Muslim Turks and anti-Muslim discourse
The effects of media constructions of 'Islamic' and 'Arabic' in Australia
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ABSTRACT: The proliferation of anti-Muslim discourse in recent years has both contributed to the reification of a singular category of Muslims in the West and encouraged erasure of the difference within and between followers of Islam. In Australia, much of this discourse has tended to equate the religion, Islam, with both a particular national identity, namely Lebanese, and a particular ethnicity, Arabic. Yet the reality of contemporary Australia, and of other western immigration nations, is a Muslim community that comprises a diversity of ethnic groups, countries of origin, language, culture, and religio-sectarian beliefs and practices. This paper examines some of the media practices that make up this homogenising discourse and then discusses the response of some non-Arabic Australian Turks who actively resist being categorised in this way.

Introduction
Current anti-Muslim discourse and its responses have focused on Arab Muslims, and particularly those who live in the outer southwestern suburbs of Sydney. But what does this mean for non-Arab Muslims: those of Turkish, Indonesian, Somali, or even Anglo-Saxon descent? Despite rhetoric from both Muslims and non-Muslims alike extolling the virtues of the global 'umma' (community of believers), the globally dispersed Muslim population continues to be defined as much by internal difference as by any appearance of unity. Sectarian differences; national, ethnic, and tribal diversity; linguistic divergence; and
political, social, and economic disparities cut across religious unity in myriad ways. Even given the commanding position of classical Arabic as the language of Islam's holy texts, it could not be said that Arabic language unites followers of the faith across the globe. Yet, much contemporary discourse in Australia considers and uses the terms 'Muslim' and 'Islam' as relatively unproblematic social unities. This paper considers the effects of such a simplifying discourse on minority Muslims within the dominant Arabic and Sydney-centric conception in current use.

The construction of the category Muslim-Australian needs to be problematised, because in most public discourse 'Muslim' is made to stand for Arabic/Lebanese. This may be demographically accurate for Sydney, but is not necessarily so for the rest of Australia. The majority of Turks in Australia are cultural Muslims and identify as Muslims religiously, but on the whole they reject being identified with Arabs or as Arabic speakers, despite a shared religious orientation. Much of the recent public discourse concerning the place of Muslims in Australia has tended to gloss the term 'Muslim' not only as a single, valid, identity category, but one that is, in the main, synonymous with an Arab ethnicity. While the Lebanese community in Australia (particularly Sydney) may make up the largest single ethnic group of Muslims, they are by no means an absolute majority of Australian-Muslims, a group that in total consists of just 1.5% of the national population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2007).

While exact figures are hard to come by, in the 2001 census 11% of Australian Muslims were born in Lebanon and 9% in Turkey (ABS, 2007). In response to the self-reported ancestry question, some 162 000 people claimed Lebanese ancestry, while 52 000 claimed Turkish ancestry. However, not all Lebanese in Australia are Muslim, with a large percentage of the Lebanese population following a Christian religion. However, anecdotal evidence suggests a significant degree of underreporting in these figures, with a widely agreed on number for Turks in Australia of approximately 100 000, slightly more than half of whom live in Melbourne (Personal communication, 2007). The majority of Turks in Australia identify with one of the branches of Islam, mainly Sunni, though a small minority are Alevi and do not identify as Muslim. The other major countries of origin (including parents' and grandparents' country of origin for those born here) of Muslims do include non-Arab countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Bosnia, Somalia, and Sudan, as well as a small cohort of indigenous and European converts. Yet the combination of world events that has
created a climate of fear in the West about Arab-led terrorism and a media tendency to simplify complex concepts into the form of sound bites has led to an erasure of heterogeneity in the public construction of Islam in Australia.

Recent research conducted with the Turkish community in Melbourne has found a strong resistance to the reification of Islam as a social category. While much of the recent debate on the incorporation of diverse social groups into multicultural societies has focused on issues of hybridity, fluidity, transnationalism, and the purported imminent demise of the nation, scrutiny reveals an ongoing engagement with the establishment and maintenance of cultural boundaries and a stubborn and intractable insistence on ethnic difference.

**Islam in the media**

A recent survey of Islam in the media has shown that, when it appears in mainstream media representations, Islam is usually treated negatively (Dunn, 2004) and is often associated with terrorism, war, fundamentalism, and the repression of women (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Brasted, 2001; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007). This media focus on such a narrow segment of Muslim activity, constructed from a marginal knowledge of the Muslim world, presents a negative view of that world. This narrow view has rarely been balanced by representations 'of the normal, stable, social existence experienced by the vast majority of Muslims' (Brasted, 2001, p. 222). Even some academic research and commentary in its efforts to expose and counteract the racism of the mainstream media has tended to elide Muslim and Arab (e.g., Balnaves & Aly, 2006; Poynting & Mason, 2006) and to focus on the moral panic involving Arabic speaking communities and Sydney's Muslim Lebanese.

This construction is not entirely a one-way imposition. Even in Muslim majority countries, the rise of political Islam can be seen against a political landscape both of traditional/folk practice Muslims who cling to the old traditions and resist change, and western or globalised, urban, educated elites. However, 'the premise that traditions and religion disappear with the advent of modernity, an evolutionary progression that is often taken as a natural consequence of secular scientific education, no longer holds' (Göle, 1996, p. 2). The rise of a modern, radical, and politicised religion, especially among university students, is not a passive acceptance of community norms, but an active resistance to westernisation and an affirmation of Islamic ideals. This
is most clear in the choice made by young, educated women to wear the veil—not the traditional peasant headscarf, but the enveloping, shapeless clothing and hair and face covering that appeared in Iran with the advent of the Islamic state. 'Veiling is the most salient emblem and women the newest actors of contemporary Islamism. No other symbol than the veil reconstructs with such force the “otherness” of Islam to the West.... The contemporary veiling of Muslim women underscores the insurmountability of boundaries between Islamic and Western civilization' (Göle, 1996, p. 1).

Paradoxically, as Islamophobia in the media has grown over recent years, the rate of Islamic ethnicisation has also increased (Bloul, 2003). Thus, diverse communities with little in common apart from a shared religion (and then often not even the same beliefs or practices within that religion) are driven to put aside internal conflict to present a united front to the wider, non-Islamic world.

Discrimination against Muslims, in the wake of the Gulf War led to a strengthening of bonds within the Australian Muslim community and a corresponding predominance of the religious factor in their group consciousness. In other words, Australian Muslims are pushed to identify more as the 'Muslim Others' of the Australian majority. These are precisely the kind of conditions leading to the ethnicisation of differences. Such an ethnicisation of a 'Muslim difference' can be shown to occur, though not in a uniform way in many Western countries where Muslims account now for a sizable minority. (Bloul, 2003, p. 10)

Traditionally, the threatening ‘other’ in Australia has been South-East Asian. Only at the beginning of the 21st century was Islam demonised as a potential threat, due much more to external or global events than to anything actually happening here (Hage, 2006). The perception of a transnational Islamic movement with global influence rising in the wake of the Rushdie affair in the 1980s has made it appear that Muslims in the West are outside the realm of what multicultural politics can deal with. In such a version of Islamic religiosity, submission to sacred laws is accorded greater weight than submission to national laws. This inverts the vital principle of multiculturalism, under which minority laws must submit to the secular national laws (Hage, 2006). As such, 'there appears to have arisen a disturbing sense that Muslims are un-Australian and that Islam poses a threat to the Australian way of life' (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005, p. 2). Yet, as with any religion, not
all followers of Islam believe the same things, nor do they believe with the same intensity. Those whom we might call ‘cultural Muslims’ do seem able to marry adherence to religious tradition with obedience to the laws of a secular state. Perhaps the Muslim-majority, secular Turkish state provides a useful road map for Turkish, and other Islamic, migrants settling in the West.

It is also clear that efforts made by the various Muslim communities in this country to unite all Muslims for political ends have generally been unsuccessful. The bitter, ethnically driven infighting that has marked the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC)—the peak body for Islam in Australia—in recent years, starkly illustrates the problems of trying to mobilise disparate religious ideologies for political purposes or projects (Kerbaj, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c). Christian churches have encountered similar difficulties, with the political efforts made by the Council of Churches finding markedly less success than the individual political interventions made by powerful members of different denominational backgrounds. No matter: how much public discourse tries to reify these major world religions into unities, the fact remains that they encompass as much diversity as they reject.

**Cultural identity**

The social effects of globalisation on an increasing scale visibly lead to an increasing range of opportunities for cultures to come into contact and start influencing each other. The Eurocentric version of ethnicity and nationalism—where language, culture, people, and state are all coterminous—tends to obscure the importance of religion (Vermeulen & Govers, 1997) as well as other cultural traits. As new flows of people, money, goods, and ideas across a global plane produce new forms of solidarity, diverse social groups that come into contact with each other can ‘become culturally more similar, and, frequently, more aware and more self-conscious, often in highly defensive ways, of their differences’ (Hylland Eriksen, 1997, p. 271). Cultural or civilisational identities may no longer be a valid measure for examining group belonging and group behaviour; so, diasporic communities of various kinds may come to command loyalties among populations that simultaneously exist within various national boundaries (Appadurai, 2006). In the context of international migration, retaining cultural identity and cultural ties may be as much about negotiating a place for oneself within a small diasporic group, coupled with the transmission of cultural and ethical norms and values to the next generation, as about negotiating with the mainstream of the host society. Research into the experiences of Muslim Turks and anti-Muslim discourse
of Turkish-Cypriots in London has shown that cultural identity is not necessarily about belonging:

What we found was that this Turkish-Cypriotness was not at all about national sentiment and attachment. Identity of that belonging-kind was not something they were really preoccupied with at all. Who they were was actually about something else, about certain ethical and moral values, about how families and communities should function, and, in the end, about the way in which human beings should relate to each other. These things were more important to them than what is conventionally designated by the term ‘identity’. And because this is the case, becoming British or English is not something that can mean very much to them. (Robins & Aksoy, 2001, p. 705)

However, Aksoy’s findings about Turks in London show that they are often caught in the middle, being neither ‘us’ nor really ‘them’. Media commentary and the remarks of politicians in the post 9/11 period quickly polarised sentiments and populations into this ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy:

The whole interpretative frame in the West surrounding the September 11 events has been one of a binary polarization, between the West and Islam: the West associated with civilizational values and Islam with violence against it. Turks and Kurds, however, do not immediately fall into one of the polar positions…. Turks, following the tragic events of September 11, were pushed to abandoning their seemingly fuzzy, contradictory, and compromising positions, and to embrace en masse one or the other. This, they were very reluctant (and perhaps, luckily, unable) to do. (Aksoy, 2004, p. 246)

This political and social polarisation in the media led to the almost instinctive association of Islamic militants abroad with Muslims at home (‘within’) (Aksoy, 2004). These Muslims within now find themselves classified as fundamentalists or potential fundamentalists, ‘criticized for behaving, or thinking, or even just looking fundamentalist’ (Aksoy, 2004, p. 232). Despite some assertions that Muslims view transnational media because they want to identify with another community (not the host), Turks turned to a variety of news sources in order to be able to think about the events and their implications from a variety of perspectives (Aksoy, 2004). Turkey has a long history of being both part of, and an outsider to, Western and Islamic worlds. It is a past characterised by a cultural ambivalence to both milieus (Aksoy, 2004).
migrant Turks generally ‘straddle’—that is to say, they sustain—this ambivalence successfully. Also, they are comparatively small and fairly invisible as a group, and thus do not necessarily either feel the need for, or have an ability to, develop an identity politics the way other ethnic minorities in Britain, such as South Asians or blacks, have done. Yet the events of 9/11 forced them to confront the ambivalence: ‘Turks found themselves aggregated into the categorical domain of “Islam”,’ (Askoy, 2004, p. 235). In some ways, this clashed with their secular, cultural identity, but in other ways they also sympathised with other Muslims who were persecuted (Askoy, 2004).

So, in 2001, a series of events laid the foundation for what would become moral panic over the place of Muslims in Australia:

*The Sydney gang rapes in August 2000, which became public knowledge a year later, the September 11 terrorist attacks which rocked the world and the ‘Tampa incident’ just before the 2001 November federal election. Australian Muslims were under siege and saw themselves lumped together as ‘the enemy’. (Deen, 2003, p. 272)*

A Turkish woman described the changed situation, and the changes to come: ‘It seems that the scenario is written and we are the players. Unemployment etc. is increasing and lots of different things are thrown to cover that. The scapegoat now is the Muslims; tomorrow it will be others’ (Personal communication, 2007). As in Britain, Australian Turks were suddenly perceived to belong to, or to represent, the frightening other.

Surprisingly, Australian Turks resist this aggregation. As one young Turk commented: ‘Turkey is a bit different to the Arab communities’ (Personal communication, 2007). Another played down the suggestion that Turks experience racism in Australia based on their ethnicity: ‘I mean if I was maybe Lebanese or from a more Arabic kind of country, our Turks … we’re a bit different and we’re not exactly hardcore. We’re a secular country as well’ (Personal communication, 2007). He then added: ‘I mean about 77% of [non-Turkish] people that I speak to do know that Turkey isn’t exactly an Arabic country, we’ve got different values’ (Personal communication, 2007). Yet he countered this with the comment: ‘When you do hear about something that happens in Iraq or something in Palestine it does still obviously pull a different string … it does make you feel a bit—it can cause some tension’ (Personal communication, 2007).
The media depiction of Sheik Taj el-din al-Hilali, the Egyptian born imam of a Lebanese mosque in Sydney, as the Mufti of Australia works as another unifying rhetorical device, implying Islamic homogeneity. Again, Turkish Muslims strongly object to this depiction. Mehmet, a prominent figure in Melbourne’s Turkish language media scene, stated categorically:

Like Sheik Hilali, they call the Mufti of Australia. Comes to the media so often. He’s there for twenty years and he’s start coming out after September 11. Before, he’s saying same thing, but they never have any interest. So now they try to find something which is against the Muslim and they use Muslim Mufti, for bigger person. But he’s not a big man, you know, as a Turkish we don’t accept him as our mufti. He’s nothing to do with the Turkish Muslim. (Personal communication, April 16, 2007)

Immigration

Prior to the events of 2001, Turks had been living more or less peaceably in Australia since the signing of a migration agreement between the two countries in 1967. This agreement led to the arrival of Turks in Australia in significant numbers. Prior to this, there had been fewer than 3,000 people of Turkish origin in Australia (Jupp & York, 1995). Over the next 35 years the population of people of Turkish ancestry (Turkish migrants, their children, and grandchildren) rose to almost 100,000. More than half of these settled in Victoria, mostly in the northwestern suburbs of Melbourne: Broadmeadows, Glenroy, Brunswick, and Coburg (Fontaine & Kaymakci, 1996).

When the Turkish migrants first began arriving in the late 1960s they were the first major Muslim wave of immigrants. However, in part because of the nationally binding sentiments that had developed around the battle of Gallipoli, there was a general sense that ‘Johnny Turkey’ was closer to the average Australian than the British high command—the first arrivals were generally well regarded. Turks had never featured in Australian mythology as the savage menace who had been ‘at the gates of Europe’, nor as combatants in long and vicious crusades (Deen, 2003). The immigration agreement that was signed between the two countries rested on the belief that the Turks were really white Europeans (that was also how they saw themselves) (Jupp, 1995). Yet the experience of Turks on the ground mirrored that of other waves of post-war migrants. One elderly woman recounted: ‘I had discrimination when I was a child. We were called as wogs and asked to go back to our countries. It started not to happen when I was an adult’ (Personal communication, 2007).
gration of Lebanese Muslims began somewhat later, in the early 70s. This was some time after the first Lebanese Christians had arrived. It was only after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, though, that Lebanese Muslims began to arrive in large numbers. In 1971, there were 3,407 Lebanese-born Muslims in Australia (Kabir, 04). By 1991, there were more than 25,000. In the census of 2002, 2,200 Australians reported their ancestry as Lebanese. In the same year, 54,600 reported their ancestry as Turkish (ABS, 2007). Of persons all ages affiliating with Islam in 2001, 62% were overseas born: most 11% born in Lebanon and 9% born in Turkey (ABS, 2007).

Recent research into the nature and experiences of the Turkish community in Australia suggests that the Arab-centrism of much mainstream media discourse is misleading. Moreover, much of the academic response to recent discourse, including analysis of the rise of anti-Islamic racism and Islamophobia, falls into the same trap of equating the Islamic with the Arabic. There is a pressing need to problematise, to reconsider, the construction of ‘Islam’ as a gloss for Arabic speaking, Arabic background, or Arabic ethnicity.

Even for those who may be considered Arabic or Lebanese on the basis of descent, language, or country of birth, such a label may be actively contested and that identity disowned. A research project conducted with migrants of Lebanese background found that a desire to assimilate to Australian society involved acquiring a degree of ‘whiteness’. One respondent felt successful if he could pass for, that is, be mistaken for,reek or Italian, as he felt those ethnicities were closer to the white ideal than was Lebanese. He described himself thus: ‘My parents were born in Lebanon. I was born here. I’m Australian’ (Hyndman-Rizik, 006).

Similarly, Erkan Saka, a Turkish student studying in the United States, describes his response to the events of September 11:

On Sept 10, 2001 night, I wrote from Houston to my friend Almila in Istanbul, that this is a peaceful place where I can focus on my work etc. It was the end of the [my] first month in the US. As usual I got up at noon the other [next] day, as an internet addict, I turned on my laptop as soon as I got [up] and I was exposed to myriad number of emails. It took a while for me to get sense of what happened and then rushed to the campus. There would be a special meeting for international students like me and here people watching CNN all over the campus like in the Gulf War I days. I thought it was all a middle eastern (!)
thing—to watch CNN collectively—but I seemed to be wrong. From the time I heard about 9/11 event to that day's afternoon, that is for some 3-4 hours, I felt to be a minority member the first time in my life. I always felt minority in my opinions etc. but this time it was all visible, bodily difference that mattered. It took only a few hours though. Rice is a great community, never but never a threatening situation happened, and I guess I look like a Greek or something since Turks are not that known in the US in case how they look like, it is Greek-ness or sometimes Italian-ness that matter.... (Saka, 2006)

Language can also be used subversively, to indicate and enact inclusion or rejection of hegemonic norms. Political multiculturalism tends to reify linguistic communities, as does an ethnic group's commanding mainstream of community leaders, elders, and representatives. Yet there are others in the group, such as young people, who can and do challenge such constructions from within (Tabar, 2007). As Tabar describes, what young Lebanese call 'Lebspeak' is 'a marker of identity, but also a linguistic resource which challenges the state's definition of Lebanese ethnicity through the invention of an “illegitimate” vocabulary undermining this definition' (2007, p. 159). Similarly, young Turks communicating with each other—especially through mobile phone and online chat—use a mixture of Turkish, English, and text abbreviations that is virtually unintelligible to outsiders.

The ethnicisation of Islam
In the 40 or so years of large scale Muslim immigration into Australia there has been a fundamental change in perceptions of ethnic difference, particularly in relation to faith-based identifications and divisions. Although freedom of religious belief has been theoretically enshrined in Australia's Commonwealth Constitution since Federation, state-based laws regarding Sunday Observance were in place for much of the last century, reinforcing the dominant Christian cultural norm (Jupp, 2002). Over the last five years, the combination of a growing and increasingly visible Muslim community within Australia, with the world events that have had an impact on Australian citizens—most notably the events of September 11 and then the Bali bombings—have contributed to both an 'ethnicisation' of the diverse followers of Islam in Australia (Bloul, 2003) and a hardening of attitudes towards that group. This is clear in the activities of individuals and of right-wing groups involved in assaults against Muslim women wearing hijab, attacks on mosques and Islamic bookstores, and the riot and affray
at Cronulla beach. It is also clear, and confrontingly so, in media reporting, most notably talkback radio, and even in federal government pronouncements considering the banning of religious clothing seen to be provocatively Islamic and therefore un-Australian.

Unquestionably, there is anxiety in mainstream Australia over Muslim followers' allegiances and loyalties.

> Presumably overseas ties can go both ways, reinforcing either particularistic attachments or affinity with a global 'umma' (community of believers), which may or may not favour the creation of an Australian Muslim identity. Appropriate [government] policies can foster the emergence of a solid Australian Muslim identity. Conversely, hysterical rejection and racist reactions will foster the alienation of Australian Muslims to the detriment of us all. (Bloul, 2002, p. 2)

Unfortunately, since those words were written, the latter course of action has all too often been the one followed.

Using Islam as a category to describe social groups in multicultural societies is quite clearly problematic. Whereas in Britain 'Muslim' is usually shorthand for Pakistani or Bangladeshi rather than Arab, increasingly in continental Europe and elsewhere, immigration from diverse countries of origin leads to a proliferation of different ethnic, language, and cultural groups who have in common only their belief in Islam. As Aksoy found in London, 'Turkish interviewees come from an Islamic country, but for few of them is being a Muslim central to their self-image. Most have strongly identified with Western values, but are not generally acknowledged as being Western' (2006, p. 933). Research conducted in Australia with Turkish-Australians found that they were similarly disinclined to put their religious identity ahead of cultural, national, and linguistic identifiers. There is also a sense of cultural ambivalence, particularly among migrants from the secular, left-wing part of Turkish society, rather than the religious/conservative right (Aksoy, 2006).

There are a number of complexities within the general concept of ethnic identity that make this group difficult to study:

> For example, those associated with combinations and tensions between different sources of identity, such as religion and national origin, or—particularly true of young people—wanting to be associated with an ethnic group but not to be bound by its cultural practices. (Enneli, Modood, & Bradley, 2005, p.viii)

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**Muslim Turks and anti-Muslim discourse**
Turkish speakers in Britain, as in Australia, belong to three distinct groups: Cypriots, Turks, and Kurds, each with their own distinct migration history. Kurds generally came as refugees and are both the last to arrive and the least socially secure (Enneli et al., 2005). In the research that I conducted, less than 5% of respondents chose religion as their only identity marker; 68% did not choose a religious identity at all. ‘Being Muslim was indeed seen by some as a cultural identity rather than as a religion’ (Enneli et al., 2005, p. 40). The research also found a lack of a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim community, beyond the ethnonational one (Enneli et al., 2005). The prevalence of ethnically segregated mosques in Australia and elsewhere attests to the widespread strength of this kind of identity.

In the popular imagination and vocabulary, race and religion are separate matters, with the language of race used synonymously with that of colour (Malik, 1996). Yet, ‘race exists only as a statistical correlation, not as an objective fact. The distinction we make between different races is not naturally given but is socially defined’ (Malik, 1996, p. 4). The subtle shift that has occurred over time in the construction of the ‘other’ has reflected changes in scientific thinking about humanity. That biologically constructed ‘race’ has been discredited has in no way reduced the efforts of mainstream communities to prevent others from accessing their privileges. Barriers based on appearance, clothing, language, cultural, and religious practice and myriad other differences between people continue to be erected. This occurs, or is instigated, to protect entrenched values, enforce continued social exclusion of particular groups, and prevent incursions of outsiders into the mainstream political and economic space. The post-war discrediting of Nazi-type discrimination based on race has morphed into the use of ‘cultural difference’ as an explanatory factor for hierarchical differentiations (Malik, 1996).

The dominant concept of culture, and the absorption of cultural difference into policies of multiculturalism have shifted the explanatory theorising of difference from the biological to the behavioural. Yet, as Malik (2005) demonstrates, there is an easy slippage between the idea that humans are culture-bearing beings and the idea that humans must bear a particular culture (their culture is this one or that one). If we can only be accorded dignity as individuals when our group is accorded dignity, as in prevailing multicultural policy, then we must stay in our group. This makes the group you were born into the most salient feature of your cultural organisation—just as in racial theory (Malik, 2005). Interestingly, despite the proliferation of strategies to deal...
with multiculturalism, globalising pressures, mass migration, and the expansion of educational systems are eroding cultural difference rather than accommodating it.

Conclusion

To maintain and define cultural boundaries is becoming increasingly problematic, especially where cultural practice intersects with other demographic variables, such as age, class, and gender. Thus, a proliferation of ‘cultures’ occurs, as we now find terms such as ‘youth culture’ used to define and explain the behaviour of ‘tribes’ of young people. Religion merely adds another layer of complexity to the idea of culture whereby some religious groups—such as Jews and Sikhs—are accorded legal status as racial groups whereas others—such as Christians and Muslims—are not.

There can be little doubt that group identity has a critical role to play in the effective function and interaction of modern, liberal, democratic political systems. Yet, in the struggle for resources, Australian Muslims have never been a unitary influence, nor a united political entity. While this in no way implies that subgroups of Muslims have not been politically active, nor that the common need of Muslims for political recognition is irrelevant, it does clearly indicate a need for the mainstream of Australian politics to engage with Islam in all its complexity and diversity. Sectarian and doctrinal difference, ethnic and cultural heritage, and linguistic diversity characterise Islam in Australia regardless of such public discourse within and outside the religion as seeks to demonstrate or declare otherwise.

The theory of ethnic identity formation, is Muslim identity ethnic, racial, national, or is it something else? Identity is inevitably contextual. Mainstream discourse is trying to construct a Muslim/non-Muslim is/them dichotomy, when in reality it must adopt, or at any rate allow, a logic that says this part of us is similar—youth culture, place of residence—even though this part is not—language, religion, culture (Hodge & O’Carroll, 2006). It is too easy to fall into the trap of talking about Muslim Australians as a single entity: clearly defined, bounded, and somehow united. But Australia’s Lebanese and other Arabic communities cannot simply be glossed as Muslim, any more than Islam can be glossed as Arabic/Lebanese. There is too much complexity within Islam, whether it relates to sectarian difference, ethnic or national origin, or political orientation. Media and public representations that consider all of Australia’s heterogeneous Muslims Muslim Turks and anti-Muslim discourse

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as a single community not only do a disservice to those struggling with their own identity formation, but may create as many problems as they solve for those being defined.

References


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