Being an Aussie Mossie: Muslim and Australian identity

among Australian-born Muslims

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Abstract

The topic of Muslim integration in Amero-Eurocentric societies such as Australia has generated much interest and comment. Despite factors that might promote Muslim inclusion in Australia, there has been an unofficial policy swing back to promoting monoculturalism, which threatens to establish a two-tier Australian national identity. This article criticises the notion of an inherent conflict between Australian and Muslim identities and examines how a group of 200 Australian-born practising Muslims living predominantly in New South Wales and Victoria value their Muslim and Australian identities. It finds they strongly value being Muslim, however they also value a concept of Australian identity that is affirming, inclusive and consists of achievable attributes, despite also struggling with perceptions of discrimination and prejudice.

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Debate surrounding the immigration and settlement of
culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse (CRALD)
migrants in Australia has a history as long as European
settlement of the continent. With growing concern about
"homegrown terrorism" in Britain and elsewhere, attention
on Muslim integration and social inclusion has widened to
include the next generations: the Australian-born children
and grandchildren of Muslim immigrants, who are
participating in a process of settlement and indigenisation
of the religion (Bouma, 1995, 1997; Bouma & Brace-Govan,
2000).

Muslim identity and Australian identity are positioned as
being in conflict with each other, a motif reinforced by
periodic attention and alarm occasioned by Muslim
transgressions, usually overseas, picked up by the media,
thereby resulting in calls by politicians and social
commentators for Muslims to prioritise and demonstrate
their loyalty to Australia and Australian identity. On the
other hand, some religious personalities have called for
Muslims to isolate themselves from being influenced by any
non-Muslim culture and prioritise their connection to Islam

and the worldwide Muslim *ummah*.[1]

A common device in the conflict positioning rhetoric is the conflation of various types of identity labels. Nationality, citizenship, religion, birthplace, ancestry, ethnicity, race, culture and generation are merged and confused in a jumble of stereotypes, with the resulting trope that one is either truly Australian or truly Muslim but not both at the same time. But what is identity, and why is there a perception that Australian and Muslim identities are irreconcilable when manifested in their fullness? Furthermore, do Muslims themselves accept this irreconcilability? In this article I criticise the notion that there is such a thing as an inherent conflict between Australian and Muslim identities. I ask: how do Australian-born Muslims value their identities, particularly given their participation in the settlement and indigenisation of Islam as part of the Australian religious landscape?

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1. *Ummah* carries a number of connotations. Here it refers to the "community of faith" that transcends all other boundaries of belonging, including geographical ones (al Faruqi, 2005; Roy, 2004).

Background to the Research

Despite adoption of Australian multiculturalism as an
official policy in 1973, there exists among some quarters,
a perception that Muslims, largely because of their
religion, have difficulty integrating in Amero-Eurocentric[2]
societies such as Australia. Attention focused on the
Muslim community by some prominent political figures, media
personalities and religious fundamentalists has tended to
reflect Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations" thesis
(Huntington, 1996, p. 23). This manifests as a concern with
the inability of Muslims to acculturate, and asserts Islam
as alien and fundamentally incompatible with the
"Australian way of life" although this is ill-defined and
culturally hegemonic (Harris & Williams, 2003, p. 215). In
the following paragraphs I will briefly discuss how Muslims
have been positioned as not-Australian through reference to
a number of well publicised events.

   In the gangs crisis, between 1998 and 2002, journalists

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2. The countries of Western Europe and their (former)
settlements, including the United States, Canada,
Australia, and New Zealand. I use the term "Amero-
Eurocentric" as a device to prevent the all too easy
reification of "West" and "Western."

and politicians (in particular then Premier of New South Wales Bob Carr) publicly used racial and religious identifiers—"Middle Eastern," "Lebanese" and "Muslim"—in their public descriptions of a number of criminal acts, the most infamous of which were a series of gang rapes committed by a group of men led by Bilal Skaf during August and September 2000. Even though the perpetrators and victims all were born in Australia, the rapes were reported in the media, based on victims' reports, as hate crimes perpetrated by Lebanese Muslims upon Australian girls. Consequently, questions about the incompatibility of Lebanese Muslims' religious values with Australian moral standards were raised (Tabar, Noble, & Poynting, 2003).

   Religious and cultural xenophobia played out in media and political rhetoric during the Children Overboard incident on the eve of a federal election in 2001. Senior government ministers, including then Prime Minister John Howard, accused asylum seekers variously of throwing their children overboard, and when that later turned out to be false, of sinking their ship, in order to be rescued. The mostly Afghan asylum seekers were depicted as "queue jumpers"[3] and

3. This refers to the belief that "rich" asylum seekers who arrive on Australian shores by using the services of people

possibly harbouring terrorists, and Howard publicly stated he did not want people "of that type" entering Australia (Kuhn, 2007, p. 7). Campaigning hard on the issue of a tough stance on border protection, the Liberal-National Coalition was returned to government, with critics accusing the government of dehumanising refugees and capitalising on anti-Muslim sentiment for political gain (Dixon, 2002).

Division between Lebanese and Australian identity labels was a major feature in the 2005 Cronulla riots that were sparked off after the bashing of two surf lifesavers by four young men of Lebanese ancestry, who had apparently responded angrily to racial taunts. On 11 December, roughly five thousand "White" Australians wearing patriotic symbols and/or wearing clothing emblazoned with racist statements such as "ethnic cleansing unit," descended on Cronulla, a beachside suburb of Sydney in response to invitations sent through SMS text messages that had received media publicity in the week preceding, particularly on talkback radio (Poynting, 2006, p. 88). With the day's passing and the consumption of alcohol by many, the mob became stirred to

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smugglers, are illegally jumping ahead of "genuine" refugees patiently waiting in refugee camps to gain legal entry to Australia.

attack anyone who looked like they might vaguely fit the definition of being Middle-Eastern, Lebanese or Muslim. Over the next few days and nights, Australians of Lebanese ancestry angrily responded with retaliatory protests and attacks in various suburbs around western Sydney. The Cronulla riots are a particularly clear example of the positioning of Muslims and Arabs, even those born in Australia or holding Australian citizenship, as outsiders (Poynting, 2006).

Some Australian politicians and media commentators have called for bans on Islamic female dress, giving a variety of reasons, underscoring the meme that such dress is foreign, threatening, and not Australian. The Reverend Fred Nile MP, asked the New South Wales government in 2002 to consider banning the Persian style *chādor*,[4] on the grounds that it could be used by terrorists to hide weapons (Kabir, 2008). The call was rejected, drawing heavy public criticism, but when quizzed on the topic for a federal perspective, John Howard gave mixed messages with his ambivalent reply, suggesting he was testing the political waters to see how the proposal would run in the electorate,

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4. A large, enveloping wrap that covers the head and body, held closed by a woman's hand or her teeth.

before rejecting the idea (Kuhn, 2007). In 2005, Liberal backbenchers Sophie Panopoulos and Bronwyn Bishop wanted a ban on Muslim girls wearing the Islamic head covering, popularly referred to as hijab, in public schools. The headscarf was laden with the contradictory symbolism of aggressive assertion of an alien, threatening culture, and the un-Australian denial of equality for Muslim women as passive victims of misogyny and oppression (Aly & Walker, 2007; Greenwood & Christian, 2008; Werbner, 2007). Most recently in 2009, a Brisbane radio personality, Michael Smith, conflated various types of Islamic dress and veiling and called for them to be banned in public places such as banks and shopping centres so as not to frighten children and victims of crime. He defended his call on the station blog, by questioning where Australia should draw the limits of religious freedom, pitting a variety of imported religious practices commonly stereotyped as peculiar to Muslims, being in conflict with the protection of society and the "Australian way of life" (Smith, 2009, para. 13).

Other recent examples of this positioning of conflict between Australianness and Muslimnness occurred in the Australian values push as part of the "culture wars" (Maddox, 2005; Marr, 2007; McKnight, 2005); in media reporting of inflammatory statements made by Muslim

personalities; the fake Islamic pamphlet controversy in the last days of the 2007 federal election; the rejection of mosque and Islamic school proposals by local councils, highlighted in the anti-Muslim school rally in Camden, NSW; and media reporting around the arrests and convictions of Muslim terrorists (Collins, 2000; Kabir, 2004, 2006, 2007; Poynting, 2004).

The Debate about Identity

Over the course of the twentieth century and beyond, the debate about what constitutes identity and how identity may be studied have provided much grist for the mill for scholars working mainly in the disciplines of psychology, social-psychology and sociology. Beginning with the scholarly foundation laid by Erik Erikson, there are those who conceive of identity as an essential part of the individual self, in its sense of sameness and continuity (Schwartz, 2001). Different aspects of identity include the ego identity, the personal identity and the social identity (Côté, 1996); this last category dealing with the self-concept in relation to others and their perceptions and responses, and is alternatively referred to as collective identity (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Consequently, a variety of researchers have studied

identity in terms of psychological health and wellbeing,
and have promoted models of acculturation, adaption and/or
assimilation for minorities such as Muslims living in the
Amero-Eurocentric world. This is where immigrants and
minorities adopt various aspects of majority culture
(language, dress, food, customs, values, ideals etc.)
ostensibly with the purpose of enhancing their ability to
negotiate living within the broader society (Berry, 1997;
Ghuman, 1997; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001;
Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). Although there has
been some recognition that acculturation is not necessarily
unidirectional, thus rejecting assimilation as an ideal
(Berry, 2001; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Sheikh, 2007),
other researchers (Chirkov, 2009; Gjerde, 2004; Hunt,
Schneider, & Comer, 2004; Rudmin, 2003, 2009) have more
broadly criticised acculturation theory as being unable to
encompass the full diversity of how individuals, groups and
societies organically and dynamically interact, adapt and
evolve, and implying that one stereotyped and reified
cultural pattern is valued over others. Bowskill, Lyons and
Coyle (2007) have demonstrated that the language of
integration and acculturation has been used to mask
assimilation calls. Furthermore, there is evidence that
many second generation Australian Muslims reject such calls

to assimilate, and that such a push may even accentuate alienation amongst a vulnerable population (Lathion, 2008; Marshallsay, 2007; Sheikh, 2007).

Poststructuralist criticism of essentialist views on identity, use a variety of descriptors and modifiers of identity, such as "fluid," "indeterminate," "fractured," "multilayered," "hybrid," "hyphenated," "produced," "negotiated," "contested," "interiorised," "synthesised," "metamorphosing" and so on. In studies of Muslims living in the Amero-Eurocentric world, this fluid concept of social identity appears frequently. For example, Gilliat-Ray who studied British Muslims' experience of multiculturalism wrote: "identity is rarely a static phenomenon, but is constantly being shaped and evolved in an on-going process of self-definition" (Gilliat-Ray, 1998, p. 348). Dwyer, in her research on British South Asian Muslim women, described identity as a "contextual and relational *positioning* rather than as a fixed essence" (her emphasis) and pointed out that such evolving hybrid identities force a questioning of "exclusionary or racialised constructions of Britishness" that are assumed to be "fixed and coherent" (Dwyer, 2000, pp. 475-476). Ismail, looking at religion and identity formation among Muslims, argued there is not a single Muslim identity but many, which are constructed from a

multiplicity of sources and referents that individuals use; from the local context, the interplay of power relations, as well as the influence of transnationalism and globalisation (Ismail, 2004). Leonard also referenced the plurality of Muslim identities in her introduction to the special issue of *The Muslim World*. In reference to young American Muslims, she pointed out that others' incorrect ascription of religiosity as the sole defining characteristic of Muslim identity, has forced the question of what it means to be Muslim in America (Leonard, 2005). Likewise, Naber pointed to the shifting nature of Muslim identity construction by young American Muslims: "'Muslim' identities are constantly rearticulated by my research participants who are active agents, crafting what it means to be 'Muslim'" (Naber, 2005, p. 490).

It should be mentioned that Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have questioned the usefulness of "identity" as a category of analysis. The thrust of their argument is that the word identity has been so overused in the social sciences that it has lost usefulness as a term of analysis. They argue it is better to replace it with more precise words, however in the nine years since Brubaker and Cooper attempted to offer us differentiated alternatives there has continued to be much research on identity, suggesting there is something

about the term that is being revealed by using it.

Methodology

The data I have used for my analysis were gathered from questionnaires distributed physically (English, Arabic and Turkish) and online (English) between March 2007 and May 2008 to Muslims living in New South Wales (mostly around the suburbs of Sydney) and Victoria (including Melbourne, Shepparton and Mildura). A handful of participants who completed the questionnaire's online version were living elsewhere than Victoria or New South Wales. Participants had to be 16 years or older to participate and the questionnaires were completed and returned anonymously. Research assistants entered responses into a database and I performed a quality control check, yielding a dataset based on 600 questionnaires.

Although the sample was not designed to be statistically representative, every attempt was made to survey a diverse population of Muslims, including Sunni, Shi'i and Sufi Muslims, those who are Australian-born and immigrants—although this article concentrates on the views of Muslims born in Australia, old and young, male and female, employed and unemployed Muslims, students and homemakers, community leaders and members of various ethnic groups, as well as

those possessing a variety of religio-political attitudes and Muslims from a diverse range of ancestries. There is, however, a purposeful bias towards those who self-identify as practising Muslims. Thus, the data represented here largely do not reflect the views of those who Saeed (2007, p. 400) calls "cultural nominalists" i.e. Muslims with little more than an ancestral connection to the religion.

Of the entire dataset, 200 participants nominated Australia as their country of birth and answered the following questions: What level of importance do you place on preserving your Australian identity? What level of importance do you place on preserving your Muslim identity? Then, respondents were asked to rate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with the statement: "I can be a good Muslim and a good Australian." Of the 200 participants who answered the above questions, 146 wrote meaningful textual responses in space provided to describe their thoughts on "being Muslim and Australian." I coded the textual responses to generate themes, which I analysed for this article.

Muslim Identity

Much discussion about Muslims and Muslim identity, whether in the Muslim majority world or where Muslims live as

minorities, has suffered from one of two fallacies. The first mistake has been to subsume Muslims into categories of race or ethnicity (Mitchell, 2006; Peach, 2006). This problem is illustrated by the difficulties Muslims have faced in seeking redress for religious discrimination under race relations legislation (Bloul, 2008; Modood, 2006). The second, and somewhat contradictory, tendency has been to endow Muslim identity with an overabundance of religiosity, demoting other influences on identity such as class, gender, and nationality (Ismail, 2004). Hermansen (2004) provides an example of this in her discussion of the performative expectations with which Muslims are faced. She recounts the story of non-Muslim university chaplains who, with echoes of old-school anthropologists observing foreign natives, idealised "unspoiled" Muslim religiosity, "because on their campuses, it's the Muslim students who remain 'believers,' who pray, who believe in Adam and Eve, etc." (Hermansen, 2004, p. 388). Muslims are seen as possessing a qualitatively different—almost consuming—type of religiosity than non-Muslims, but this fails to recognise that the very same forces of modernity and postmodernity that have challenged the place and role of religion in the lives of those living in the Amero-Eurocentric world, have been hard at work amongst Muslims as well.

When describing Muslim identity much depends on the type of self-understanding, identification and/or "groupness" we are attempting to define (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). We might well ask what does it mean to say Prophet Muhammad, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, Usama bin Ladin, Elijah Muhammad, and even US President Barack Obama (as some of his political opponents have attempted to argue) all possess a Muslim identity? In its most fundamental religious form, "Muslim" is a scripturally derived adjective describing anything or anyone (including animals, the angelic realm, all prophets and saintly characters, indeed the entire universe) that is in a state of submission to the Creator. But "Muslim identity" has been used alternatively (and at times contradictorily) to refer to people holding shared religious beliefs; having Muslim ancestors; belonging to a Muslim majority nation; promoting a particular political ideology; engaging in or supporting terrorism; and/or having a shared experience of scrutiny and discrimination.

It is this last type that has prompted a number of scholars to view Muslims living in the Amero-Eurocentric, particularly in the post-September 11 period, as manifesting a category of identity based on a shared sense of scrutiny, stigma and exclusion (Aly & Green, 2008;

Choudhury, 2007; Gilliat-Ray, 1998; Moll, 2007; Sirin, et al., 2008; Zine, 1997). Yet, this shared perception of stigma can prompt a strengthening of group identity among some individuals, particularly when the experience of prejudice and discrimination is more overt (Ashmore, et al., 2004; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2007; Göle, 2003; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Modood, 2006). As Branscombe and Ellemers (1998, p. 251) found: "When disadvantaged group members perceive themselves as being rejected in a variety of situations because of discrimination on the part of the dominant group, they feel both more hostility toward that outgroup, and they increasingly identify with their minority group."

Nevertheless, this strengthening of group affiliation in the face of group stigma appears not to occur amongst those with already low identity commitment to the group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997, 2002). This may help explain the surprising fact that members of militant groups do not generally already possess a high degree of religiosity and knowledge of Islam prior to their radicalisation (Choudhury, 2007; Lentini, 2008; Roy, 2004). Thus, these radicalised Muslims are not simply intensifying their religious commitment by joining militant groups. Rather they are rejecting the stigmatised group identity

that is the traditional Islamicate[5] cultures of their

parents—rebelling against a sense of liminality and blocked

progress[6]—by joining fundamentalist and militant groups that

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5. To borrow Marshall G. S. Hodgson's term, "Islamicate"

refers to "a culture, centred on a lettered tradition,

which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the

society … I thus restrict the term 'Islam' to the religion

of the Muslims, not using that term for the far more

general phenomena, the society of Islamdom and its

Islamicate cultural traditions" (Hodgson, 1974, p. 58).

6. It used to be argued that terrorists only came from the

dispossessed margins of society, however it seems that

militant groups are attracting a number of middleclass and

well educated individuals (Lentini, 2008). Thus,

researchers (Awan, 2008; Choudhury, 2007; Lentini, 2007)

have identified the phenomenon of blocked aspirations

amongst such individuals. This is where Muslims who believe

the very structures of the societies they live in, prevents

them from being able to fulfil their aspirations, due to

institutionalised racism and unrecognised Islamophobia

(Modood, 2006). They thus withdraw from the goal (Crocker &

Major, 1989) of living as full citizens of the societies

they perceive are rejecting them.

offer them an alternative, albeit maladapted, route for affirmation. "Perhaps the most straightforward behavioural response to group-value threat for those with low commitment is to try to leave the group and gain access to another more attractive group" (Ellemers, et al., 2002, p. 175).

Overt hostility to the wider Australian society in the context of strengthening stigma identity was *not* a strong theme that emerged in analysis of the data, however strength of commitment to Muslim identity was certainly evident (see table 1).

It should be remembered that the research design included a purposeful bias towards self-identified practising Muslims, which goes to explaining the strength of commitment to religious identity amongst this group. Nearly 60% of these respondents indicated that religion is "extremely important" in their lives and just over 70% indicated their habit is to perform the daily obligatory prayers in their correct times at least half of the time or more.[7] Thus, these are Muslim respondents for whom religious

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7. To properly fulfil the requirements of daily obligatory prayers according to religious law, they must be performed in their correct times, the exact details of which vary

salience is relatively high.

Multiculturalism and Australian Identity

Two contradictory trends inform the debate about the nature
of Australian society, and Australian identity. One trend
promotes acceptance of cultural diversity and another
promotes assimilation of minorities into majority Anglo-
Christian culture. A pendulum swing between forces exerted
by these two trends at a government policy level has been
occurring not only in Australia, but in other Amero-
Eurocentric nations as well (Soroka, Johnston, & Banting,
2006). Liddicoat (2009) has surveyed the evolution of
multicultural policies in Australia since the late 1970s,
and noted the swing back to a monocultural, assimilationist

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slightly between the various schools of law. I asked this
question in the attempt to minimise social desirability
bias in assessing observance of prayers in levels of
religiosity. That is, failure to live up to the stricture
of praying in the correct time is not as stigmatising as
failing to pray altogether. Thus a person who does not
regularly perform the daily obligatory prayers is given the
facesaving option of indicating they do not make their
prayers "on time."

idea of Australian identity in the twenty-first century.

An analysis of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Goot and Watson (2005) discussed national identity in terms of what it means to be Australian. Over a number of surveys, most respondents felt that to be "truly Australian" is to feel Australian, possess Australian citizenship, respect Australian political institutions and laws, and to speak English; all of which are achievable rather than ascribed qualities (Goot & Watson, 2005). However, more exclusivist conceptions of Australian identity are found among significant percentages of the population. For example, Goot and Watson found that in the 2003 survey (n = 2160) 58% of respondents answered it is "'fairly important' for 'true' Australians to be born in Australia," and 36% "say it is important to be Christian" (Goot & Watson, 2005, p. 188). This conflicts with the official policy of Australian multiculturalism that recognises the existence of a plurality of Australian cultural expressions—including Indigenous, European, homegrown and new migrant. "The key to the success of Australian multiculturalism is inclusiveness. Every Australian benefits from our diversity and all Australians have the right to be active and equal participants in Australian society, free to live their lives and maintain

their cultural traditions" (DIMIA, 2003, p. 5). Yet despite
the pluralist language of multicultural policy expressions,
Humphrey (2001) argues that in reality different cultural
patterns are valued differently according to an undeclared
hierarchy, and Kolig and Kabir find Muslims placed at the
bottom of this: "Among a variety of cultural and ethnic
groupings, Muslims as a 'cultural' category … face the
largest difficulty meeting the criteria of acceptable
citizenship" (Kolig & Kabir, 2008, p. 270).

Amongst the respondents in the current research, the
preponderance of evidence shows that most of these
Australian-born Muslims value a concept of Australian
identity that is affirming, inclusive and consists of
achievable attributes rather than exclusive ascribed ones.
This is hardly surprising, given that most (nearly 80%) are
second generation Australians, children of immigrants from
other than North-West European ancestry,[8] who would be thus

8. Of the 200 Australian-born participants whose responses
are discussed in this article, only 17 nominated both
parents born in Australia. A further 18 nominated a parent
born in Australia and a parent born overseas. Five
participants with overseas-born parents had British
ancestry. Two participants did not provide details of their

excluded from the "true Australian" club as described
above.

The majority of participants indicated they placed a high
level of importance in preserving their Australian identity
(see table 2), and nearly 80% of individuals who provided
textual responses to the request "tell us your thoughts on
being Muslim and Australian," provided responses that can
be specifically described, either wholly or in part, as
affirming their connection to Australia and Australian
identity.

The strongest themes to emerge here were that
participants perceive no inherent conflict between their
Muslim and Australian identities (44 responses tagged);
demonstrable pride in being Muslim and Australian (20
responses tagged); that most Muslims and members of the
wider population share the same values (19 responses
tagged); that participants are integrated in Australian
society (18 responses tagged); respect for the Australian
state (10 responses tagged); that Australia provides
freedom and opportunity to participants (9 responses
tagged); and that even in the face of difficulties (such as
discrimination and prejudice) participants want to be

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parents' places of birth or ancestry.

Australian (8 responses tagged). For example, one Victorian male participant of Egyptian ancestry, born in 1976, wrote:

> I don't separate the two. I am a Muslim and an Australian they are completely different concepts and for me work greatly together. I love being a Muslim Australian and an Australian Muslim.

Here, the participant distinguishes between two types of different but valued identities, each with a different emphasis (one stressing religion, the other nationality) but the participant does not perceive this as a conflict: the two identities "work greatly together." Another participant, this time a female of Lebanese ancestry born in 1987 and living in NSW wrote:

> I think being an Australian Muslim is great! I love living in Australia. There are times I feel discriminated against but overall I live happily and experience positive relationships with the people around me who come from all different religions and backgrounds.

Here the participant demonstrates a positive valuation of her connection to Australian and Australian Muslim identity, even in the face of possible discrimination based on that identity.

Other participants noted the existence of barriers to full acceptance and inclusion in Australian life, such as the perception of discrimination, as mentioned by the previous respondent. In all, 49 individuals provided responses discussing these barriers, the most important of which were: noting the existence of ignorance, racism, and prejudice (25 responses tagged); difficulties with being Muslim in Australia (14 responses tagged); the need to juggle competing demands on identity (6 responses tagged); feeling excluded by others (6 responses tagged); and that the media takes a negative stance against Muslims (5 responses tagged). For example, this participant who was born in 1986 and is a female of Turkish ancestry living in NSW wrote:

> I consider myself a true blue as they say. Even though at times it's hard to be accepted into the wider Australian community because of our slight different morals and norms. I have the voice within myself to say g'day and selam.[9] I don't understand why others cannot see it like I do. I guess stereotyping fogs many people's minds and lack of tolerance is a major

9. Meaning "peace," a traditional Muslim greeting.

issue.

Although this participant does draw a distinction between the "morals and norms" of Muslims and the wider Australian community, they are only marginal differences, and should not be a cause of exclusion. It is not differences that are the problem, but rather stereotyping and a lack of tolerance from the broader community. Some see this prejudice as having been fostered by anti-Islam and/or anti-Muslim forces in government and media. As one participant noted:

> I believe the media does almost no good in easing and helping Muslim Australians to be a part of the country and feel like they belong and can live peacefully. I find nothing within my religion causes tension within myself in terms of having to go against Australian law or government nor does it allow intolerance, terrorism, extremism, discrimination or a rejection of Australia. However there are aspects of the Australian CULTURE that I do reject, such as the consumption of alcohol, pork, gambling and the like (her emphasis).

The response of this participant, another female of Lebanese ancestry living in NSW and born in 1986, should be read in the context of the values debate and culture wars

that have been fostered by some advocates of monoculturalism. They are those who once might have preferred excluding cultural diversity altogether but who promote assimilation as preferable to multiculturalism, given their acceptance of the inevitable reality that Australia has and continues to accept migrants from diverse nationalities, languages and ancestries.

The participant's references to being able to follow her religion *and* be loyal to the Australian state and its laws, may well be read as a direct reply to sentiments such as were expressed by former Federal Treasurer Peter Costello. In 2006 he publicly asserted that Muslims who wish to live under sharia law should choose to live somewhere other than Australia as such a wish was inconsistent with Australian values (Costello, 2006).[10] The following year, the

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10. Costello presumably meant "sharia" to refer to interpretations of religious law implemented by Muslim majority states such as in Saudi Arabia, or models of interpretation advocated by religious fundamentalists who reject the separation of religion and state. However similar to Catholic canon law and Jewish halakah, sharia is a broad Islamic concept referring to the divine will expressed through revelation that governs every aspect of

government of the day introduced changes to citizenship
laws including a test that included an English language
proficiency component, and a preparatory booklet *Becoming
an Australian Citizen* (DIAC, 2007) that cast a particular
Anglocentric model of Australian identity in the starring
role. As Liddicoat notes:

> The text constructs a British-oriented account of
> Australian culture, with frequent mentions of the
> important of British traditions, values, language,
> etc. and repeated mentions of a "Judeo-Christian
> heritage". The text therefore constructs an Australian
> norm which is white, Anglo-Saxon and Christian as the
> core identity to which new citizens will give
> allegiance. The representation downplays the
> linguistic and cultural diversity of Australia in
> favour of a British homogeneity (Liddicoat, 2009, pp.
> 12-13).

But this is hardly a conception of Australian identity that

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the lives of Muslims (Calder & Hooker, 2006). Sharia is
thus interpreted through the activities of religious
lawyers, and has historically encompassed a wide diversity
of thought and opinion.

non-Christians and/or or those without North-West European ancestry can fully embrace.

However, it seems that Australian-born Muslims are more optimistic about their ability to manage the competing demands on their identity than many of their politicians as table 3 shows. The vast majority of participants agree that it is possible for them to be both good Muslims and good Australians. They do not need to choose between sharia and Australia-they can live with both.

A mere 12 participants indicated that preserving their Australian identity was "not at all important" to them and only 10 strongly disagreed with the statement advocating the possibility of being a good Muslim and a good Australian.[11] Of these participants, there appeared to be some ambiguity as to the nature of Australian identity requiring them to engage in activities in direct conflict with their religious requirements (such as eating pork and drinking alcohol). For example, a female participant of

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11. Human error in completing the questionnaire may also explain at least three of the negative responses as some affirming statements were made in the textual responses despite the participant having indicated disaffiliation with Australian identity.

Lebanese ancestry, born in 1985 and living in NSW wrote: "I think that people don't really know how to explain what an Australian is. For example, if I drink I am an Australian. At the end of the day I think that I am a good Muslim Australian. I obey the law. Not discriminate (sic)." Only two responses indicated an irresolvable conflict between what it is to be Australian, and what it is to be Muslim, such as from this male Victorian born in 1987 with Ethiopian ancestry: "They intrinsically oppose each other. The best way to describe it is as a balancing act."

Conclusion

Demands to prioritise identity, whether coming from the wider society asking Muslims to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation state and hegemony of the dominant group, or in contrast, from parents fearing the loss of culture and religion in their children, means that Australian-born Muslims face something of an identity crucible (Ali, 2005; Dwyer, 2000; Marshallsay, 2007; Sirin, et al., 2008). Criticisms of multiculturalism are found in the use of "social cohesion" language, where there is an emphasis on building or maintaining cohesion around shared values and shared national identity (Markus & Kirpitchenko, 2007; Soroka, et al., 2006). This has been given impetus by the

global crisis events that have occurred since the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States (Cesari, 2004; Kolig & Kabir, 2008; Soroka, et al., 2006).

Yet, as Bouma and Ling (Bouma & Ling, 2007) point out, diversity has always characterised Australian society and insisting on uniform religious and cultural values does not guarantee a conflict free society. Instead, "social cohesion is threatened when one group convinces itself that it does not need another producing conflict that shreds the social fabric" (Bouma & Ling, 2007, p. 87). Given the reality of the diversity of Australian society, the promotion of monoculturalism threatens to establish a two-tier Australian identity. Members of the first tier are the "true Australians," those who possess the ascribed attributes of a Judeo-Christian heritage and an Anglo-Saxon or Celtic ancestry, whose ancestors were transported as convicts, or who settled during European colonisation of the continent. The second tier is everyone else, tolerated at the good graces of the true Australians. They can achieve a measure of Australianness so long as they do not rock the boat too hard, and attempt to challenge the hegemony of the first tier (Hage, 2008; Henry-Waring, 2008; Kolig & Kabir, 2008). As Aly writes: "Muslim citizens run the risk of being constructed as 'un-Australian' when they

articulate their concerns or opinions" (Aly & Green, 2008, para. 5).

Despite this, in analysing and presenting data collected from a large sample of Australian-born Muslims, I have found that Australian-born practising Muslims are largely able to harmonise their Australian and Muslim identities. Most Muslims, even those who perceive that society excludes them from full participation, do not join militant groups or engage in illegal behaviours acting out their disaffection. Despite the disgruntled grizzles of some who complain that Muslim assertiveness is a threat to social cohesion (often a barely disguised call for assimilation) all but a few Muslims who protest exclusion, do so through legitimate channels available to all citizens. Their willingness to engage with the state and its institutions to achieve their variegated goals (even if they are different from what pro-assimilation and/or secularist rhetoric declares is desirable) is an expression of the hope for equality and the promises that multiculturalism was supposed to deliver (Modood, 2003, 2006) and second of the overwhelming acceptance of the legitimacy of the state of which they are citizens.

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Table 1.

Importance of preserving Muslim identity among participants.

What level of importance do you place on preserving your Muslim identity?	No.	%
Extremely important	145	72.5
Very important	25	12.5
Important	24	12.0
Somewhat important	5	2.5
Not at all important	1	0.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 2.

Importance of preserving Australian identity among participants.

What level of importance do you place on preserving your Australian identity?	No.	%
Extremely important	72	36.0
Very important	55	27.5
Important	41	20.5
Somewhat important	20	10.0
Not at all important	12	6.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 3.

Strength of agreement with being both good Muslims and good Australians.

"I can be a good Muslim and a good Australian."	No.	%
Strongly agree	133	66.5
Agree	37	18.5
Neutral	20	10.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	10	5.0
Total	200	100.0

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