

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE UN-AUSTRALIAN? VIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM STUDENTS IN 2006

### **Nahid Kabir**

*Recent political and media debates have focused on Australian values, Australianness and being un-Australian. The current war on terror and the Cronulla riots in December 2005 have raised the question of whether Muslim Australians are willing to adopt Australian values. This paper reports on sixty in-depth face-to-face interviews with Muslim students in Sydney and Perth. The main topic of the interviews was: what it means to be 'Australian' and 'un-Australian'. The study focuses on the students' outlook. It concludes that these youthful participants hold very positive views about Australian values, but most of them were very distressed by the Cronulla riots.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The recent citizenship debate in Australia has highlighted the question of Australian values, and what it means to be Australian or un-Australian. In February 2006, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello commented that Muslims who want to live under Islamic *Sharia* law had no place in Australia. In September 2006 Australian Prime Minister John Howard commented on talkback radio that 'a small section of the Islamic population' was 'very resistant to integration' because they failed to learn English quickly enough and did not accept Australian values such as gender equality.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Howard Government proposed a four-year waiting period for migrants to become citizens, together with a new citizenship test requiring knowledge of Australian values and history as well as of the English language.<sup>2</sup> Then the Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, raised the stakes by calling for all new arrivals to sign up to Australian values when they applied for their visas.<sup>3</sup> Some poll results have reinforced this doubt about the loyalty of Muslim Australians. For example, a May 2006 television poll of the general public posed the question: 'Do you think that Muslims can be loyal to both their country and their religion?' The response was: yes: 12 per cent; and no: 88 per cent.<sup>4</sup> On 2 October 2006, *The Australian* reported that

a recent Newspoll found 77 per cent of respondents backed a citizenship test on the English language and knowledge of, and commitment to, Australian values and 'our way of life'.<sup>5</sup> In the context of the citizenship debate, the author sought to investigate the commitment of a sample of young Muslims in Australia to Australian values and the English language, and to discover whether mainstream pressure to inaugurate a citizenship test is necessary.<sup>6</sup>

The author is a Bangladeshi-born Australian Muslim. She lived in Pakistan and the United States for some years and in the Middle East for ten years. Therefore, it was easy for her to relate to and communicate with Muslim students of diverse backgrounds. The students felt relaxed because of the author's non-Caucasian appearance, and her familiarity with their cultural, social and religious issues. For her PhD and post-doctoral projects, 'Muslims in Australia', the author had conducted 120 interviews with Muslims, aged 18 to 90 from 1998 to 2005. For this study the author interviewed 60 Muslim students attending secondary schools, aged 15 to 18 in Sydney and Perth from July to August 2006.

This paper commences with discussion of the concepts of the key terms—*Australian* and *un-Australian*, followed by demographic material. Next it outlines the

method for this study, presents the interviewees' definitions of the terms Australian and un-Australian, and concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

### **THE KEY CONCEPTS**

Literature defining the terms Australian and un-Australian is limited. Zuleyka Zevallos observes that an Australian identity or Australianness could be defined through a traditional Australian identity or Australian culture, or through an emphasis on multiculturalism. She found some Turkish and Latin American women believed that Australia did not have a culture of its own and that, in their view, Australianness was based on multiculturalism.<sup>7</sup> Bob Birrell notes that Australianness is broadly located in egalitarian and democratic values, which emphasise common civic ideals, a reaction against the hierarchical British class system, and which values concepts of mateship and 'a fair go'.<sup>8</sup> John Hirst argues that when multiculturalism is interpreted as meaning acceptance and tolerance of immigrants ('soft multiculturalism') Australians are proud of their achievement but they resent and resist the kind of multiculturalism (assisted by government support) that focuses on Australia's shortcomings and promotes cultural separatism.<sup>9</sup> Tim Phillips and Philip Smith researched the concepts of Australian identity, Australian values and what it means to be an Australian and un-Australian using focus groups drawn from different social segments. They noted that defining Australian identity or an Australian could be very subjective. From an urban white-collar perspective, an Australian could mean someone with a commitment to a fair go, mateship, tolerance, a family orientation, helping people, and a relaxed easy-going lifestyle. From the perspective of a non-English speaking woman it could mean a fair go, tolerance,

owning your own home, freedom to practice one's religion, a casual dress code and equality for women. From a traditional nationalist perspective the term an Australian could mean being willing to go to war for Australia, accepting conscription in wartime, and being in favour of retaining the monarchy. Tim Phillips noted that Aborigines, migrants and young people would probably define the concepts of Australian and un-Australian in different ways, and recommended further research on this topic.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the study of Australian Muslim youth is timely.

### **AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM YOUTH**

In 2001 the Muslim unemployment rate was 18.5 per cent compared to 6.8 per cent of Australian-born and 6.8 per cent of the national total.<sup>11</sup> Katharine Betts and Ernest Healy observe that Australian Muslims have a lower total weekly household income per household and per household member than households affiliated with other religions. This may be due in part to the disproportionate presence of young children in Muslim families and to higher levels of unemployment. The situation of Lebanese Muslim households was even worse. They had a lower weekly household income than their Christian counterparts and this amount had to be stretched over more members, so that their income per household member was half the national average. Betts and Healy also note that first-generation Lebanese Muslim males, because of their lower educational qualifications, were worse off than their Christian counterparts.<sup>12</sup>

The present study of 60 young Muslim students of diverse ethnic backgrounds found that 15 fathers (25 per cent) were unemployed or had no work, and 52 mothers (86.6 per cent were unemployed or had no work) (see Tables 1, 2 and 3 for details). Some students of Lebanese, Indonesian, Somalian and Sudanese

backgrounds are part of large families (at least nine children). This study also found that two of the Sydney-based Australian-born students, one of Lebanese and the other of Syrian origin, worked 30 hours a week in order to support their families.

The participants for this study comprised 38 students from two state schools in south-western Sydney, and 22 students from an Islamic independent college in Perth, all aged 15 to 18 years (Table 1). The students in the Sydney schools were mostly Australian-born, while those in the Perth Islamic college were mostly overseas-born refugees. Of the 60 participants, 30 were classified by their

respective schools as being ‘at-risk’, that is, alienated, violent or angry individuals who under-performed in class, lacked literacy and numeracy skills, and had begun to truant.<sup>13</sup>

The author conducted in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with all participants in July–August 2006. In the interviews the authors asked the participants about their lives, including early school memories, family members, parents’ work status, students’ part-time work, sporting activities, music, entertainment and cultural interests, together with their hopes, ambitions and dreams. However, a special focus was

**Table 1: Overview of the sample by birthplace (overseas-born) or birthplace of parents (Australian-born)**

Birthplace	Perth	Sydney
Overseas-born	19	13
	1 (Afghanistan)	1 (Afghanistan)
	1 (Eritrea)	2 (Bangladesh)
	3 (Iraq)	1 (Egypt)
	1 (Kurdistan)	1 (Indonesia)
	1 (Malaysia)	2 (Iraq)
	1 (Pakistan)	1 (Lebanon)
	8 (Somalia)	1 (Kosovo)
	1 (Sudan)	2 (Pakistan)
	2 (UK-born of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin)	1 (Somalia)
		1 (Sierra Leone)
Australian-born	3	25
	1 (Singapore)	1 (Egypt)
	2 (Egypt)	1 (Indonesia)
		1 (Jordan-Palestine)
		14 (Lebanon)
		1 (Singapore)
		4 (Syria)
		3 (Turkey)
Total	22	38

given to what they meant by the terms Australian and un-Australian.

Hirsch's Social Density Scale was used to assess the density of individuals' social networks.<sup>14</sup> If an individual had a high density network, it was assumed that he or she had a strong support network. The social network appeared to be strong with most students. The Middle Eastern students, especially, had strong family support, including grandparents. Most of their families had come to Australia in the 1970s. However, most participants were of lower-socio economic status and belonged to large families.

It is interesting to note that out of 38 students in the two Sydney state schools, 14 students (six Australian-born of Middle Eastern background and eight overseas-born of other ethnic backgrounds) responded that their national identity was that of their parents' country of origin, for example, Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Fifteen students identified as having dual national identity—Australia and their country of origin. Seven students identified only with Australia. One said that she was an Australian Muslim, while one wasn't sure of her national identity. Out of 22 students in the Islamic college in Perth,

**Table 2: Overview of the sample by birthplace (overseas-born) or birthplace of parents (Australian-born)**

Birthplace	Perth	Sydney
Overseas-born	19 (4 other Middle East, 15 other)	13 (1 Lebanon, 2 other Middle East, 10 other)
Australian-born	3 (2 other Middle East, 1 other)	25 (14 Lebanon, 11 other Middle East)

**Table 3: Overview of the sample by socio-economic status of fathers**

Birthplace	Perth	Sydney
Overseas-born	19 (4 white-collar, 9 blue-collar, 4 unemployed, 1 divorced, 1 deceased)	13 (1 white collar, 4 blue-collar, 7 unemployed, 1 retired)
Australian-born	3 (3 white-collar)	25 (2 white-collar, 18 blue-collar, 2 unemployed, 2 divorced, 1 disability pensioner)
Total	22	38

Note: White collar is defined here as tertiary-educated professionals, managers and administrators, associate professionals, advanced clerical and service workers, intermediate clerical, sales and service workers. Blue collar is defined as tradespersons and related workers, elementary clerical, sales and service workers, and labourers and related workers.<sup>15</sup>

Unemployed mean no work, retired, ill-health, disability pensioners.

The participants of divorced parents or deceased father live with their unemployed mothers.

Out of 22 mothers in Perth, 5 had paid jobs such as teacher, teaching aide, secretary, business, and government service, and the rest (17) were housewives/homemakers.

Out of 38 mothers in Sydney, 3 mothers had paid jobs such as social work, florist, and food packer for the aeroplanes; the rest, 35, were housewives/homemakers.

13 students (one Australian-born and 12 overseas-born) responded that their national identity was that of their parents' country of origin, for example, Afghanistan, Somalia or Iraq. Three students said that they felt connected to both Australia and their parents' country of origin, and four students said that their national identity was Australian. One student, who had lived in New Zealand for a few years, said New Zealand was her national identity, and one identified himself with the Muslim nation. The author has used fictitious names for the interviewees.

### **STUDENTS' DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM AUSTRALIAN**

The term an Australian was variously defined by students both in Sydney and Perth. Sometimes the students looked at it as a noun—referring to a person or nationality, and sometimes as an adjective—referring to culture or behaviour. Let us first explore the definitions given by the Australian-born students both in Sydney and Perth, followed by the overseas-born students.

#### **Sydney: Australian-born**

The second-generation Australian-born students in Sydney defined Australian as follows: Ayesha [female, Jordanian-Palestinian origin, divorced parents] said, 'It depends how you go. I am an Australian when I go with them for a walk and I'm Jordanian when I go with the Jordanians'. Zainab [female, Lebanese origin, blue collar father] defined an Australian as 'Living, and being born in Australia'. Imran [male, Egyptian origin, blue collar father]<sup>16</sup> said:

Well growing up in Australia for so long, it's something you adapt to.

You become Australian as who you are, yeah you can't help it.

Fatima [female, Lebanese-Syrian origin,

blue collar father] emphasised tolerance: 'Australian' is accepting everybody's opinions and religions and cultures; it doesn't really matter who you are. You are in the same country. You are all the same citizens.

Mohammad (male, Syrian origin, divorced parent) said, 'Hmm, just freedom of speech, all that'. And Sufyaan (male, Lebanese origin, blue collar father) had this to say:

Oh I'm proud to be an Australian. It's a positive thing. It's a great country to be in. Great opportunities, great things ... it's just little things like that, little racism, prejudices, but you'd have them in other countries, many countries. You've seen what happened in America with the whole KKK thing against the blacks, you find it everywhere. I wouldn't want to be in Iraq with the whole Shia and Sunni thing going on. Like ... We're here, we're in harmony now. It's just little things like that, that will spark things up.

#### **Perth: Australian-born**

The Australian-born Perth students also considered the definition of Australian positively. A third generation Australian-born student Aziz [male, Egyptian origin, white collar father] emphasised tolerance and freedom of speech:

Well, I think a good Australian is someone who stands up for people's rights and people's beliefs and is tolerant and is accepting of other people's cultures and other people's beliefs and isn't afraid to say how they truly feel, and to stand up for what they feel is wrong.

Another third generation Australian-born student Mustapha [male, Egyptian origin, white collar father] stated:

Hmm, Well I know a lot of Australian people, they're very nice people, they'll help out whenever.

## Discussion

It is interesting to note the similarities between the Australian-born students in Sydney and Perth. In defining the term *Australian* they emphasised tolerance, helping people, freedom of speech, integration, and citizenship. Surprisingly, these students' perceptions of *Australian* are quite similar to depictions made by academics such as Birrell, Phillips and Smith.<sup>17</sup> Historian Helen Irving observed that the length of residence of overseas-born immigrants can make a difference to people's perception of being an Australian.<sup>18</sup> Anthony Smith noted that the familiarity with and fondness for local landscape can also invigorate one's sense of belonging. As Sydney student Sufyaan said, 'Oh I'm proud to be an Australian. It's a positive thing. It's a great country to be in'.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps what characterised most of the young Muslim participants who had a positive definition of the term Australian was their bicultural position. For example, in their life stories they mentioned that they were engaged in outdoor sports and Western music, some did part-time work in departmental or fast food stores, a few were readers. For example, Zainab works in a departmental store and reads James Patterson's books. Sufyaan played Rugby League and represented the Bulldogs, and now he represents his school in inter-school sports. Sufyaan also works in Hungry Jacks. Perth student Aziz plays the piano and represents his Islamic college in inter-school debates. These Australian-born students in Sydney and Perth enjoy Western music such as hip hop, rhythm and blues, singers James Blunt, Tupac, Mariah Carey, Usher. Some of the students also enjoy their own traditional dances, music and food, such as the Arab students with their traditional dance *dabke* at family and friends' wedding ceremonies. Some took pride in saying they played the Lebanese drum *derbeekah* on special occasions.

Though the participants in Sydney reside in predominantly Muslim suburbs, their attendance at state schools has exposed them to mainstream Australian teaching staff, and this interaction with the wider community may have contributed to the development of their positive thinking about Australianness and being an Australian. Similarly, Perth student Aziz's divorced parents are remarried to mainstream Australians. Though Aziz attends an Islamic college, he is also exposed to the Australian culture or way of life through his parents' remarriages, and also through his school, which has employed some non-Muslim Australian teachers. Rogler et al. suggest a bicultural position or a balanced acculturation is best for the development an individual's self esteem. In other words, biculturalism means a near native-like knowledge of two cultures, which includes the ability to respond effectively to the different demands of these two cultures. Some researchers have found that the combination of retaining traditional cultural elements, together with learning those of the host society, can enhance mental health and a hopeful outlook.<sup>20</sup>

One striking finding of this study was that of all the 28 Australian-born students in Sydney and Perth, the bicultural stance through music was taken strongly by 26 Australian-born students irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds (Tables 1, 2 and 3). One Australian-born student of Lebanese origin in Sydney who identified his national identity with Lebanon said that he rarely listens to Western music but he plays sports. When the author asked, 'Is it because of your religion?', the student responded, 'Because the people around me, it's Arabic ... I hear it [Western music] when I feel like hearing, but I'm not into it'. Similarly, one Australian-born student of Egyptian origin in Perth who identified his national identity

with Egypt said that he does not listen to Western music but plays sports—soccer, tennis, basketball, and swimming.

On the other hand, those students who identified their national identity with Australia appear to be more integrated with the wider community, perhaps because these students have one strikingly similar factor—they have part-time jobs in mainstream Australian shops. Only one student is linked to the wider society through his divorced parents marriage to mainstream Australians. So integration takes time and also integration is a two-way street.

### **Sydney: Overseas-born**

The 16-year-old Sydney student Ahmed [male, Singaporean origin, white-collar father], though in fact Australian-born, has lived most of his life in Singapore and defined Australian as:

To me it's just like the stereotypical image of an Aussie, you know shrimps on the barbie and stuff like that.

Humaira [female, Bangladeshi origin, unemployed father] said:

You get to meet other people from different backgrounds because it's a multicultural country and you meet people from different religions and there are different types of people.

Similarly, Muneer [male, Lebanese origin, retired father] reiterated:

We came to Australia because in Australia you can get citizenship, like Muslims and Christian are living in Australia, and that's very like—it's a good thing.

Aida [female, Kosovon origin, unemployed father, Bridging Visa E holder]<sup>21</sup> who wears western dress and works in an Australian restaurant defined Australians as:

Well, people that are from different backgrounds, but they speak [English] and dress [Western] like Australian people, you say they are Australians.

On the other hand, Gulistan who wears a *hijab* or a headscarf [female, Afghan origin, unemployed father] rejects Aida's version of the term *Australian*:

'An Australian'? But that does not mean we change our perspective about how we live. Just because we are in Australia does not mean we have to follow their ways.

### **Perth: Overseas-born**

The 17-year-old Perth student Nazma [female, Kurdish origin, blue-collar father] defines Australian as: 'It's such a multicultural country, you can't really say "Oh, like it's just the white people are Australian", because we're just as much Australian as they are'. Rahim [male, Somalian origin, blue collar parent] said: 'To be an Australian, it's quite okay'. Mehjabeen (female, Somalian origin, blue collar father), 'Um, be nice to the Muslims, cooperate'. Parveen [female, UK-born Bangladeshi origin, white-collar father] said:

The value of giving everyone a fair go, is very much Australian. But it is also very much an Islamic value. In fact Islam is a religion that teaches the equality of human beings irrespective of human gender, ethnicity, race and culture.

Ayesha [female, Eritrean origin, unemployed father] observed:

Umm well I think they use that in a bad way. Like 'You're acting like an Australian'. They're not saying it in a good way. Acting like an Australian, would mean, short clothing, beer, and stereotypes.

However, Ali [male, Iraqi origin, unemployed father] who attended a

Catholic school in 2001 and later moved to an Islamic College in Perth emphasised the question of loyalty.

Oh to be an Australian means like you will do everything for Australia. If there is any war or anything, you will go for Australia. You will say 'I will go for Australia'.

Ali further said:

I had a lot of friends, non-Muslims and Muslims. We shared a lot there and caring to each other. Sometimes they differentiated between a good and bad Muslim. If, for example, a Muslim did something bad, they would not generalise all Muslims as bad people.

### **Discussion**

Both in Sydney and Perth, only two overseas-born students, Ahmed and Ayesha, had stereotypical definitions of Australian. Their responses were similar to Zuleyka Zevallos's findings in her study of second generation Turkish and Latin American migrant women (Australian and overseas-born), aged 17 to 28 years. Zevallos found that most of her subjects thought Australianness or Australian culture meant convict history, meat pies, barbeques and the laid-back Australian persona.<sup>22</sup> Zevallos found that most of her participants thought Australian culture was multicultural. In a similar fashion most of the overseas-born participants for this study also put a great deal of emphasis on multiculturalism.

The 32 overseas-born students for this study, both in Sydney and Perth, arrived in Australia during the last 10 years, some of them as recently as two years ago (Table 1). These students have learnt the English language in a short time and have endorsed the Australian values of 'a fair-go' and loyalty to Australia. As discussed earlier, out of 27 participants (seven Australian-born and 20 overseas-born) who identified their national identity with their country

of origin, all said that their loyalty lay with their host country, Australia. Some of the Sydney and Perth students who have come from a traumatised refugee background such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia, were also appreciative of multiculturalism. These overseas-born students both in Sydney and Perth also hold a bicultural position, speak both languages and listen to Western music, but their affiliation with their Muslim cultural identity, particularly among the Muslim girls wearing the *hijab*, appears to be strong. The overseas-born Iraqi student, Ali, who has integrated more into the wider community held a very optimistic view of the term Australian. He equated Australianness with loyalty and going to war. (It is not known whether any Muslims from Australia fought for the British Empire during World War I, but during World War II some Australian-born Muslims of Javanese origin from Mackay volunteered to go to war, and some Australian-born and overseas-born Albanians also fought for Australia during World War II.)<sup>23</sup>

So without the citizenship test the 32 overseas-born students have turned out to be the citizens desired by some politicians. Gulistan, the Afghanistan-born student, speaks fluent English but wears the *hijab*. She disagreed with Aida that all Australians have to wear Western dress. Gulistan meant that one can also be an Australian without abandoning their traditional clothing. Ayesha, the Eritrean-born student, speaks fluent English but holds a stereotypical image of an Australian, perhaps because her father is unemployed or perhaps she still does not feel very connected to Australia as Ahmed. However, everyone showed respect for the law of the land and the concept of the *Sharia* law never occurred in their conversation. Though most of the participants in this study belong to a lower socio-economic group, the



author did not find any students who had entirely segregated themselves from the mainstream society. The 38 Sydney students are attending state schools run by the wider community and the 22 students in the Islamic college in Perth are also exposed to non-Muslim mainstream staff. In this respect, all students are exposed to the Australian values of 'a fair go' and loyalty. Under the circumstances, the author wonders whether the mainstream pressure for the citizenship test is warranted. As Irving pointed out, the length of residence of overseas-born immigrants can make a difference to people's perception of being 'an Australian'. While upholding the example of Australia's second Prime Minister Alfred Deakin (Australian-born of British immigrant parents), Irving argues:

So it was in nineteenth-century Australia. If Alfred Deakin called himself an 'independent Australian Briton', he did not really believe he lived or thought just as the Englishman did in Britain. Deakin, indeed, scorned much to be found in England, in particular the 'class-feeling' and 'snobbishness' that 'pervades English society from top to bottom'. The 'Australian Briton' did not share in this English culture, but had a new type of identity, its shape already emerging the moment white people began to occupy Australian soil. It was this identity that was articulated one hundred years later in the processes of forming a nation.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, it can be argued that new immigrants will endorse the Australian values of liberal democracy, gender equity and national loyalty. It is just a matter of time. This point will be discussed below.

### **Defining the term un-Australian**

Muslim Students in Sydney and Perth defined the term *un-Australian* variously, though there were some common themes such as: not being born in Australia and

not having Australian values or not appreciating popular culture, disloyalty, racism, and people's behaviour during the Cronulla riot. There were only two Australian-born students in Perth (see Table 1). Therefore,, in Perth, most of the themes in this section were defined by overseas-born students.

### **NOT BEING BORN IN AUSTRALIA, NOT HAVING AUSTRALIAN VALUES AND NOT ENJOYING POPULAR CULTURE**

#### **Sydney: Australian-born**

Australian-born Fauzia [female, Lebanese origin, blue-collar father] defined un-Australian as 'not being born in Australia'. Zainab [female, Lebanese origin, blue collar father] said, 'Your behaviour's being un-Australian'. Hamida [female, Syrian origin, blue-collar father] said:

To be Australian means to go with the flow; like with the trend; popular culture; to do what everyone else is doing. To be 'un-Australian', is like a wog I say. To be a wog! Like to do stuff that people used to do a long time ago, the olden days as you say.

Mohammed [male, Syrian origin, divorced parents], who aims to be an English teacher, held that stereotyping is common in all groups:

Un-Australian: I guess you could be Australian and un-Australian at the same time because everyone here, even the Australians themselves, they get stereotyped, picked on; everyone has their own fair share of you know, abuse and that.

#### **Sydney: overseas-born**

Gulistan [female, Afghan origin, unemployed father] perceives the term *un-Australian* could refer to an act related to 'religions and way of thinking'. Ahmed [male, Singaporean origin, white-collar father] said, 'Like they're just trying to say,

“Oh this guy’s not acting Australian so he doesn’t have the Australian values and that”.

### **Perth: overseas-born**

Khadija [female, Somalian origin, unemployed father] and Mariam [female, Eritrean origin, blue-collar father] believed that the term *un-Australian* meant ‘having a tradition, having a religion [different from those current in the mainstream population]’. Nazma [female, Kurdish origin, blue-collar father] commented: “Un-Australian?”—when you don’t believe yourself that you’re an Australian’. Aida [female, Kosovan origin, unemployed father, Bridging Visa E holder] thought that people’s traditional clothing would make them look un-Australian. Parveen [female, UK-born Bangladeshi origin, white-collar father] said: ‘Someone who’s un-Australian is someone who doesn’t accept what Australia stands for as a national and the value’. Mashroof [male, UK-born Pakistani origin, white collar father] put it in a more explicit way:

Well to be Australian, you know you’ve gotta enjoy yourself, you know watch a bit of cricket, AFL, good barbeques you know. Everybody should follow democratic principles of equal rights, you know, democracy, interact with one another; don’t be racist, things like that. But to be un-Australian is someone like, who won’t learn English, you know who’ll just stay within his own people, you know he won’t enjoy the ‘fair dinkum’, they say the Aussies, you know so yeah. [So an un-Australian is a migrant who does not integrate into the wider community].

All respondents in Sydney and Perth share similar views on the meaning of the term *un-Australian*—relating it to place of birth, behaviour, different religion [not Christianity], wearing traditional clothing,

and expressing foreign values. However, the overseas-born [Afghan in Sydney and Somalian in Perth] of refugee background appear to be more connected with their Islamic religion than were the other respondents. It is also interesting to note that what the Australian-born Mohammed in Sydney said about the terms *Australian* and *un-Australian* was echoed by the UK-born Pakistani student (Mashroof) in Perth. That is, one can be Australian through sports, the Australian Football League, and traditional barbeques or through being a good citizen by obeying the principles of liberal democracy. But like some Australian politicians, overseas-born Mashroof also thinks that unfamiliarity with the English language and living in enclaves is un-Australian. He emphasises a need for integration with the wider community. These views were held irrespective of the socio-economic status of the students’ fathers.

### **DISLOYALTY**

#### **Sydney: Australian-born**

Fatima [female, Lebanese-Syrian origin, blue-collar father] said:

I say un-Australian would be like not showing respect to our country. Like this is Australia. We are all proud of it; if someone says, ‘Oh, you know I hate Australia’, then that’s just wrong. That’s saying you are un-Australian; you are not being right. You are being actually racist to your own country. Like when people will say ‘Go home to your country’; we are all Australian citizens, that is un-Australian.

#### **Sydney: Overseas-born**

Nighat [female, Pakistani origin, blue-collar father] said:

Some Muslims are not loyal to Australia, because they are more loyal to their religion. But I think it is not correct because like we live here, even in our

religion, we have to abide by the rules and values where we do live, so if we like go against the rules of Australia, we are going against our religion, so we have to abide where we do live. So I think everyone should be loyal to the country where they live, because we live here and we do think that it is our country, and this country is giving us our future.

In this context, the sense of belonging to Australia by both Australian-born and overseas-born in Sydney is similar but Nighat's mention of Islam once again shows that the new immigrants feel more affiliated to their religion than the Australia-born students do. However, this affiliation to one's religion should not be considered a cultural threat to the mainstream population as the immigrant's first priority is to 'respect the law of the land'.

## **RACISM**

### **Sydney: Australian-born**

Nasreen [female, Lebanese origin, blue-collar father] commented:

Sometimes I find Australians pretty racist since 9/11 to Muslims, because they humiliate everyone. Because they just aimed at the Muslims, like they didn't aim it at anyone else.

Once I was reading the article, I was doing it for English, I was doing advertising and then we saw the sign about Osama bin Laden; 'all Muslims are terrorists', so that's how it's, like they're aiming at just at Muslims.

Khadeja [female, Lebanese origin, blue-collar father] described the term *un-Australian* as:

I know that a person who doesn't abide by the rules is not an Australian. My mum had an operation on her knee, and

she wears a scarf. Yeah *hijab*, and then she was in a particular place, you know the area Bankstown? ... And there's a lot of Muslims in that area, and then this lady with a big cross just started pushing her—and I wasn't there yet—and she pushed her and my Mum had just had an operation and she's like 'Leave me alone please. Just leave me alone'. And she kept on pushing her and then my Mum just started crying, and then she just left. I can't stand people that have racism in their blood.

### **Perth: Australian-born**

Aziz [male, Egyptian origin, white-collar father] held:

What is it to be un-Australian; someone who says things like, who is very possessive, who is very selfish and says 'You don't belong here; get out, go away, get out of our country'—things like that. That's un-Australian in my opinion.

Many participants in Sydney and Perth also considered that vilification against Muslims since September 11, 2001 was un-Australian. However, the Cronulla riot, as discussed next, was identified by all Australian-born students as un-Australian, but the overseas-born students appeared to have been less affected by it. Some overseas-born students in Perth blamed the media for stirring up the riot.

## **CRONULLA RIOT**

A majority of the Sydney students were distressed by the Cronulla riot, particularly those of Lebanese origin, and they regarded the incident as un-Australian. Cronulla, located in the Sutherland Shire south of Sydney, is the only beachside suburb in Sydney with train access. According to the 2001 Census, 86.9 per cent of Sutherland residents identified themselves as being of Australian, Irish or

English origin compared to the general Sydney Anglo population of 65.6 per cent.<sup>25</sup> Ahmed Hamodeh, argues that Cronulla has had a long standing culture of protecting ‘our’ beach from the ‘other’. He writes that locals reported that for decades the ‘surf gangs’ had battled to protect their beach from ‘westies’ or ‘wogs’. Under the circumstances, the new arrivals—people of Middle Eastern origin—were not welcome on the Cronulla beach.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Ryan Barclay and Peter West interpreted the local youths’ hostility towards Australians of Arab descent as ‘patriotic’ rather than ‘racist’ because ‘many were draped in Australian flags and covered with tattoos (mostly temporary) of the Australian flag’. Barclay had used the beach for 10 years. He reports that immigrants were accepted if they observed the norms of how the beach should be shared.<sup>27</sup> Paul Sheehan held that it was conflict between predominantly Anglo Christian, conservative, insular youths and Lebanese Muslims. Sheehan argued, ‘That from the media’s treatment of the riot the ‘subtext was clear—it was the latest variant of the White Australia tradition’.<sup>28</sup> There were also suggestions in Sheehan’s book that local Lebanese were disrespectful of Australian girls at the beach. As one girl, Tegan Wagner<sup>29</sup> reported:

I’m a Shire girl. I’ve been going to Cronulla for years. I’d seen first hand how people get treated, not by the local Lebanese, but by the Lebanese Muslims that come in from places like Bankstown and Riverwood. They treat our beach like a sleazy nightclub. They treat young women like garbage. And as soon as you say anything, they are on their mobile phones to 50 of their closest friends and their mates come down and outnumber people. If it’s guys, they will beat them up. If it’s girls, they will terrorise them.<sup>30</sup>

## Event

On 4 December 2005, a fight between three surf lifesavers and a group of four Lebanese-background young men had occurred on the beach.<sup>31</sup> The lifesavers had reportedly insulted their assailants with public taunts that ‘Lebs’ can’t swim.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Barclay and West reported that Lebanese males in a pack would normally come to the beach and verbally abuse the local women with phrases such as ‘you’re a slut’, ‘you Aussie slut’, ‘you should be raped’.<sup>33</sup> Following the fight, the popular commercial media, notably the tabloids and talkback radio, fanned the flames. On 11 December 2005, about 5,000 young people converged on Sydney’s Cronulla beach, many draped in Australian flags, singing *Waltzing Matilda* and *Advance Australia Fair* as well as chanting ‘Kill the Lebs’, ‘no more Lebs’, ‘fuck off Lebs’, ‘fuck off wogs’, ‘let’s keep our country clean’ and attacked people of Middle Eastern appearance.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, on 12 December 2005 a group of Lebanese-Australians arrived at Punchbowl Park armed with guns, matches, baseball bats, knives, chains and iron bars; when they departed they left messages written on the roadway: ‘AUSSIE TO DIE, IT’S WAR, NEVER REST ASSI DOG, YOU CAME IN CHAINS U CONVICT DOGS, WE FEAR NO OZY PIGS’ [sic];<sup>35</sup> and launched a reprisal attack by smashing shops and cars and threatening people who got in their way.<sup>36</sup> They also bashed at least four people.<sup>37</sup> The next day Australia’s leading national newspaper, *The Australian* had the headline on the front page: ‘Gangs launch revenge raids \* Muslims retaliate for riot \* Shots fired, six arrested \* Residents, cars attacked’.<sup>38</sup> The Lebanese-Australians were then labelled as ‘Muslims’. On 14 December 2005, *The Australian* reported, ‘The main beach at the Cronulla was virtually deserted yesterday, except for a self-described “proud Aussie” who wit-

nessed the race riots on Sunday and returned to protect the sand “from the hairy ape Muslim invasion”<sup>39</sup>.

### Aftermath

The Cronulla riots impacted on all the Sydney Muslim students, especially those in the Lebanese community. It appears conflict originated from both sides; however, this study reveals the unheard voices of some Australian-born Sydney Muslim youths about the incident. Suleiman [male, Lebanese origin, blue-collar father] said:

‘An Australian’, like being an Australian probably is setting a good example, but to be Lebanese you be setting a bad example. ‘Un-Australian’, probably ... like the Cronulla riots was un-Australian; like behaving in an abnormal way ... Like it just depends who your employer would be; like if they’re racists or not. Because my brother he used to work in air conditioning, and just when the Cronulla Riots were going on, he got fired. His boss was an Aussie. His boss gave him a reason, but a very stupid reason.

Bashir [male, Syrian origin, blue-collar father] said:

To me personally it hasn’t had any impact because we live in an Anglo-Saxon area, away from Punchbowl and Bankstown area [predominantly Arab]. They haven’t changed towards us; however, if we go to areas different than where we live, like for example Cronulla, Bondi, we find a lot of racism, and after the Cronulla riots you get looks—you get dirties—bad looks. Like, ‘What are you doing here? You don’t belong here’. So it’s put a huge boundary between Middle Eastern looking and in between Anglo-Saxons; like it’s very bad. It’s caused a disaster.

Mahmood [male, Lebanese origin, blue-collar father] had this to say:

I’m Australian, but what happens, people make you think you’re not Australian. You know like you go down to Cronulla, me and my mate went down to Cronulla the other day, even before the riots, and you’ve got, whatever you want to call them, Sutherland Shire boys showing off! Saying racial comments, ‘You fucking wogs, go back to your countries’, but little do they know we’re exactly like them. But what we’re just a little bit more tanned.

Fatima [female, Lebanese-Syrian origin, blue-collar father] commented:

The Cronulla riot was the worst. My little sister, they went to these Cronulla pools, all the boys were calling them ‘Go back to your home town’, and they were really racist towards her and like she was only 13 at the time, so she didn’t understand what she should do. So the teachers had to remove them from the pool. Like it got really bad.

Abdul [male, Lebanese origin, father disability pensioner] justified the Lebanese-Australians action at Cronulla:

Well the Cronulla riot did have a big impact on me because they did say that us Middle Eastern appearance boys did go down there and harass their girls and vandalise their property, but really when ...; I have two sisters, and my two sisters went down to Cronulla during the summer and they were harassed by Aussies down there. And they just think of, well they just said that alcohol did make the riot even more bigger; well alcohol is not the answer here. It’s just their actions, they’ll be racist, they were after the Middle Eastern appearance people, as well we did retaliate at them you know. I know it was wrong what we did when we went up there, but I still reckon ... Every thing happens for a reason, do you know what I mean?

Imran [male, Egyptian origin blue-collar father] said:

Well I think it's you know, overdone. They just make it so bad and put it on the Muslims. You know we didn't do nothing, and it had a bad impact because people are looking at me differently, saying 'He's Muslim ... , this, that', in a negative way.

Selim [male, Lebanese origin, blue-collar father] was critical of the event:

Well there was a lot of chaos; everyone was running around, going crazy. The Australians were fighting the Lebanese, the Lebanese fighting the Australian; stupid.

### **Perth**

The Perth students were well-informed about the Cronulla riot and, though it did not have such an impact on them, they were upset about the media reports. Rabia [female, Somalian origin, blue collar parent] commented:

Yeah, just the day after the Cronulla incident happened some youth egged a house in Belmont [suburb of Perth]. None of them would have done that if they didn't see the Cronulla thing ... ; so sometimes I sort of blame the news for showing stuff, because why do they have to repeat an incident that's already happened, unless they're trying to, you know, get some sort of reaction out of it?

Nazma [female, Kurdish origin, blue-collar father] also linked the Cronulla riot with the anti-Islamic sentiment which appeared in the media:

What happened in the Cronulla incident; like it was all the [Muslim] youth have just been exposed to all this negativity and stuff and then I suppose it's like most of Sydney is like full of Lebanese people and that's why the Lebs are going crazy. If you've seen on the news and stuff, in

Sydney and stuff with all the Cronulla incidents and everything, and the only reason they're doing that is because US President George Bush and whoever masterminds and are behind this, know that those little kids are going to be doing that. And that's why they show such disgusting and graphic images of their people getting harmed because they just want a reaction out of them, and it's working, sadly.

On 14 December 2005, *The Australian* also reported on repercussions in other Australian cities. It reported that there were attacks on a Middle Eastern family in Perth and a Lebanese Australian taxi driver in Adelaide.<sup>40</sup>

### **Discussion**

It appears the Middle Eastern Muslim students in Sydney were hard hit by the Cronulla riots. But it did not have such an impact on Muslim students of other ethnic backgrounds such as Turks or Singaporeans. A Turkish youth said that it had not impacted on him though he felt for his Lebanese friends because they all stuck together. However, Ahmed [male, Singaporean origin, white-collar father] was not so sympathetic towards Lebanese youths:

They're cocky, they have too much confidence in themselves. They think they're like, I don't know I just think they're up themselves. They don't care. Because like for them it's just a school and teachers are just people that teach them, so they think they're better than the teachers. But not all of them, no.

Similarly, Nighat [Pakistani] said that she felt uncomfortable about the domination of the Lebanese girls in her school. It seems that Ahmed and Nighat, two overseas-born students, were a minority in their school because there were a large number of Australian-born

Lebanese students and the old migrant groups felt more empowered than the newcomers. Similarly, perhaps, the Anglo youths and young adults at Cronulla beach felt like established custodians whose forebears had lived in Australia for generations. This feeling of empowerment by the incumbents over the newcomers is surely a natural phenomenon. The Cronulla beach was their space, and the newcomers were not welcome.

Generally, the students in this study were optimistic about their inclusion as Australians, except in respect of incidents that occurred during the Cronulla riots. For example, Bashir, Mahmood and Fatima expressed their sense of rejection—when they were treated as non-Australians by other Australians—at this time. Selim was very critical of both groups involved at the Cronulla riot. Imran, though of Egyptian origin, felt the impact of the riot because of his Middle Eastern appearance. The Perth students blamed the media for reinforcing Australians' fear of Muslims. Carmen Lawrence observes that the media over-exaggerated mainstream Australians' fear of the 'other' by showing graphic pictures of the Iraq war or of militant Muslims' acts of terrorism repeatedly and, in her view, this resulted in the Cronulla riot.<sup>41</sup>

Of the seven Sydney students who spoke about the aftermath of the Cronulla riot, only Fatima and Selim identified their national identity with Australia.<sup>42</sup> The other five Sydney respondents said they feel connected to both nationalities—Australia and their country of origin. Abdul held the view of retaliation. Though Abdul's father is unemployed he works in a mainstream store. Abdul is fond of rap music and Tupac. In fact, most of the male respondents in Sydney are fond of Tupac's lyrics.<sup>43</sup> When the author asked Abdul, 'Is Tupac contributing positively to youth development?' Abdul responded:

I reckon music has nothing to do with what you do outside. Everyone's got their own mind, own opinion; it's just music is there for you to entertain yourself while you are bored. It's not like you go outside and hit someone because you heard music.

Of the two Perth respondents who spoke about the aftermath of the Cronulla riot, only Rabia identified her nationality with Australia. She commented, 'I say Australian, because some of us haven't gone back to Somalia at all', while Nazma identified herself as a Kurdish Muslim. In this case, her ethnicity and religion has taken priority in her identity. Both the girls wear the *hijab* and are fond of Western music—Rhythm and Blue, Pop, James Blunt and Michel Bublé. But Rabia worked at a mainstream store. Perhaps, her sense of belonging to Australia has developed from her contact with the mainstream Australians through work.

## CONCLUSION

The Australian-born Muslim students in Sydney and Perth have defined the terms *Australian* or *Australianness* as standing for tolerance, helping people, freedom of speech, integration and citizenship, though the overseas-born students both in Sydney and Perth placed more emphasis on multiculturalism as a defining characteristic of Australianness. On the definition of the term *un-Australian* all students expressed similar views but the overseas-born students considered that anything un-Australian was also un-Islamic. This is an interesting finding. Under the circumstances, contrary factors such as the Cronulla riot would obviously be seen as un-Australian because both the groups involved—the mainstream Australians and Lebanese Muslims—had been disrespectful both of one another and also disrespectful of the law of the land by

smashing cars and momentarily creating havoc in the locality. It appears the underlying reason for the Cronulla conflict was cultural and clearly beyond the socio-economic status of the rioters. The tensions between these two groups were building over the years, and finally the outburst took place in December 2005. Under the circumstances, effective steps should be taken by the local councillors, community leaders, schools and more importantly parents to educate young people to show tolerance to other cultures. As reported by some informants, the use of mobiles and group confrontation against other groups by some Lebanese-Australians should be addressed by community leaders.

As observed, Muslims are disadvantaged in employment. Furthermore, as Betts and Healy have noted, first-generation Lebanese Muslim males have lower rates of post-school qualifications than their Christian counterparts. This study has also found that 25 per cent of fathers had no work and 86.6 per cent of mothers were unemployed (Table 3). Two of the participants of Arab backgrounds worked 30 hours a week to support their families despite the fact that they were still attending school. However, the students in this study, both Australian-born and overseas-born, held an optimistic view of Australianness. Therefore, the suggestion by some politicians and mainstream Australians that we should insist that new immigrants should both learn the English language and endorse the 'Australian way of life' and 'Australian values' as part of a citizenship test is questionable and may even be counter-productive.

This study finds that overseas-born Muslim young people already speak English and support liberal democratic values. They feel loyalty to Australia. There are grounds for optimism that this trend

will continue with other new immigrants. Nevertheless, there is evidence in this study that Australian-born Muslim students who have integrated into the wider community through sports, debates and work at mainstream stores are able to articulate a broader set of Australian values and behaviours. Through their schooling and community life, the overseas-born students should be respectfully encouraged to engage with other Australians in similar activities so that they too will come to appreciate better what it means to be Australian in a short time.

The immigration history of Australia shows that earlier immigrant groups, such as the Greeks and Italians, initially had poor English skills but they have proved to be desirable citizens.<sup>44</sup> In the current climate of global war on terror, it is even more crucial that new immigrants are encouraged to become bicultural. This means their cultural ways should not be regarded as deficits but as valuable assets to be complemented by the absorption of the new language and culture of their adopted country. But this absorption takes time. To force newly arrived immigrants to learn English and Australian history would be adding stress to their already existing anxiety of settling into a new country.

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#### **Notes**

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- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> G. Megalogenis, 'Keelty: terrorism not fault of Muslims', *The Australian*, 16 September 2006, p. 1
- <sup>4</sup> Channel Nine, 'A Current Affair' <<http://au.answers.yahoo.com/question/index: ylt=AqYCNIB7D9EcQ0EtHw4GiXLg5gt.?qid=20060628163720AABxvdz>>
- <sup>5</sup> Editorial, 'Taxi rank offence', *The Australian*, 2 October 2006, p. 9
- <sup>6</sup> Migrants seeking citizenship will need a grasp of up to 200 questions about Australia under the proposed new citizenship test, and to answer them in English. The test will be on computer, and applicants will be expected to understand and respond in English to oral questions when registering for the test. Citizenship applicants would need to study 'Let's Participate: A Course in Australian Citizenship', a syllabus based on the current citizenship introductory course, and other relevant materials. The test will require answers to about 30 multiple-choice questions selected randomly from a secret list of 200 questions. The test topics would include Australian landmarks, Indigenous history, white settlement, constitution and the monarchy, freedom, obeying the law, enrolling to vote, jury service, the national anthem, the flag, coat of arms, flora and fauna and national colours. Those aged under 18 or over 60 and people with physical and mental incapacities will not have to sit the test. People with low literacy can take it in an alternative format. See M. Metherell and T. Dick, 'New citizens face test on 200 questions', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 December 2006, p. 1. The introduction of the test requires new legislation. At the time of writing this has not yet been put before the Parliament.
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- <sup>16</sup> The national indicators in brackets after the names indicate the participants' parents' birthplace; this may be either the participants' own birthplace or their country of origin if born in Australia.
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- <sup>19</sup> A. D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991, p. 14
- <sup>20</sup> L. H. Rogler, D. E. Cortes, and R. G. Malgady, 'Acculturation and mental health status among Hispanics: convergence and new directions for research', *American Psychologist*, vol. 46, no. 6, 1991, pp. 585–597; see also N. Kabir, 'Students at risk: can connections make a difference?', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2006, pp. 17–24.
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- <sup>22</sup> Zevallos, 2005, *op. cit.*
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- <sup>24</sup> Irving, 1997 *op. cit.*, p. 31 (Irving is quoting from *Alfred Deakin, The Federal Story*, Robertson & Mullens,

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- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> R. Barclay and P. West, 'Racism or patriotism? An eyewitness account of the Cronulla demonstration of 11 December 2005', *People and Place*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2006, pp. 75–85
- <sup>28</sup> P. Sheehan, *Girls Like You*, MacMillan, Sydney 2006, pp. 361–362
- <sup>29</sup> Tegan Wagner was one of the four young girls brutally raped by the Pakistani-born 'K' brothers in 2002. She was a 14-year-old virgin. The six 'K' brothers were Muslims and tried the cultural defence and used religion at their trial. They said the girls hadn't been wearing purdah and so on as a justification for what they had done. Tegan Wagner waived her right to anonymity after the trial. See *ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 362. The author received similar anecdotes from other sources regarding the use of mobiles and group confrontation by some Lebanese-Australians with other ethnic and racial groups, in other places particularly in road-related incidents in Sydney. People from Caucasian, Lebanese Christian, and Bangladeshi backgrounds have discussed this with the author while she was in Sydney in 2006.
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- <sup>39</sup> S. Kearney and C. Overington, 'Digging in at the beach', *The Australian*, 2005, 14 December, p. 4
- <sup>40</sup> 'Culture of rage', *op. cit.*, p. 4
- <sup>41</sup> C. Lawrence, *Fear and Politics*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2006, p. 13
- <sup>42</sup> As discussed earlier, all participants for this study have identified their national identities either with their parents' country of origin, with both countries, that is their parents' country of origin and Australia, or only with Australia. So, from that sample, the author discusses explicitly which identity group the interviewees of the Cronulla aftermath belonged.
- <sup>43</sup> Most of Tupac's songs are about the hardships of growing up around violence in United States ghettos, poverty and racism, and sometimes his feuds with fellow rappers. Messages of political, economic, and racial equality pervade his work. For Tupac Shakur's details see <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupac\\_Shakur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tupac_Shakur)>, accessed 27 January 2007.
- <sup>44</sup> See P. Georgiou, 'Pity the poor immigrant who has to earn his welcome', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 2006, p. 11