making Australia a better place and a better global citizen.”

Hawthorne acknowledged that diversifying the voices in Australia’s publishing and public sphere is “rarely fast ... we hope that our books will still be around in 50 years or 100 years”. By taking such a long view, “I used to think we were only 10 years ahead. But as we got older I discovered that we were sometimes 20 years ahead of the cultural curve”.

This long-term vision to change is only feasible because WDP and Spinifex set such a high bar for quality in writing, editing and book production (as set out above), and because the issues they publish about remain distressingly evergreen (e.g., refugee rights, men’s violence against women). Each publisher expressed great pride in the calibre of their printed books, particularly the covers—a key measure of publishing quality. Lewis reported praise like “God, those books are good to look at” and Klein mentioned that “Spinifex has really gotten a name for itself with our beautiful covers”.

With solid products in hand, both presses can act unconventionally: only letting their titles go out of print when they lose the rights, and continuing to promote backlist in their catalogues, newsletters and social media when they relate to current affairs. (After 2020’s Black Lives Matter protests, Spinifex listed an Indigenous-authored book from 2002 in an academic newsletter.) Compared to the standard 6-week book promotion, ongoing publicity for a backlist title (Poland, 1999b) is more likely to create and maintain the visibility required to catalyse *voice*; it can also sustain public attention through the agenda setting, agenda building and dialogue maintenance needed to transform public attitudes (Rochon, 1998).

Authors

Authors and their presses

Overall, all four authors interviewed – two from each press – were very pleased with their publishers: their compliments for the relationship, editorial, design and overall publishing process

were unstinting. (The design and editing other MSPs who had published these authors were also lauded.) One author had such a good relationship with her press they jointly published one title (she self-published the print book, the press issued the e-book). Patricia praised her press's politics, thorough editing and attractive packaging. Helen's press "shared the same vision as me, that these stories needed to be heard because they make up the rich tapestry that is Australia today". Abigail's process was

a much more intimate experience than any of the [previous presses]. I just felt an incredible sort of communication nexus with [publisher]. And I felt that she really cared about the manuscript in a way that I hadn't had before.

Gloria's publisher

took a risk, they took a punt. Only because they were interested in difference! And they took great care with that firstborn, as they continue to do with all the other books that came after. They produce beautiful books with great care.

Further, all four authors valued their presses' continual, respectful consultation on everything from metaphor choice to jacket images to prize nominations. They especially appreciated their presses' concerted efforts to ensure they felt ownership of the cover and the final manuscript, both at the heart of an author's emotional response to their book and their publishing experience. Three authors applauded their presses' long-term commitment: "They keep you in their list forever, unlike big publishers: they pulp/remainder you!" (Gloria). Each writer had previously published with mainstream and/or small publishers, and their current presses' performance compared favourably. Interestingly, the individuals at major publishing houses were mostly commended for their work, while the primarily commercial focus of their presses' publishing and policies was criticised.

Each author was uniformly emphatic that her work maintained its integrity throughout the publishing process; that the press engaged with all facets of their identity and ideas; and that both books and promotion were an adequate representation of their original vision. Spinifex's successes at the Frankfurt Book Fair were recognised by both its authors. These comments indicate that WDP and Spinifex have successfully supported their authors' reflexivity and agency in transmitting their *voice*. Unsurprisingly, all four WODs would recommend their press to other WODs or mainstream writers: "Yeah, oh 100%. Like I've had the two books with them now, and they're a dream to work with" (Helen). Two writers have already done so, but one expressed serious reservations about WDP's co-publishing model, used for selected titles and in which authors are 50-50 partners for both costs and royalties. This author would recommend WDP to emerging writers only if they weren't obliged to co-publish, and also noted that co-publishing was possibly not appropriate for more experienced authors used to being paid for their work.

As negatives, the authors acknowledged two common publishing pitfalls: "the big disadvantage—as I'm sure you'll know about the small publishing houses—is a) their distribution and b) their PR abilities" (Abigail). And indeed, all authors specifically called out their titles' limited availability in bookshops, the small numbers of reviews, and their own poor access to media and festivals. Two also mentioned low advances, but it must be stated that these issues were named with understanding, not resentment. The writers knew that these weaknesses result from MSPs'

limited budgets, rather than poor practice or neglected strategy (White, 2017). Similarly, Gloria was realistic in acknowledging the challenges her press faces in a transnational world: “I think their strategies are very strong, but strategies are strategies. They’re up against so much, so many variables, so whether they succeed or not is another story.”

Further, one author disagreed with her press defaulting to world rights in contracts, while another recounted a “marginalising” experience (her term) with her press that had caused her discomfort. A blurb which she hadn’t seen or authorised was circulated, describing her work as representing an ethnic tradition. This tradition forms part of the author’s heritage and occasionally her practice, but she felt the blurb pigeonholed her work culturally and limited its universality.

Authors’ suggested publishing strategies

The authors’ specific suggestions for Australian publishers, laid out in Table 1, focused primarily on acquisition and marketing/publicity.

Table 1

Authors’ suggested strategies for stages of the publishing cycle

Publishing stage	Authors’ suggested strategies
Manuscript acquisition	-Accept unsolicited manuscripts -Respond to every submission -Allow authors to experiment/develop (not replicate previous successes)
Marketing/publicity	-Devise/review promotion strategies for each title with WODs -Fund WODs for festivals/events
Foreign rights/ translations/ co-editions	-Negotiate in/excluding rights for particular territories/ languages/formats
Overall	-Have dedicated imprint/department for WODs/diverse narratives -Develop leadership re: plural voices

Beyond their very feasible suggestions, the authors often advised philosophical or conceptual modifications to standard practices, changes of attitude which would see publishers better facilitate space for WODs in the book industry—better enable their *voice*. The shining example of this was offered by Gloria in her cogent, sensitive six-point plan for Australian publishers’ “wholehearted engagement” with writers and readers of difference:

1. *Know them ... the genuine interest in the other ... in a literature that is plural and that grows! Please do not to make all your writers sound like you or white or Anglo-European.*
2. *Give them a chance to be heard.*
3. *Sustain them* by investing in them long-term in terms of money, creative development[,] support and time.
4. *Educate your readers* on how to listen to [them]!
5. *Educate yourself; educate your literary palate.*
6. *Re-think your idea of “the market”*: publishing is not just a business. (original emphasis)

What Gloria proposes here is that publishing truly commit itself to advocacy and to literature, becoming an industry with social, political and creative obligations beyond its prevailing commercial demands, and taking greater responsibility for its tangible role in influencing our lives and societies (Bhaskar, 2013).

Publishers and authors

The full set of strategies and suggestions by both publishers and authors are tabulated in [Part 1 of this publication](#).

Challenges, solutions and prevailing issues

All interviewees—publishers and authors—were asked what they perceived as the challenges, solutions and prevailing issues that face small-press publishing, and the capacity of Australian presses to bring the work of WODs into print and the public consciousness. While there was no space in the master’s thesis to analyse these responses in detail, I have collated and listed them here.

Table 2

Publishers’ and authors’ perceptions of the challenges, solutions and prevailing issues facing small-press publishing and publishing WODs

Topic	Publishers’ views	Authors’ views
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being ignored/neglected/not taken seriously as a publisher/role model (festivals/media/industry) -MSPs expected to cater to others’ expectations of “diversity” -Facing tacit discrimination as lesbian publishers -Limited funds -Limited commercial appeal of minority authors -Relying heavily on limited number of titles to carry the list -Mass closures of feminist/independent bookshops -Low bookshop profile/sales -Increasingly conservative political climate -Significant trust issues from WODs -Building unknown authors’ profiles from scratch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Excessive focus on repetitive mainstream voices -Small number of authors dominate “diversity” market -“Marginal” voices not recognised as part of society that deserves publication -WODs edited to sound uniform/palatable -WODs forced to “perform” difference -WODs forced to protect personal/creative integrity -Hard to break into “cliquey” mainstream publishers/events/festivals -Difficult to get reviewed/interviewed, esp. mainstream journals/media -Publishing with MSPs further marginalises WODs -MSPs dependent on grants

Topic	Publishers' views	Authors' views
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exploit a niche -Keep up stamina to survive -Be proactive with new technologies/media -Seek ways to commercialise important unheard stories -Get rid of patriarchy -Change adverse social structures -Collaborate with other MSPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Grants for a) publishing b) promotion c) festival attendance -Reassessing existing festival/publishing/event funding ?Quotas for WODs, esp. government-funded festivals/publishing/events
Unresolved issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Publishers too risk-averse to a) publish unheard/different voices b) hire staff from range of backgrounds -Limited understanding in publishing re: being "other" -Faddish attention to WODs -Risk of WODs being "exoticised" -Prioritising writer's difference over quality of work -No funding to translate languages spoken in Australia -No emphasis on making fictional casts reflect society's diversity (not just lead characters) -Disability rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Minority groups/disabled/etc missing from publishing -WOD representations insufficient/inaccurate -Restrictive ideas of "Australian national literature" -Focus on fashionable topics/"flavour-of-the-month" diversity -Good-quality work not getting exposure it deserves -Limited institutional/financial support for MSPs -Reviewers/interviewers neglecting MSPs

Conclusions of this research

This research assessed how two Australian MSPs—Spinifex and Wild Dingo—publish and promote writers of difference, and thus enable *voice* in Australia’s literary and public spheres. In a unique scholarly contribution, I also investigated the response of each presses’ authors to their strategies, and their suggestions to publishers and the industry.

Klein, Hawthorne and Lewis founded their presses to amplify WODs who were under-represented: in Spinifex’s case, radical feminists; in WDP’s, Australia’s disempowered and disenfranchised. This sense of mission or “sacred duty” guided their publishing strategies in similar directions, in which *authors are never reduced to a commodity* (as seen too often in mainstream publishing). Their authors offered strong positive responses about their small-press experiences, celebrating the non-traditional strategies around commitment, time, quality, integrity, risk, relationships and long-term publicity; they also acknowledged the traditional bugbears (distribution and promotion). The four *voice*-creators proposed various strategies, which, together with the presses’ own practices, suggest tools that Australian publishers and publishing can use to diversify their sector’s representation and impact.

Through their interrelated principles and practices, WDP and Spinifex fulfil many of Couldry’s requirements for the facilitation of *voice*: they create visibility; respect and act on an author’s *voice*; strengthen their agency and reflexivity; manifest their *voice* in material form (a book); and work to develop narrative resources, strategies and spaces to strengthen their message in the public and literary spheres. Their commitment to social change can be understood thus: “The editor [or publisher] is in service to the writer; the editor and the writer are in service to the book; the book is in service to an entire community” (Schotts, 2017, p. 147). Spinifex and Wild Dingo successfully enable the *voice* of their writers of difference. They demonstrate that MSPs can uplift neglected voices and that their publishing strategies deserve greater consideration as political actions, and thus support my contention that the small-press sector merits attention within communication for social change.

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Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, co-publishers, Spinifex Press, 16/07/2020.

Catherine Lewis, Wild Dingo Press, 24/07/2020.