

Strangers Within in the “Lucky Country”: Arab-Australians after September 11

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In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, one fallout from the horrific attacks was a backlash across the world against people of Arab descent.¹ While there has been much discussion of this reaction in the United States and across Europe, less attention has been paid to the vilification of people of Arab descent in other countries such as Australia. While the Australian case is not an isolated phenomenon, the impact of 9/11 on Arab-Australians is particularly interesting within the context of Australia's policy of multiculturalism.² Officially, Australia's multicultural policies have been seen as an integral part of the so-called “lucky country” of Australia, a land of fairness and opportunity for all.³ In reality, the position of Arab-Australians has been far more ambiguous, with a strong history of prejudice directed against them. However, within this historical context, 9/11 and the events that followed – the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Bali bombings – represented a particularly significant moment for people of Arab descent in Australia. For as well as overt attacks and vilification, the compatibility of Arab ethnicity and Islam to Australia and the very identity of Arab-Australians as “Australian” were questioned. To be framed in this way, as strangers and a threat in their own country, was a devastating blow for many Arab-Australians.

Arab migration to Australia has spanned over one hundred years and approximately half a million Australians claim some form of Arab descent.⁴ Many members of Arab-Australian communities are now second-generation Australians or have lived in the country for the majority of their lives. Arabic is the fourth most commonly spoken language in the country, with the largest proportion of these Arabic speakers born in Australia.⁵ Today Arab-Australians constitute populous and diverse communities within Australia. Following the events of 9/11 however, Arab-Australians found themselves under attack.

Prejudice

In the first two weeks following the 9/11 attacks, over 400 calls were made by Arab-Australians alleging physical and verbal assaults to a hotline in New South Wales, Australia.⁶ Similarly, reports of vilification to the Australian Arabic Council in Melbourne were twenty times higher than in 2000.⁷ After 9/11, and particularly following the Bali bombings, “Islamophobia” -- which must be seen as including people of Arab descent because of the popular conflation of the categories of Arab and Muslim -- established a firm foothold in Australia. A recent University of New South Wales study found that one in eight people interviewed admitted they were prejudiced, particularly against Muslim Australians.⁸ Over twelve per cent of those questioned said that they did not believe that Muslim Australians and “people from the Middle East” fitted into Australian society.⁹

Vicious verbal and physical attacks against Arab-Australians post 9/11 focused predominantly on people and institutions visibly seen as Muslim or Arab, particularly women wearing Islamic dress.¹⁰ Examples of attacks recorded by the Sydney-based Australian Arabic Communities Council Racism Register included an attack on a housewife and her daughter in a supermarket in Sydney. The woman “had the veil taken off her and her daughter's head. Then [the attackers] ... dragged both of them to the floor and beat them up, at the same time yelling obscenities. The daughter's arm was broken.”¹¹ In another assault, three men attacked a schoolboy, cutting his legs, punching and kicking him and yelling racist abuse.¹² In another case, a Muslim taxi driver in Melbourne was held at knifepoint and verbally abused about his faith.¹³

Other incidents of vilification, reported as part of an Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) project documenting prejudice against Arab-Australians after 9/11, included the following accounts:

In the shops, they call us “terrorists” and “Osama bin Laden.” Sometimes people spit and shout and it leaves us feeling quite scared and shaken. No one helps or defends us. (Perth, Western Australia)

I was shopping and someone threw eggs at me, spat at me, and took my veil off. Who was there to help? (Sydney, New South Wales)

One day, I went to the CBD [Central Business District] with a friend. We were about to cross the road when two men started yelling “You are Taliban – go home!” I keep thinking about it. I don’t feel safe when I go around places. One year after September 11, I crossed the street to go to campus and a young man gave me the finger. (Melbourne, Victoria)

I was picking up my children from the local Islamic school, and on the way home a lady tried to run me off the road. She followed me home and then when I was in my driveway getting the kids out of the car the lady came up ... and physically assaulted my daughter ... She kept yelling abuses and swear words at us ... like “we’ll fix you, you nappy heads,” and “get the f ... out of our country you f ... ing terrorists.” She also called my daughter a “slut” many times. The whole time my neighbour was watching. (Melbourne, Victoria)¹⁴

Islamic institutions such as mosques and schools were also targeted, with Brisbane’s largest mosque fire-bombed, a Perth mosque defiled, and a Brisbane Islamic school bus stoned.¹⁵ Hate mail was sent to organizations such as the Australian Arabic Council and the following to the Lebanese Moslems Association in Sydney:

You Leb people are scum. Lower than a snake’s belly. We don’t want your sh-t in Australia. All Lebs should be rounded up, born here or not, and shipped back ... or maybe they could be fed to the sharks, if the sharks don’t object to these mongrel useless dole-bludging scumbags.¹⁶

Human rights and community organizations also attracted similar mail; for example, the Center for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales received an email containing the following extract: “To you people in Australia who call yourselves Muslim ... If you haven’t got the guts to call yourselves Australians first and have respect for the majority, Christians, then f ... off back to the sh-t hole you ran away from (f ... ing cowards).”¹⁷ As Muslim students in Victoria reported: “After September 11, Bali, and the Iraq war, we [Arab and Islamic communities] are treated like terrorists. Even Muslims who have been part of this country for many years all of a sudden were no longer treated as part of this country.”¹⁸

In interviews conducted by the author following

9/11, individuals said they felt they had been “tarred with the same brush” as adherents of *Al-Qaeda*, and that people in their workplaces looked at them “differently.”¹⁹ They noted that attacks on individuals and mosques had created concerns for safety within the community and questions about whether Arab and Muslim communities were accepted in Australia. Post 9/11, community members believed they were seen as “outsiders,” a possible “Fifth Column,” and that their loyalty was being questioned without due reason.²⁰

Conflating the “Other”

Prejudice directed at Arab-Australians following 9/11 also extended to individuals presumed to be Arab and/or Muslim or who wore clothes that marked them religiously, such as turbans.²¹ For example, after 9/11 the Sikh community in Western Australia was targeted: a pig’s head was left in front of a Sikh temple, and an elderly Sikh man was pelted with beer cans while out on an evening walk.²² Mr. Sarjit Singh Jassal, Trustee of the Sikh Gurdwara Temple in Perth, Western Australia, noted that:

Because some turban-wearing people grabbed headlines through terrorist acts, all turban-wearing people, including Sikhs, have become the targets for racist taunts and jibes ... I have lived in this country for twenty years, and, like many Sikhs, have great Australian friends, but these days, people look at us suspiciously and it is not uncommon for us to be questioned aggressively about what faith we belong to.²³

Similarly, the Western Sydney Merrylands Orthodox Christian Church had racist graffiti sprayed on it and was set on fire because it had Arabic signs.²⁴ The Australian Jewish community also reported a rise in vilification and attacks; threats against members of the Jewish community almost doubled.²⁵ In one anecdotal example of the conflation of anyone seen as “different,” a young Australian woman met her father at the end of a short plane journey to find him ashen-faced and perspiring. He explained that he was stressed because he had been sitting next to “one of those terrorists.” The daughter later realized he was referring to a man wearing a Jewish yarmulke.²⁶

However, the verbal and physical attacks on Arab-Australians that occurred after 9/11 did not occur in a vacuum. As noted earlier, they came within an existing history of prejudice against Arab-Australians. Historically, this discrimination has tended to be most prominent during times of crisis, most notably during the 1990 Gulf War.²⁷ As scholar Scott Poynting has argued, surges in verbal and physical attacks have been “an intensification of existing, ongoing and everyday forms and patterns of vilification.”²⁸ This ongoing prejudice was apparent in events and issues that occurred immedi-

ately prior to, during, and following the events of 9/11. These issues both framed and exacerbated the reaction to 9/11.

Backdrop to 9/11: The Refugee Crisis

Starting around 1997, the number of so-called "illegal immigrants" arriving in Australia by boat, mainly from the Middle East, increased as a result of ongoing turmoil in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁹ Despite their relatively small numbers – around 2,800 individuals arriving in 2000 -- the Australian government and media focused on the "illegal" nature of their arrival in Australia, rather than on the circumstances from which they were fleeing.³⁰ Politicians and the press increasingly propagated fear and panic about the refugees, constructing them as a "quasi-invasion of Muslim asylum seekers."³¹ Popular fears that a "flood" of Muslim refugees threatened the sovereignty of Australia came to a head on 26 August 2001, when a sinking boat of refugees off the coast of Australia was rescued by the Dutch container ship *Tampa*. When the captain of the *Tampa* attempted to bring the refugees to safety in Australia, the Australian government refused to allow the ship to disembark. The *Tampa* was stopped by the Australian military and the refugees onboard were transported to the Pacific Island of Nauru for detention and the processing of their refugee claims.³² All of this was done so the Australian Prime Minister John Howard could "keep his promise that the asylum seekers aboard the *Tampa* would not set foot on Australian soil."³³

The *Tampa* incident demonstrated the framing of Middle Eastern refugees as a "threat" by the Australian government. When 9/11 occurred against this backdrop, rhetoric and fear about this "threat" only increased. Following 9/11, Prime Minister Howard ambiguously linked refugees with terrorists through comments such as "you don't know who's coming and you don't know whether they [refugees] do have terrorist links or not."³⁴ This situation was further exacerbated by the so-called "children overboard" crisis the following month, in October 2001. This involved another boatload of Middle Eastern refugees, who, the Australian government claimed, had attempted to force the Australian navy to come to their rescue by throwing their children into the sea. Within the existing hysteria concerning refugees who might possibly have "terrorist links," the "children overboard" situation resulted in a climax of revulsion towards Middle Eastern refugees. This demonizing of refugees was epitomized by the Prime Minister's comments on radio that "I certainly don't want people of that type in Australia, I really don't."³⁵ It was later revealed by the media, and admitted by the government, that the claims that the refugees had thrown their children into the sea were false.³⁶ What actually happened was that the refugees' boat had

started to sink, all of the refugees had ended up in the water, and were rescued by the Australian Navy. However, despite this revelation, the demonizing of these refugees had already been well established. Furthermore, both the *Tampa* and the "children overboard" affairs served the government well. In the wake of the fear and hysteria following 9/11, the government's "tough stance" on the "threat" it argued was presented by refugees helped the government to retain office in the November 2001 election.

The combination of the government's existing framing of Middle Eastern refugees and the fear of terrorists propagated following 9/11 did much to conflate the categories of Arab/Muslim/Terrorist. This was then extended to Arab and Muslim Australians, and fear concerning refugees became conflated with fear over whether Arabs and Muslims were an acceptable part of the Australian social framework.

Ethnicization of Crime

Another key issue that acted as a backdrop to the events of 9/11 and further inflamed questions of the compatibility of Arab and Muslim Australians to Australia, was the "gang-rape" debate. This debate stemmed from the gang rape of a number of young Anglo-Australian women by youths of Lebanese-Australian background in Sydney's western suburbs between August 2000 and August 2001.³⁷ The issue of race came to play a central role in the cases when it was revealed that the young rape victims were called "Aussie pigs" and subjected to taunts about being raped "Leb style."³⁸ The apparent targeting of Anglo-Australian women in the crimes was used by journalists such as *The Australian* newspaper's Janet Albrechtsen to argue that the gang rapes stemmed from the perpetrators struggling between "Islamic values" and Australian "society's more liberal democratic values."³⁹ Albrechtsen further proposed that, "Transplanted to countries such as Australia, a culture which places so little value on gender equality was always going to have problems when faced with women who not only read and write but think and assume control of their lives. Each of those barbaric gang-rapists showed utter disdain for their young Western victims."⁴⁰

When the twenty-year-old found guilty of being the leader of the assaults was sentenced to a record fifty-five-year jail sentence (with a forty-year non-parole period), debate over the ethnicization of crime was reignited and focused on whether the rapes and/or the sentencing had been racially or ethnically driven. Aided by commentators such as Albrechtsen, many argued that the rapes were the result of the incompatibility of Arab and Islamic culture within Australia.⁴¹ Others contended that the focus on the race and ethnicity factor in the crimes followed from an existing framework of eth-

nizing crime, particularly in Sydney's western suburbs.⁴² In response to the focus on ethnicity, the New South Wales Rape Crisis Center pointed out that such horrendous crimes against women are perpetrated by men from all races, ethnicities, and religions. The Center further noted that gang rapes were an element of a larger situation of violence against women that had "spiralled out of control" and that focusing on the ethnicity of those involved in the crimes did little to prevent future such crimes.⁴³ Despite the logic of such positions, however, following 9/11, the hysteria over the "incompatibility" of Islam and Arab ethnicity within Australian society only increased.

The Bali Bombings

Prejudice directed at Arab-Australians intensified yet again following the devastation of the October 2002 Bali bombings. Australians suffered the highest Western casualties of the Bali bombings: eighty-eight Australians were killed and many more seriously injured. With the bombings, carried out by the Indonesian Islamic militant group *Jemaah Islamiyah*, Australia found itself directly touched by terrorism for the first time, given that the targets of the Bali attacks were well-known Australian tourist locations. Australia's feelings that it had been targeted by Islamic fundamentalists further increased the following month, when Australia was declared to be an *Al-Qaeda* target as a result of its role in the "war on terror." It was then also discovered that Abu Bakr Bashir, the spiritual leader of *Jemaah Islamiyah*, had visited and spoken to groups in Australia a number of times in the 1990s.⁴⁴ These events resulted in an intensification of sentiment against Arab and Muslim Australians among the Australian population, and touched off another cycle of anti-Arab and Muslim violence. This included the firebombing in Melbourne of the Umma Islamic Center, and the vandalizing in Sydney of the Rooty Hill Mosque, an Islamic school, and the home of a Muslim cleric.⁴⁵ The amplified questioning and suspicion of Muslims and Arabs following the Bali bombings was evident in the Australian current affairs program *60 Minutes*, during whose report on "Islam in Australia" journalist Richard Carlton commented:

In the aftermath of the Bali bombing, what place for Islam in Australia? Even if very few people are prepared to say so publicly, we are now embroiled in a confronting debate over the rise and role of Islam in Australian society. With so much of the turmoil in the world originating in the Muslim world, have we in Australia got our immigration mix wrong? ... There's no polite way of putting it — is Islam in any way responsible? ⁴⁶

Other examples included the following comments by right-wing *Herald Sun* newspaper columnist Andrew Bolt:

Islam in Australia. Is it a threat? Do the Bali bombers have friends here? ... Already many Australians fear or even hate Islam. Listen to the radio talkback on some stations. Or see the burn marks of the Doncaster petrol bomb. If I was a Muslim here, I'd be embarrassed — ashamed — to have my religion linked to the cruel murder of so many young Australians, and to so much other gleeful violence besides. Worse, I'd be scared of what other Australians might say or do to me, knowing they must make that link too.⁴⁷

Bolt then noted the "un-Australianness" of those attacking Muslims in retribution for Bali and conceded that Muslim leaders in Australia had condemned the bombings. This did not stop him, however, going back to his premise that "None of this should stop us asking now whether such moderate Islamic leaders have done enough to fight militant Islam in our own country ... I don't expect any local Muslims, fired up by the extremists, to carry out terrorism in this country. But I didn't expect September 11, either. Or Bali."⁴⁸

As noted earlier, abuse directed at Arab-Australians following 9/11 constituted a surge in existing prejudice. However, the intensification following 9/11 was a particularly significant moment within this established pattern of discrimination. As Scott Poynting has noted, there has been a strong connection between the legitimization of racist discourses in the public space through the media and comments by politicians at times of crisis and surges in attacks and vilification of Arab-Australians.⁴⁹ Questions concerning the place of Arab-Australians within the nation had been raised prior to 9/11, particularly during the 1990 Gulf War. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, it appeared that many Australian leaders and the media felt it was legitimate to question the very basic rights and identity of Arab-Australians. The identities of "Muslim," "Arab," and "terrorist" became increasingly merged within the public space into one homogenous entity and Arab-Australians were effectively framed as the "other" and a possible threat.

Leaders

Immediately following 9/11, Prime Minister Howard appealed for "tolerance" and stated that neither Muslims nor Arabs within Australia should be scapegoated for the terrorist acts. Compared to the delayed response of Bob Hawke, Prime Minister during the 1990-1991 Gulf Conflict, whose reaction to attacks on Arab-Australians was seen to be too little too late, this was, *prima facie*, a positive achievement.⁵⁰ However, for many, the Prime Minister's official rhetoric was in practice little more than window dressing, and was invalidated by his other comments and actions, particularly in relation to refugees. For example, while he urged Australians to be "tolerant," he was "too busy" to accept an invitation to

a Sydney mosque, despite the symbolic significance of such an act in terms of calming anti-Muslim sentiment.⁵¹ Furthermore, as Hanifa Deen, author of *Caravanserai: Journey Among Australian Muslims*, has argued, overall prejudice towards Arab-Australians was allowed a more free hand after 9/11 in comparison to the 1990 Gulf War:

So far I have not witnessed the same level of political reassurance and support this time around [compared with the 1990-91 Gulf War] except perhaps from Australian church leaders and educational institutions. Where once it was only the social misfits who showed their racism, now the voices of prejudice are drawn from a wider spectrum.⁵²

Comments by Australian politicians across both the major mainstream parties and more right-wing marginal parties served to conflate the categories of Arab/Muslim/terrorist and legitimize the "othering" of Arab-Australians.⁵³ The Prime Minister's ambiguous comments on the possible connections of refugees with terrorists were echoed by a number of other members of his government, most notably the Defense and Immigration ministers and the Attorney General.⁵⁴ This "othering" of refugees was then compounded further by little questioning of such misleading generalizations by the opposition Labor Party. With an election close on the heels of the intersection of 9/11 with the refugee and crime debates, the official position of Labor differed very little from that of the government. The dominance of these discourses then paved the way for the general legitimization of questioning the place of Muslims and people of Arab descent in Australia.

One example of such questioning came from former Senator John Stone of the conservative National Party. Following 9/11, Senator Stone raised his concerns about the consequences of further Muslim immigration into Australia due to his belief that Muslims were basically incapable of "assimilating" into Australia's dominant Judaeo-Christian culture.⁵⁵ This questioning of the suitability of Islam within the Australian context was further demonstrated by the Prime Minister's refusal to condemn comments calling for the banning of the *chador*⁵⁶ following the Moscow Theatre Attacks in October 2002. In the wake of the attacks by Chechen militants, Reverend Fred Nile, leader of the Australian right wing Christian Democratic Party, called for Muslim women to be banned from wearing the *chador* in public in Australia. He argued that the *chador* could be used to "conceal both weapons and explosives" and was a "perfect disguise for terrorists."⁵⁷ According to Reverend Nile, his fears were no "fairy tale, it just occurred in Moscow where six women wearing *chador* coverings also were carrying explosives and were prepared to blow up the theatre and kill seven or eight hundred people."⁵⁸

Prime Minister Howard's response on talkback radio

was, "I don't have a clear response to what Fred's [said] -- I mean I like Fred, and I don't always agree with him ... but Fred speaks for a lot of people." Howard qualified his comments by adding, "On the other hand, I feel it's very important at the moment that Islamic people don't feel they're being singled out."⁵⁹ However his failure to condemn Reverend Nile's comments served to further legitimize the "othering" of women wearing Islamic dress and questions of whether such dress should be acceptable within Australia.

Pauline Hanson, then leader of One Nation, an Australian right-wing anti-immigration party, also made a number of comments illustrating, and further contributing to, the framing of Arab ethnicity and Muslim faith as being incompatible within the Australian context. Following the *Tampa* incident, Hanson praised the way the Prime Minister had dealt with the issue, adding that, "a lot of people are actually saying that I'm John Howard's advisor because he's picking up a lot of the policies and issues I have raised and spoken about over the years."⁶⁰ Hanson also felt the need to add to the debate concerning the gang rapes in Sydney by commenting that "the problem came from a lack of respect for Australian culture ... A lot of these people are Muslims, and they have no respect for the Christian way of life that this country is based on."⁶¹

Media

Further consolidating the "othering" of Arab-Australians following 9/11, moreover, was their representation in the media. The refugee crisis, 9/11, the ethnic crime debate, and the possibility of "Fifth Column" Muslim extremist groups within Australia, were all conflated. Alarmist or frankly anti-Arab/Muslim headlines regarding refugee boats, such as, "The illegal armada keeps coming,"⁶² came alongside reports of raids on Arab and Muslim homes in Sydney such as "Terror Australis: Bin Laden groups in our suburbs."⁶³ Right-wing commentators seemed to seize the day in all major newspapers across the country. As discussed earlier, in the national daily *The Australian*, the influential commentator Janet Albrechtsen blamed the gang-rapes in Sydney on the incompatibility of Arab and Islamic culture within Australia.⁶⁴ In Sydney, the *Daily Telegraph's* columnist Piers Akerman discussed Muslim immigration with an article entitled "Opening our doors to a wave of hatred."⁶⁵ Melbourne's *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt made comments that he had "grave doubts about the role of Islam in a secular, multi-ethnic nation like Australia." In a later article he added:

Let's compare ... these two most holy of men -- those founders of great religions. Unlike Mohammed, Christ did not slaughter unbelievers, execute women who sang rude songs about him, cut off the limbs of apostates, sleep with a woman whose family he has

just killed, have sex with a nine-year old, urge the murder of Jews, authorise the beating of wives ... and promise heaven above all to those who made war on infidels.⁶⁶

Prejudice and stereotypes were also generated on Australia's notorious "talkback" radio forums, where "shock jocks" rained vitriol on Arab-Australians. As Ghassan Hage noted, these "shock jocks" rallied "their listeners to stop the invasion of the rapist, violent, un-democratic Muslim hordes."⁶⁷ Within this conflation of Arab/Muslim/terrorist, there was also a popular revival of "clash of civilization" theories to explain 9/11 and the "war on terror."⁶⁸ Within the mainstream media, there was much discussion of 9/11 in terms of the "West" versus the "East" and the "West" versus "Islam." An example of this can be seen in a special report in the *West Australian* newspaper discussing Australia's involvement in the "war on terror":

At one level, the war against terror derives from a fundamental clash of civilizations. What is at stake for the West are core values of profound importance – political democracy, intellectual freedom, individual liberty ... religious pluralism, a liberal economy and the emancipation of women, Radical Islam despises them all.⁶⁹

The revival of such paradigms served to set up categories of who was considered Australian and who was considered a possible "enemy." Arab-Australians generally found themselves grouped within the latter. As an indication of this, following 9/11, Arab-Australians were asked by the media to declare their loyalty to Australia. After the *Taliban* in Afghanistan declared *jihad* in response to the U. S.-led action in Afghanistan, Muslim community members in Australia were asked to state their stance on the call. Australian Arab and Muslim community leaders responded by declaring the *Taliban* call as illegitimate.⁷⁰ However, the very fact that such communities within Australia were asked to formally declare their loyalty signaled the questioning of the space and place they occupy within the national psyche following 9/11.

Dissent

While there was a sharp increase in verbal and physical attacks on Arab-Australians and questioning of their place in Australia, this prejudice did not go entirely unchallenged. Post 9/11, there was increasing evidence of questioning and dissent of the framing of Arab-Australians as "other." Much of this can be attributed to important gains made by Arab-Australian communities following the 1990 Gulf crisis. As a result of organizations created in response to the discrimination experienced during the Gulf War, Arab-Australians had, by the time of 9/11, put in place an organizational infrastructure to combat and respond more effectively to

prejudice. According to Australian Arabic Council Chairperson Roland Jabbour, in November 2003 the Australian Arabic Council had:

noted distinct and dramatic changes in public perception over the past few years. While racial vilification is on the rise and seemingly spiralling in its intensity, the perpetrators are a minority ... [as demonstrated by the fact that] the AAC receives more calls than ever from journalists seeking an Arabic perspective to balance an article; we have noted an increase in the amount of positive and supportive correspondence we receive from the wider community.⁷¹

Furthermore, despite the strong support for the Prime Minister's stance on refugees, driven by the climate of fear fanned after 9/11, and reflected in his electoral success in 2001, it did not go completely unchallenged. The more left-wing political parties of the Greens and the Democrats were very vocal in their condemnation of both the government's treatment of refugees and their opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷² Public support of such opposition to government policies was reflected in the "protest" votes received by the Greens Party during the 2001 election, where their vote doubled to nearly five percent.⁷³ Whilst such dissenting voters were still in the minority, this was a significant indicator of opposition to the stance of the government.

Protest by the Australian public in response to the Australian government's role in the so-called "war on terror" was also unprecedented. As people took to the streets protesting the 2003 war on Iraq, the framing of those involved in protest also reflected a change from the time of the 1990 Gulf War. In 1990, protest by mainstream "Anglo" Australians was seen as legitimate anti-war protest; however, protest by Arab-Australians was encoded as "un-Australian" and a "Fifth Column" response.⁷⁴ By the time of the 2003 protests against the war on Iraq, however, while Arab-Australians still received particular scrutiny, the mass nature of the protests meant that all dissenting Australian community members were now framed within U. S. President George Bush's paradigm of being either "with us" or "against us" in the war between "good and evil." As a result, any citizen who protested was of dubious loyalty — accused by Prime Minister Howard of giving "encouragement to the leadership in Iraq."⁷⁵

Another example of the questioning of, and opposition to, the dominant discourse following 9/11 was the overall reaction to the Bali bombings within Australia. Compared to the general rallying behind the U. S. president following 9/11, in Australia there was division over how to view and react to the Bali bombings.⁷⁶ This was demonstrated particularly when members of the government insinuated a linkage between the Bali bombings and Australia's involvement in the then-proposed war against Iraq.⁷⁷ Scholar Andrew MacIntyre noted that he

expected a “gung ho” desire for retribution following the Bali bombings, possibly directed towards Iraq, as seen in the U. S. What happened instead was that many Australians refused to support a war in Iraq as a knee-jerk reaction to the Bali bombings and protested what they saw as the political exploitation of the tragedy:

My guess would have been that the dominant effect [of the Bali bombings] would have been, if not a rallying around the flag, then at least a coming together, but I’m not sure that’s what we’re seeing ... People understand that Saddam Hussein is a bad guy who could do some terrible things, but they are wary of going into a discretionary war.⁷⁸

Reaction of Arab-Australians

The attacks and vilification precipitated by 9/11 represented a devastating blow for many Arab-Australians. There has been much scholarly attention to questions of the “in-betweenness” that comes with hybrid identity, of not quite belonging to the world of origin nor the dominant culture of the country in which you live. It is important to ask, then, what it means for Arab-Australians when their identity as Australians is questioned. As Hanifa Deen noted when she revisited many of her interviewees after 9/11:

I found my Muslim and Arab comrades acknowledging 2001 as a defining moment in their existence in Australia. I discovered them reeling from events near and far, which had impacted on all our lives. They were stunned that, almost overnight, people were repulsed by them and doubted their commitment to Australia ... relations between Australia’s Muslim and non-Muslim populations changed. The average Australian was frightened and repulsed by Muslims. In turn, many Muslims began to feel that Australia was no longer a safe place for them.⁷⁹

According to the Australian Arabic Council, members of Arab communities have found that “wog” – a term once used derogatively towards migrants in general – has been replaced by the use of the word “Arab” as a specifically targeted insult.⁸⁰ The prejudice directed at Arab-Australians is demonstrated in this comment by an Arab-Australian: “People can’t see past my ethnicity – I cease to be a person with skills, experience, background – all these become footnotes to being an Arab.”⁸¹

Moreover, while the very “Australianness” of Arab-Australians has been questioned following 9/11, at the same time, they have been asked to continually reaffirm that they “put Australia first,” and demonstrate that they are “loyal” to Australia, and to an extra degree than other “real” Australians. At a sermon to mark the end of Ramadan and Eid in December 2003, Australian Muslim leader Sheikh Taj Din al-Hilali entered the loyalty debate, telling those assembled at the Lakemba mosque in western Sydney that, “Australia is our compassionate

mother, and I say to every person living in Australia, from the person in the highest office to the ordinary man in the street, love this country or leave it, shape up or ship out.”⁸²

In light of this focus on the “loyalty” of Arab-Australians, it is necessary to analyze the very concept of loyalty. As James Connor argues, loyalty is indicative of emotional links to spaces and places and ranges from the family level to the trans-national.⁸³ Multiple layers of loyalty are a necessary part of the human experience, with multiple loyalties being able to co-exist simultaneously: loyalties to sporting teams, political parties, kinship, and nation.⁸⁴ Thus, for example, an Arab-Australian can be simultaneously loyal to his/her local soccer team, the Brazilian national soccer team, a specific political party within Australia, the Muslim community, the Palestinian community, and the wider Australian community, without any of these loyalties negating another.⁸⁵ However, fear of the “other” and the questioning of the “loyalty” of non-British immigrants has been a continuous feature of Australia’s history since colonization.⁸⁶ Scholar Nikos Papastergiadis has explored the suspicion and fear expressed in questions on the identity and “loyalty” of “others” within Australia. In examining the culture of fear and ambivalence towards migrants within Australia, Papastergiadis has argued that: “Fear of an external invasion has always operated alongside guilt over the foundational occupation of the land in Australia ... the fantasy of an unoccupied territory and the fear of invasion are so deeply ingrained in the national imaginary that the slightest disturbance to the existing culture can produce the most violent reactions.”⁸⁷

This fear and ambivalence is reflected in the experiences of Arab-Australians after 9/11. Prejudice directed at them demonstrated that their acceptance within the “lucky country” is as best tenuous. Arab-Australians found that questions concerning their very identity as Australians and their right to be in Australia were legitimized within the public space. As the Australian Arabic Council has noted:

The “fair go” motto we always believed in has been replaced with the “fear go” where the individual sees himself above the rest of society. When fear is embraced ... minorities are being made to feel grateful for the right to practice their own culture; for being tolerated. Equity and fairness are rights; they are not privileges ... There has been a campaign to disenfranchise large sections of our society, particularly in the last two years ... The Australia which was the kind of society everyone would want to live in, is slipping away from us.⁸⁸

In the wake of 9/11, Arab-Australians have responded to the prejudice directed at them in a number of ways. For some it has resulted in a crisis of personal identity

and feelings that their Arab identity will not be able to co-exist with their other “Australian” identities. At a grassroots level, in interviews and personal conversations with the author, members of Arab-Australian communities said that they “kept to themselves more” and were “keeping a lower profile,” particularly women wearing Islamic dress. Some further noted that they were thinking of changing their names in order to “blend in” and to “improve their employment possibilities.”⁸⁹ Other Arab-Australians have reacted by reasserting the viability of their contrapuntal⁹⁰ identity and by focusing on the need for better education and understanding of both Islam and Arab culture.⁹¹ To this end, a number of projects have been set up with the aim of documenting and combating prejudice and discrimination.⁹² As Hanifa Deen has furthermore noted, 9/11 acted as a watershed moment for many activists from Muslim and Arab communities in Australia:

In the past, there had been much talk about entering into dialogue with the wider community, but it never moved much beyond interfaith meetings and was more rhetorical than real. Now the leadership of Mosque communities was seen to be dropping its fortress mentality. Almost overnight Muslims had become the most unpopular group in Australian society and they were coming to an understanding that they needed to emphasize to fellow citizens a sense of shared values. They needed deeper and more regular dialogue instead of the occasional fending off of criticism.⁹³

Conclusion

Historically, the position of Arab-Australians within Australia has been ambiguous. Despite their populous and diverse communities within Australia, over their one hundred years of migration there has been a consistent level of prejudice directed at them. From this base of discrimination, the community has seen anti-Arab sentiment increase dramatically during times of crisis, such as during the 1990 Gulf War. However, 9/11 and the events that followed – especially the war on terror and the Bali bombings – are particularly significant within this history. September 11 heralded a discourse within Australia that legitimized the questioning of the compatibility of Arab and Muslim Australians with the Australian social context. Following 9/11, in addition to overt prejudice expressed in attacks and vilification, it appeared legitimate to question the loyalty of Arab-Australians, to ask whether they were a “Fifth Column” for *Al Qaeda*, and if Muslim women should be “allowed” the basic civil right of wearing the *chador*. Through their comments and framing of Arab-Australians, the media and politicians within Australia played a very large part in creating and exacerbating this destructive atmosphere. This is not to say that such rac-

ist discourses went unchallenged. There was considerable dissent within the general Australian population against the anti-Arab, anti-Muslim discourse. This opposition was reflected most prominently in the unprecedented protests within Australia against the treatment of refugees in Australia and the war in Iraq. However, 9/11 resulted in a level of prejudice towards Arab-Australians that the community is still struggling with today. Arab-Australians have responded to 9/11 in a number of ways. For some, the resulting attacks and vilification have made them question their place within the Australian nation. Many now feel less secure and less accepted. They feel the need to continually justify that they are not terrorists and that they are “loyal” to Australia. Other reactions by Arab-Australians have been to assert their right to a contrapuntal identity, and to focus on increasing understanding and combating prejudice. The backlash from 9/11 in Australia, however, has served to starkly demonstrate the ambiguous position of Arab-Australians within the “lucky country” of Australia.

NOTES

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²It is important to note that by using the term “Arab-Australians” I am not attempting to present the many communities that fall under this umbrella term as a homogenous group, but rather to use a term that refers to a cultural group of shared language and heritage, a term that has been utilized by the communities themselves from the time of the 1990-1991 Gulf War as a unifying definition.

³The use of the catchcry of the “Lucky Country” to describe Australia gained currency after the publication of a book by that title by scholar Donald Horne in 1964. Although Horne used the phrase ironically in his critical commentary on the state of the Australian nation, it has since become one of the most widespread expressions used when describing Australia. It has been used to describe everything from Australia’s weather, lifestyle, and general economic prosperity to encapsulating the general feeling that Australia has managed to escape, through its relative isolation, much of the conflict and turmoil outside its shores. “The Lucky Country,” *Australia’s Culture and Recreation*, <<http://www.acn.net.au/articles/luckycountry/>> (26 July 2004).

⁴Trevor Baltrouney, "From 'White Australia' to Multiculturalism: citizenship and identity," in *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, ed. Ghassan Hage (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 38-42.

⁵Baltrouney, "White Australia to Multiculturalism," 60.

⁶Kate Legge, "Climate of tolerance gets frosty," *The Australian* (6 May 2002), <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/stor.../0,5744,4265299%255E21207,00.htm>> (9 Sept. 2002).

⁷Roland Jabbour, "Impact of the Israeli-Palestinian Crisis on Arabic Australians," *Australian Arabic Council* May 2002, <<http://www.aac.org.au/media/php?ArtID=7>> (25 Nov. 2003).

⁸Kevin M Dunn, "Racism in Australia: findings of a survey on racist attitudes and experiences of racism" (paper presented at the conference "The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in the European Union and Australia," The University of Sydney, Sydney, 18-20 Feb. 2003), 1.

⁹Dunn, "Racism in Australia," 2.

¹⁰"Isma – Listen: National consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians: Issue 6," *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Website*, October 2003, <http://www.w.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/news6.htm> 1-7, (27 Nov. 2003).

¹¹Cited in Scott Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs?: Attacks on Arab and Muslim Australians before and after 11 September," *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 14:1 (July 2002): 45.

¹²Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 45.

¹³Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 46.

¹⁴Cited in "Isma – Listen: Issue 6," 2.

¹⁵Capdevila Gustavo, "War on Terror: UN Documents wave of anti-Muslim reactions," *Asia Times*, (26 March 2002), <www.atimes.com/terror/DC26DK01.html> (28 Nov. 2003); "Isma – Listen: National consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians: Issue 5," *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Website*, September 2003, 1-3, <http://www.w.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/news5.htm> (27 Nov. 2003).

¹⁶Unsigned hate mail sent to the Lebanese Moslems Association in Sydney. Cited in Legge, "Climate of tolerance gets frosty." Around 200,000 Arab-Australians are of Lebanese descent, making them the most numerically dominant group of Australians with Arab background. As Lebanese migrants were also among the first nationals from the Middle East to arrive in Australia, "Lebanese" came to be synonymous with "Arab" and "Middle Eastern." Despite Arab-Australians increasingly coming from a diverse range of Middle Eastern countries, this popular conflation has largely continued, with many Arab-Australians popularly assumed to be Lebanese. This has become particularly problematic in the wake of increasing prejudice and hostility towards Arab-Australians, as the abbreviated term "Leb" has become used as a general anti-Arab slur. Baltrouney "From White Australia to Multiculturalism," 39.

¹⁷Extract from email sent to the Centre for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales and forwarded to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Cited on "Isma – Listen: Issue 5," 2.

¹⁸Muslim students in Shepparton, Victoria, 29/5/03. Cited on "Isma – Listen: Issue 6," 1.

¹⁹Interviews conducted by author in 2002.

²⁰Interviews conducted by author in 2002.

²¹"Isma – Listen: Issue 6," 1.

²²"Isma – Listen: Issue 5," 3.

²³"Sikhs 'target' of racial slurs," *Sikh.com.au*, (9 December 2001) <<http://www.wsikh.com.au/guest/index.html?news12122001.asp~bottom>> (28 Nov. 2003).

²⁴Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 45.

²⁵Jeremy Jones, "Assaults and Insults: Review of anti-Semitism in Australia in 2002" *The Reviem*, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, February 2003. Cited in "Isma – Listen: Issue 5," 3.

²⁶Story told to me by daughter in question. Permission granted to cite this story.

²⁷Christine Asmar, "The Arab-Australian Experience," in *Australia's Gulf War*, eds., Murray Goot and Rod Tiffen (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 57-81; Ghassan Hage "Postscript: Arab-Australian belonging after 'September 11,'" in *Arab-Australians Today*, 241-248; Baltrouney, "From White Australia to Multiculturalism," 37-62; Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 43-64; Scott Poynting, "Street Arabs' and 'Mug Lairs': racism, class-relations and moral panic about Lebanese-Australian youth," in *Arab-Australians Today*, 145-160; Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey Among Australian Muslims* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002).

²⁸Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 44.

²⁹James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 193-196.

³⁰Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 46; Jupp, *White Australia to Woomera*, 193-196.

³¹Hage, "Postscript," 241.

³²Jupp, *White Australia to Woomera*, 194; Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 47.

³³Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 47.

³⁴"Terror threat justifies immigration crackdown: Howard," *TCM News*, (7 November 2001). <<http://archives.tcm.ie/breakingnews/2001/11/07/story29269.asp>> (27 Nov. 2003).

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³⁵Cited in Nikos Papastergiadis, "The Fear of Difference." Forthcoming publication, 2004.

³⁶Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 48; Alexandra Kirk, "Ruddock on 'children overboard' refugees," *PM Program*, (7 March 2003). <<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/s801631.htm>> (1 Dec. 2003).

³⁷Stephen McDonnell, "Interview with Dr Ghassan Hage," *Four Corners*, (26 August 2002). <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/s677558.htm>> (7 Nov. 2002).

³⁸"Criminal Gang or Islamic Gangs?" *Media Watch*, (9 Sep-

tember 2002). <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/090902_s2.htm> (29 Nov. 2003).

³⁹Janet Albrechtsen, "Talking race not racism," *The Australian*, (July 17 2002). <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,4718201%5E2120>, 1-4 (28 November 2003).

⁴⁰Albrechtsen, "Talking race not racism," 1-4.

⁴¹In David Fickling, "Racially motivated crime and punishment," *Guardian*, (23 September 2002). <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,797463,00.html>> (28 Nov. 2003); Albrechtsen, "Talking race not racism," 1-4; "Criminal Gang or Islamic Gang?"

⁴²Hage, "Postscript," 242-243; McDonnell, "Interview with Dr Ghassan Hage."

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⁴⁷Andrew Bolt, "Reform Islam Here," *Herald Sun*, (20 October 2002) reproduced at <<http://www.pastornet.net.au/jmm/aasi/aasi0847.htm>> (12 January 2003).

⁴⁸Bolt, "Reform Islam Here."

⁴⁹Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 43-45.

⁵⁰Asmar, "The Arab-Australian Experience," 71-72.

⁵¹Such activities were undertaken by the likes of U. S. President George Bush and the U.K.'s Prince Charles. Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 45.

⁵²Deen, *Caravanserai*, 385.

⁵³Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 56; Hage, "Postscript," 241-248.

⁵⁴Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 56.

⁵⁵Robert Manne, "Beware the new racism," *The Age*, (16 September 2002). <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/09/15/1032054709197.html?from=storyrhs>> (1 Dec. 2003).

⁵⁶The word chador in Australia generally refers to the garment known elsewhere as the abaya, or the Islamic garment that covers the hair, comes under the chin and covers the clothing to the floor.

⁵⁷Richard Phillips, "Australian prime minister gives the nod to anti-Muslim racism," *World Socialist Web Site*, 29 November 2002, <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/nov2002/nile-n29.shtml>> (25 Nov. 2003).

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⁵⁹Cited in "PM tightlipped on Nile's comments to ban Muslim dress," *Australian Broadcasting Commission News Online*, (21 November 2002). <http://www.abc.net.au/news/politics/2002/11/item20021121124527_1.htm> (27 Nov. 2003).

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⁶¹Cited in Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 51.

⁶²*Daily Telegraph* (17 August 2001), 8, cited in Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 53.

⁶³*Daily Telegraph* (12 Oct 2001), cited in Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 55.

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⁶⁵*Daily Telegraph* (18 September 2001). Cited in Poynting, "Bin Laden in the Suburbs," 55.

⁶⁶Cited in Manne, "Beware the new racism."

⁶⁷Hage, "Postscript," 248.

⁶⁸Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations?" *Foreign Affairs*, (Summer 1993): 22-37.

⁶⁹*West Australian*, (23 April 2002).

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