‘You Have to be Anglo and Not Look Like Me’: identity and belonging among young women of Turkish and Latin American backgrounds in Melbourne, Australia

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ABSTRACT This study examines the ethnic identities of 50 second-generation migrant-Australian women aged 17–28 years. Twenty-five women were from Turkish backgrounds and 25 women were from South and Central American (or ‘Latin’) backgrounds. The overwhelming majority of the women interviewed for this study had travelled extensively to their families’ countries of origin, and their experiences growing up in Australia alongside their ongoing overseas visits shed light on transnational ties and the negotiation of ethnicity and belonging in the Australian multicultural context. A typology of the women’s migrant-Australian identities highlights the differences and similarities of experiences among the women in both groups, and reveals the role of social context in shaping identity. Islam was a primary source of identification for most of the Turkish women, as a form of pan-ethnic identity. Participants exhibited a good deal of agency in their identity choices, and this was specifically connected to their transnational positioning. However, while most of the women took on a transnational identity to some degree, their experiences of racism and social exclusion reproduced an ambivalent sense of belonging to Australia. Their sense of being allowed to belong ‘where they are at’ remained salient to the ways in which they constructed their identities.

KEY WORDS Ethnicity; identity; social constructionism; transnationalism; Turkish; Latin American; Australian culture; multiculturalism.

Introduction
This paper engages the contradictory processes of transnationalism that shape constructions of ethnicity by second-generation migrants. Despite the participants’ agency in forging symbolic connections with multiple transnational groups, their sense of hybridity reflects their ambiguous social location within Australian society. We first detail the theoretical position on identity and transnationalism as it relates to constructions of national and pan-ethnic identities. Second, we describe the methodology of the study and the social profile of the participants. Third, we present a typology of the women’s ethnic identities which is framed in terms of their
adoption or rejection of an Australian identity. Additionally, the paper demonstrates the role of social context in constructions of ethnicity, in order to highlight the contingency and contradictions embedded within the women’s location as transnational agents.

**Transnational reconstructions of identity and belonging**

This study adopts a social constructionist perspective to examine the ethnic identities of second-generation migrants through a transnational lens. Ideologies and resources are tied to specific identities, and so the content and the representation of social identities are affected by social interaction at both the personal and societal level, as well as by political ideologies and social discourses (Callero 2003, p. 124; Hall 1992a, pp. 274–7; 1997; Okolie 2003). Identities are based on specific constructions of culture that idealise who and what make up a group’s membership. The concept of ethnic culture refers specifically to beliefs about a shared ancestry and shared communal practices that might include language, symbolism, morality and ideology (Bottomley 1997, p. 14). And the meaning we place on our ethnic identities is derived through reference to particular customs, experiences, places and histories. Pierre Bourdieu (1990, p. 59) argues that culture is embodied through material practices.

Ethnicity is not a reified ‘thing’; instead, it is a social process that communicates social difference, and which maintains group boundaries and political processes through shared social meanings. Thomas Eriksen (1991) argues that the construction of ethnic difference can be seen as a ‘language game’. Given that identities are the outcome of ongoing social reiterations, they frequently encompass contradictions that often go unacknowledged by social actors. Eric Wolf argues:

> In studies of culture we need to take much greater account of heterogeneity and contradictions in cultural systems and to explore the ways in which this differentiation produces a politics of meaning and cultural construction and not merely automatic repetition of inherited forms. (Wolf 1994, p. 7)

The cultural differences usually attributed to ethnic groups are created by the group’s members to bind an ethnic group together, and so cultural traits are thus only socially meaningful if and when we want them to be (Barth 1969). Stuart Hall (1992b) argues that, even though ethnic identities are constructed around essentialised notions of difference (usually attributed to innate characteristics and biology), ethnic categories actually represent particular choices of subjectivities. However, ethnic identities can be seen to embody both a resistance towards established norms of power while also reproducing hegemonic understandings of culture, race, gender and national belonging (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992; Bottomley et al. 1991). This is because, at the everyday level, ethnicity is constructed around ideas that essentialise oppositional binaries between dominant and minority groups (Hall 1992b, 1997; Noble et al. 1999). As Gillian Bottomley points out: ‘The idea of identity as sameness requires an Other who is different [emphasis added], a drawing of boundaries that exclude challenges, a refusal to recognise the dissonances within those boundaries’ (Bottomley 1997, p. 44).

When people relocate from one nation to another, they bring with them significant attachments to several different social networks and they often bear
complex ideas of ancestry that extend beyond the boundaries of one specific geographic location (Evans Braziel & Mannur 2003; McEwan 2004). Transnationalism theory sees migrants as citizens of the world who ‘manage to construct and nurture social fields that intimately link their respective homelands and their new diasporic locations’ (Patterson 2006, p. 1891). Diaspora refers to the dispersion of ethnic communities around the world through migration, as well as their descendents. Diasporic identifications draw on the collective memories, myths, sentiments and material conditions that link individuals to one (or several) ancestral homelands, as well as ‘a sense of sympathy and solidarity’ with others whom they believe share their cultural heritage (Patterson 2006, p. 1896).

Some diasporic communities include many different national or ‘pan-ethnic’ groups. Pan-ethnic labels can obscure the political and historical differences within and between individual ethnic groups and they potentially reproduce hegemonic understandings of culture (Cohen 2003; Langer 1998; Portes & MacLeod 1996, p. 524). For example, some researchers argue that the concept of a ‘Latin American community’ in Australia is a political construct that evolved from a need to maximise access to resources given the mandates of multicultural policies (such as funding for community groups) (Lopez 2005; Torezani 2005). At the same time, constructions of pan-ethnicity create an opportunity for members of minority migrant groups to belong to a wider collectivity. This process can give them an added sense of social empowerment than could be otherwise achieved by identifying solely with their country-of-origin migrant communities (Zevallos 2005a).

There is a growing body of research that suggests that second-generation migrants construct Islam as a pan-ethnicity for similar reasons of empowerment (see Butler 1999; Jacobsen 2001; Jacobson 1997; Schmidt 2002). Religious groups are often heterogeneous, so, while their members share a belief system, they do not always share ethnicity. In the case of young, educated Muslims living in the West, however, religion is sometimes constructed as an ethnic category. Garbi Schmidt labels this process the ‘ethnification of Islam’ (Schmidt 2002, pp. 1–2). Schmidt argues that the adoption of Islam as an ethnicity is ‘both an answer to the “in-betweenness” of hybrid migrant identities and a means to define performative qualities of a global Islam’ (Schmidt 2002, p. 15). This suggests that, irrespective of their national backgrounds and their cultural differences, some young Muslims feel unified through their religious connection, rather than being fractured through national differences.

Despite the heterogeneity of the groups who might unify through imagined diasporic connections, this process is one which potentially strengthens individuals’ social location in the world. In this meaning, the concept of ‘social location’ refers to a person’s positioning within ‘interconnected power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors’ (Pessar & Mahler 2003, p. 816; see also Anthias 2001, p. 634). Homi Bhabha’s work on hybridity is centrally concerned with the reflexivity involved in navigating ‘in between’ several cultures. Bhabha argues:

Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic
memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside: the part in the whole. (Bhabha 1998, p. 34)

Studies show how second-generation identities encompass hybrid ideas about what it means to be Australian using reflexive reproductions and contestations of parental, communal and Australian beliefs and practices, particularly in regards to gender (Baldassar 1999; Elley & Inglis 1995; Noble et al. 1999; Pallotta-Chiariolli & Skrbis 1994; Zevallos 2003). These studies also highlight the contradictions involved in negotiating intersecting gender, ethnic and national identities. Elley and Inglis (1995) conducted interviews with second-generation Turkish youth. As one of their participants explained:

If I’m going to stay in Australia, I’m going to be an Australian. But if I’m too much of an Australian then I’d be isolated from my own community. . . . If I want to stay with my community then I’ve got to be a member, an element of it . . . [to] be appreciated and be seen to be part of it. (Elley & Inglis 1995, p. 199)

They found that place of birth, ‘mother-tongue’, and religion were ‘symbolic markers’ of Turkish ethnicity. More generally, notions of family loyalty, the social organisation of marriage and traditional segregation of gender roles shaped the youths’ identities in Australia (Elley & Inglis 1995, p. 201).

Studies on Latin American migrants have also identified how ‘traditional’ norms that Latin migrants bring with them to Australia act as ideological constructs that reinforce gender stereotypes (Moraes-Gorecki 1988; Pease & Crossley 2005). Other studies also reflect that young second-generation Latin women take on Australian cultural ideals of gender equality. Ien Ang points to the potential power of diasporic communities to ‘unsettle static, essentialist and totalitarian conceptions of “national culture” or “national identity”’, given that migrants’ ties are increasingly transnational rather than limited by geography (Ang 2001, p. 34). Recent studies show that, while there is widespread support for the ideals of multiculturalism (Jones 2000; Pakulski & Tranter 2000), there is a great deal of ambivalence about what this cosmopolitanism actually means (Ang et al. 2002, 2006). At the everyday level, constructions of national identity are less influenced by multiculturalism and more influenced by narratives of ‘traditional’ (read: white, masculine) Australian culture, epitomised by the bronzed Aussie surfer (Phillips & Smith 2000; Smith & Phillips 2001).

Empirical studies on whiteness have demonstrated how racial constructions continue to reinforce the taken-for-granted ‘centre’ of national culture (Bulbeck 2004; Hage 1998; McLeod & Yates 2003; Schech & Haggis 2001). This is evident in ongoing racism at the institutional and everyday levels (Castles & Vasta 1996; Dunn et al. 2004; Hage 1998; Vasta 1993, 1996; Zevallos 2004). Hage (1998) argues that debates about race/racism and multiculturalism are best explained as ‘nationalist practices’ centred on a contest over space. Hage’s white supremacist participants saw themselves as having ‘an imagined privileged relation between the imagined “race”, “ethnicity” or “culture” and the national space conceived as its own’ (Hage 1998, p. 38). This position of privilege is supported by their whiteness: they perceived themselves to be ‘spatial managers’ entitled to make judgements about who does and does not belong to the nation. While transnationalism theory has advanced academic debates about nationalism, in practice, diasporic connections
are hampered by territorial power struggles between minority and majority groups and parochial ideas about national belonging (Ang 2001; Anthias 2001; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). Ang argues:

> It is clear that many members of ethnic minorities derive a sense of joy and dignity, as well as a sense of (vicarious) belonging from their identification with a ‘homeland’ which is elsewhere. But this very identification with an imagined ‘where you’re from’ is also a sign of, and surrender to, a condition of actual marginalisation in the place ‘where you’re at’. (Ang 2001, p. 34)

Similar criticisms have been made of transnational theory and its premature enthusiasm to dismiss the importance of national identity as an expression of geographic location. Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue that the social sciences have overstated the position of migrants as transnational actors. Instead, they argue that, for the majority of humanity, social experiences are centred on the place where they live, and so national identities remain salient: ‘nationalism is a powerful signifier that continues to make sense for different actors with different purposes and political implications’ (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002, pp. 326–7).

The data, discussed below, present a framework to think through some of the ambiguities, contradictions and complexities in naming, claiming and living with identity choices in the Australian multicultural context.

**Methodology**

The data presented are drawn from a qualitative study about the intersections of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and nationality of 25 women from South and Central (or ‘Latin’) American backgrounds and 25 women from Turkish backgrounds. The interviews had a focus on themes of identification:

- How do these women construct their ethnicity?
- What does the women’s citizenship mean to them and does this citizenship influence their adoption of an Australian identity?

Data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews between September 2001 and April 2003. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the participants were given pseudonyms. Initial contact was made with various Latin and Turkish student, community and welfare groups to recruit the participants. The Turkish sample was gathered by the snowball method initiating from student social clubs in Melbourne universities which catered to Turkish students, and this led to contacts within Islamic groups in universities which had Turkish members. The Latin sample was gathered initially from university contacts and one Latin American community welfare group in Melbourne, which then snowballed to these women’s friendship networks. Given that this study snowballed primarily from university sources, the findings presented need to be viewed in relation to the women’s education.

The participants were aged 17–28 years and they mostly lived in the less affluent western and northwestern suburbs of Melbourne. The women almost uniformly described their locales of residence as ‘multicultural’, and so their ideas of Australia as a multicultural society should be situated within a framework of place,
specifically the urban geography of Melbourne’s west. Twenty-eight women were studying full time in university at the time of their interviews; 15 women had completed at least one university degree; four had completed at least one Technical and Further Education (TAFE) degree; two women had deferred their university degrees; and one woman was finishing high school at the time of her interview.

A second-generation migrant is defined in Australian census statistics as a person with at least one parent who was born overseas (Khoo et al. 2002, p. iv), but other studies have a broader definition. These studies include overseas-born individuals who came to Australia during their childhood up to early adolescence (see, for example, Butcher & Thomas 2001, pp. 6–7; Vasta 1994, pp. 21–2). The present study includes both Australian and overseas-born second-generation migrants. Thirty women were Australian-born and the 20 women who were born overseas arrived between the ages of 6 months and 10 years. Seventeen Latin women were born overseas and their average age of arrival was 6 years, while the three overseas-born Turkish women arrived before the age of 2. All 50 women were Australian citizens.

Given that there are only three overseas-born Turkish women in this sample, in comparison to 17 overseas-born Latin women, a straightforward comparison of the two sample groups is difficult. This sampling difference is a limitation of the study, and it arises as a result of the outcome of the snowball recruitment. This pattern, however, reflects the broader migration patterns of both groups. Turkish migrants arrived in Australia predominantly during the 1960s and early 1970s, meaning that the Turkish community in Australia has a sizeable second-generation population (see DFAT 2004, pp. 1–2; Khoo et al. 2002, p. 12; Elley & Inglis 1995, p. 194). In comparison, Latin migrants arrived in Australia predominantly during the mid- to late 1980s (Amezquita et al. 1995, p. 168), meaning that there are proportionally fewer people in the second generation relative to other longer established groups such as the Turkish.

All of the participants’ families had lived in the major cities of their countries of origin at the time of their migration (usually the capital city). While all 50 participants had spent at least half of their lives living in Australia, 11 women’s families who had initially migrated to Australia had later relocated the family back to their countries of origin during the women’s childhoods, until finally returning to Australia to live permanently. These women who temporarily relocated overseas were mostly Australian born (eight women). Of the 11 women who had temporarily relocated, eight were Turkish and three were Latin. These women had lived in their family’s country of origin for a minimum of 1 year and up to 8 years. Additionally, two of the Turkish women had made this move to Turkey twice in their lives for a total period of 5 and 6 years, respectively. All had all been enrolled in the education system in their respective country of origin for the duration of their overseas stay.

A further 29 women had gone on holidays to their families’ country of origin that lasted typically between 3 and 5 months, and most of these women had made these extended visits at least twice (and sometimes up to five times). Most of the women also had regular contact with friends and family in their countries of origin via telephone or e-mail in between visits. Collectively, the Latin and Turkish participants’ ongoing contact and regular visits to their families’ countries of origin position them as an interesting group with which to explore notions of belonging and identity construction, given their transnational links between Australia and their families’ countries of origin.
The sample size and the snowballing recruitment mean that this study is not representative of the groups interviewed. While it may not be possible to generalise from the data, the analysis sheds light on the diverse ways in which some well-educated second-generation migrant women discuss their ethnic identities in relation to their Australian upbringing. The quotations presented are representative of the women in both sample groups. Where data on both groups are discussed concurrently, the quotations are followed by the sample group to which the participant belongs (either Turkish or Latin).

A typology of migrant-Australian identities

The 25 Latin women interviewed came from six Spanish-speaking migrant national backgrounds (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Peru and Uruguay). The 25 Turkish women shared the same migrant national background (Turkish), although three women’s families originated from Cyprus. Both sample groups of Latin and Turkish women, however, identified with both a migrant national culture and a wider pan-ethnic migrant culture. All the Latin women identified with their families’ national group (e.g. Argentina) and with pan-ethnic Latin groups (South/Central American and Latin American). The Latin women described their culture in relation to their family practices regarding food, Latin music, speaking Spanish, family togetherness, and festivity. While the Latin participants identified that there were some national differences, they believed that all Latin migrants shared similarities in these aforementioned cultural practices. As we will see below, this belief in the (imagined) cultural similarities among Latin migrants shaped these participants’ ideas of Latin pan-ethnicity in Australia. All the Latin women had been raised as Catholic and most of them attended Catholic schools, but they said that religion was not a defining feature of their migrant practices or their ethnic identities.

In contrast, the Turkish women identified with their families’ national group (Turkey) and with a broader Islamic pan-ethnic group. The Turkish women described their culture in Australia in relation to religious festivals celebrated by Muslims (such as Ramadan), marriage rites and the value of respecting their elders. Fourteen of the twenty-five Turkish participants wore the hijab (Muslim dress and headscarf). These women referred to themselves as ‘closed’ or ‘covered’ Muslims because they wore the hijab. The other 11 women did not wear the hijab, and they referred to themselves as ‘open Muslims’. Being ‘open’ refers to not wearing a headscarf or any additional covering on their hair, faces and bodies. The majority of the women who did not wear the hijab expressed a strong desire to do so in the future. The terms ‘open Muslim’ and ‘closed Muslim’ reflect the language that the participants used to describe the hijab, so while they are not my own concepts, I use them to draw out some distinctions in the way that the Turkish women described their identities.

Irrespective of whether or not they wore the hijab, all 25 Turkish women spoke of themselves as ‘religious Turks’, ‘Muslim-Turks’ or as ‘Muslim-Australian’, and they spoke of Islam as both a religion and as a pan-ethnic culture. The participants had strong ties to Muslim youth groups at their universities or through their local mosques in Melbourne, either through their own membership or through their friends’ membership. Because of these active ties to Islamic organisations, it would seem unsurprising that this particular sample of Turkish interviewees placed strong
emphasis on their religious identities. The Turkish women’s constructions of pan-ethnicity are elaborated upon below.

A threefold typology has been developed to highlight the flexible, ambiguous and contradictory processes embedded within constructions of ethnicity, especially given the participants’ transnational positioning. The three identity types discussed in this analysis are: ‘not Australian’, ‘partly Australian’ and ‘Australian’. While these categories do not truly reflect the fluid processes of identity construction, the typology provides an avenue to make sense of the discursive practices and subjective meanings that underpin the participants’ identity choices. The typology reflects the ‘language games’ that the participants used to construct culture (cf. Eriksen 1991). That is, interest is in how the women labelled and discussed their identities, rather than on documenting the women’s actual behaviour in relation to their identities. In naming their ethnic identities, the women discussed a binary process: they emphasised that they were either adopting or rejecting an Australian identity. At the same time, however, the interview material shows that the women moved between a broader continuum of multiple identities. In some instances, they spoke as if they were more or less inclined towards one identity over another. For example, some women who took on their family’s country-of-origin ethnicity as well as an Australian ethnicity said they were ‘more Latin than Australian’ or ‘more Australian than Turkish’. In other instances, the data suggest the contingency of the participants’ identities. For example, when they were travelling overseas, they would adopt an Australian identity, even though they reported never claiming this identity whilst in Australia.

It is the nature of typologies that they reduce the complexities of everyday life because they are abstractions of reality (McKinney 1969). Talking about ethnicity is not the same as ‘doing ethnicity’, and so this typology represents a conceptual framework to better understand some of the background issues involved in identity ‘work’. More specifically, it is a framework that addresses the processes involved in thinking through and verbalising ideas about entitlement, privilege and opposition as they relate to the constructions of ethnic identities. The typology is discussed below in more detail, but Table 1 summarises the typology and shows the numerical difference between the two groups in each type and makes reference to the women’s Australian or overseas birthplace.

Thirteen of the fifty participants adopted ‘not-Australian’ identities; of these women, six were born overseas and seven were born in Australia (see Table 1). The Latin women are over-represented in this category: 10 Latin women said that they were ‘not Australian’ while only three Turkish women identified themselves in this way.

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<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>‘Not Australian’</th>
<th>‘Partly Australian’</th>
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<td>Latin</td>
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TABLE 1. Ethnic identities of the Latin and Turkish participants
way. Thirty-six of the fifty participants described themselves as ‘partly Australian’. The Turkish participants are predominantly represented in this category (22 of 25 Turkish women). Most of the Latin women in the ‘partly Australian’ category were born overseas. Of the 14 Latin women who adopted a ‘partly Australian’ identity, 11 were born overseas. Only 1 of the 50 women interviewed described her identity as exclusively ‘Australian’, and that was one of the Latin women. The significance of these findings and the nuances of the identity types are discussed below.

‘Not Australian’
Thirteen of the fifty participants said that they were ‘not Australian’. The majority of the women in this category were Latin (10 women) and they were mostly Australian born (eight women). The 10 Latin women described their ‘not-Australian’ identities in the same way, by simultaneously emphasising their migrant and pan-ethnic ethnicities and rejecting an Australian ethnicity. The three Turkish women in this category had two ways of describing their ‘not-Australian’ identities. First, by emphasising their migrant cultures and, second, by drawing on ideas of an Islamic pan-ethnicity. I now briefly detail each sample group’s identity constructions before discussing the ‘not-Australian’ category more generally. Overall, the Latin and Turkish women in this category rejected an Australian identity primarily because of their inability to identify a distinctive Australian culture, but this also belied their experiences of racial constructions of Australian identity.

‘Latin but not Australian’
The 10 Latin women in this category described their ‘not-Australian’ identities in reference to their migrant communities and pan-ethnicities. Zenia is a case in point. She was born in Peru and arrived in Australia when she was 6. When I asked her to reflect on her ethnic identity, she said: ‘Latin, I guess . . . I’ve never thought of me being Australian . . . [because] I think I just want to hold onto being a Peruvian, being someone else’ (age 21). Zenia insisted she did not consider herself Australian, even though her recent 3 month holiday to Peru had confirmed that Australia was ‘home’. She did concede that her citizenship might make her ‘sort of Australian’:

Do you think of yourself as Australian?
Zenia: I’m not. I’ve always had that [idea]. Under my dad’s name I’m Australian, in citizenship, but I don’t consider myself Australian . . . I am, in a way, but . . . I tell everyone, ‘I’m Peruvian, I’m not Australian’. I tell my friends that and they say, ‘But you live here. You’re [Australian] under your dad’s name’, whatever. I sort of am Australian but I don’t think in that way.

The Latin participants used their migrant and pan-ethnic identities interchangeably. Australian-born Josefina admitted that there were some differences between the individual Latin communities, such as through variations on food or dialect. In spite of their differences, she said, ‘at the end they’re all basically the same’:

Why aren’t those differences very important here as they might be over there?
Josefina: Over there? [Thinks] It’s really hard to say. Basically if you put us together, todos somos Latinos [we’re all Latin]. We get a big culture, that’s a
big culture, all of us together. If you start separating them, it’s like you get little separate cultures. So [thinks] I don’t know [laughs]. (Age 25)

Latin pan-ethnicity becomes a vehicle for resisting assimilation with the Australian majority, but, as the women described it, this pan-ethnicity is also accommodated within the Australian multicultural discourse. Devi said of Latin pan-ethnicity: ‘Within our community we’re a multicultural community’ (age 23). Rather than having the individual migrant communities fracture into ‘little separate cultures’, as Josefina put it, the construction of a pan-ethnic Latin culture allowed a ‘multicultural’ Latin community which symbolically unified Latin people together despite their differences.

‘Turkish but not Australian’

There were three Turkish women in the ‘not-Australian’ category. Two of them were ‘open Muslims’ who did not wear the hijab and they said that they were ‘Turkish, not Australian’. For example, Pertev described herself as a ‘Turk’ and she said ‘I don’t see myself as Australian’ (age 23). Bikem, who had once ‘hated’ her culture and religion when she was younger had since reconnected with these identities, especially through her fiancé (who was also of Cypriot background). She now described herself as a ‘Turkish-Cypriot’, and said: ‘Now I’m like, “I’m Cypriot and I’m proud of it”’ (age 18). In this instance Bikem was taking on both a national migrant identity (Turkish) and a localised migrant identity (Cypriot). The other Turkish woman in this category, Rana, was an Australian-born ‘closed Muslim’ who wore the hijab and described her ethnic identity as a ‘Muslim-Turk’. This was a hierarchical identity because her Turkish ethnicity was secondary in importance to her Muslim identity, as she explained:

A lot of Turks are very nationalistic, where they say ‘I’m Turkish and then I’m Muslim’ whereas I would say, ‘I’m Muslim and then I’m blah, blah ...’ In our religion, first thing is Muslim, you should be proud of your religion, and then I’m Turkish. (Age 19)

Discussion: ‘A bit Australian but not really’

All of the 13 women in the ‘not-Australian’ category described the traditions that their families have kept up in Australia as more influential to their ethnic identities than Australian culture. For example, Sayuri said: ‘I feel Argentinean living in Australia.’ She explains: ‘I mean, this [Australia] is my country, but I feel like Argentina is who I am. Like the way I am, my background, and yeah I feel a connection to the country’ (Latin, age 27). Despite being born in Australia, or having lived there for most of their lives, they emphasised that they had not grown up the ‘Australian way’, and so they did not see themselves as Australian.

Australian cultural values of gender equality were important to these women, but this gender ideal was not compelling enough for them to adopt an Australian identity. There was an objective dimension to the women’s rejection of an Australian identity, and this related to their belief that they were not accepted as Australian by ‘white’ or ‘Anglo’ Australians. When I asked Rana if the way other people saw her as being ‘not Australian’ was stopping her from seeing herself as Australian, she answered:
Rana: Yeah it does, because if other people don’t believe it, how can you? You start doubting it, ‘Where am I?’ [Laughs] If people started accepting me as Australian and accepting me as I am, and not without it [hijab], if people said, ‘Alright I accept you, you’re Australian’, then maybe, like you said, I could start thinking of myself as Australian, because then you think, ‘They accept me as I am’. … to some people being Australian is being white and being preferably Christian or whatever and if you’re anything challenging their ideals then they make you feel like, ‘Nup. Can’t accept you’. (Turkish, age 19)

Ideas of whiteness and difference, whether they are structured around ideas of race or religion, can shape how people reflect upon their ethnic identities. The participants, however, did not really connect their experiences of racism to their ethnic identities. Instead, they cited Australian culture as the reason why they did not feel Australian. For example, Matijana was born in Peru and migrated when she was 6 years old. When I started to ask specific questions about her ethnic identity, she was quick to warn me that she was Peruvian and she said, ‘I hate it when people say I’m Australian, so don’t say it. I hate it’. When I asked her why she felt this way, she answered:

Because if you look at the Australian public in general, they’re such—ugh! They’re such bums. They’ve got no culture, for starters. Not all of them, that’s a generalisation, because I know some and they’re really, really, nice but in general [pause] of course I’d never say this to them! In general they have no culture, no respect for others. Oh, I can’t say it in English! Like, no tienen ni por venir [they haven’t got anything to look forward to], do you know what I mean? Like, I don’t want to be associated with that. Sorry, that’s why I hate it. (Latin, age 19)

The women’s belief that Australia has no culture could be understood as a form of strategic essentialism (cf. Noble et al. 1999). By emphasising multiculturalism and diminishing the contribution of Anglo-Australians to the national culture, the participants create a place for themselves within the national culture and reduce their sense of marginalisation.

In actuality, these women did refer to themselves as Australian indirectly at various points of their interview when they talked about the nation. They used pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘us’ when they referred to ‘Australians’, and yet they were adamant that they were not Australian when they were asked about their identities. Significantly, these women who rejected an Australian identity in Australia assumed an Australian identity when they travelled back to their families’ country of origin. These transnational mobilities had shown them that they were seen as Australian: their life outlook was different, especially in terms of their gender ideals and career goals; their clothes were different; they spoke Spanish/Turkish with an accent; and they were perceived as affluent in comparison to the locals. Overseas, their Australian identity was unique and so this sense of difference was experienced positively. The following quotation is from Claudia, an Australian-born Latin participant, reflecting on her travels to her parents’ birthplace:

[I]n Uruguay I’d be called ‘The Aussie’, ‘The Kangaroo’, coz they knew I was from here. They’d be like, ‘You’re Aussie, you’re Aussie!’ And to be quite honest, when I was over there I was actually quite proud to be
Australian! [Laughs] like even more, ‘Yeah I’m from Australia’, coz they
loved it! It’s like [excited tone], ‘Oh my God, you’re from Australia!’
(Latin, age 18)

For these women, to reject an Australian identity was to reject Anglo-Australian
culture. Adopting a ‘not-Australian’ identity signalled their difference from Anglo-
Australians, whom they saw as lacking any cultural identity. It was also an
acknowledgement that, even though they did take on Australian cultural practices
and values, they did not feel as if they were ‘allowed’ to be Australian because other
people did not affirm this identity. These participants’ diasporic connections
reflected their ambivalent sense of belonging ‘where they are at’ (cf. Ang 2001).
While Australia was home, they are not always seen as if they are ‘from’ Australia,
and so their transnational links were elevated above their Australian influences.

The women’s discussion of why they did not adopt an Australian identity
suggests a perceived hierarchy of belonging to the nation—that is, in their
experiences, some Australians assert a stronger claim on Australian culture than
others. This hierarchy of belonging is elucidated in the women’s discussion of
exclusionist constructions of Australian culture (through monocultural rather than
multicultural emblems), or in everyday exchanges that remind them of their
otherness (through the question ‘where are you from?’). These women’s perceived
low position in this hierarchy of belonging to the nation has strongly impacted the
ways in which they claimed their identities.

‘Partly Australian’

Almost three-quarters of the entire sample held a ‘partly Australian’ identity; that
is, 36 of the 50 women interviewed held hybrid migrant-Australian ethnic
identities. This group was predominantly Turkish (22 women) and Australian
born (23, of whom 20 were Turkish). Some of these women described their
identities as being ‘in the middle’ or ‘in between’ their migrant and national
identities, and they said things like, ‘[I’m] 50/50, yeah . . . I think I’m in the middle;
definitely in the middle’ (Moira, Latin, age 25). The women also described how
they were Australian because they have an ‘Australian side’, an ‘Australian touch’
or an ‘Australian part’ to themselves. For example, Esmeray said: ‘I don’t think I
could ever live there [in Turkey] forever and not come back coz I’m partly
Australian and that’s the thing’ (Turkish, age 23; emphasis added). Overall, there
were two major influences on the Latin and Turkish women’s ‘partly Australian’
identities: ideals of gender and multiculturalism.

‘More Latin than Australian’

There were 14 Latin participants in this category, and they described their ‘partly
Australian’ identities by drawing on their migrant, pan-ethnic and Australian values
and practices. The Latin women who held ‘partly Australian’ identities were
predominantly overseas-born women (11 of 14). The Latin women tended to say
that their Latin identities were more important than their Australian identities,
thereby showing a symbolic hierarchy between these identities. The Latin women
emphasised their adoption of Australian ideals of egalitarianism, specifically of
gender equality, but their Latin identities took precedence over their Australian
identities, chiefly owing to the ways in which the women made sense of racial constructions and claims of national belonging. For example, consider this exchange with Wendy:

I kind of take on board the things that I like from the environment where I am and obviously that environment is Australia, so I think I’m a bit of both. Oh! No, I should say [I’m] mostly Salvadoran but there’s a bit of the Australian in me. I think I’d be different to someone who lives in El Salvador all their life. (Latin, age 27)

But later, when I asked her if she calls herself Australian, Wendy replied:

Wendy: Well I think you have to be Anglo. Let’s face it. Some people that are Australian don’t look, like, blonde. So I guess that’s my perception of it, but if I were to think about what I consider typical of an Australian person then, yeah, you have to be Anglo and not look like me [laughs]. I know that’s really superficial but that’s what people see initially. They’re not going to stop to think about your personality when you first introduce yourself. (Latin, age 27)

‘Australian-Turks’ and ‘Muslim-Oz-Turks’

The Turkish women in this category offered two interesting contrasts. First, the majority of the open Turkish women said that they felt ‘more Australian than Turkish’ and, second, all except one of the closed Turkish women specified that their Islamic pan-ethnic identities were more important than their Australian and Turkish identities. First, the open Turkish women tended not to nominate their religion as an ethnicity, even though Islam was central to their daily lives. Their Australian identities seemed to be ranked as more important than their Turkish identities:

Akasma: I still got that Turkish identity; I can’t say that I don’t. And I’ve got the Australian side. It’s just both. I can’t say ‘I’m Turkish’ or ‘I’m just Australian’. I’m just in the middle. But [I’m] more leaning towards the Australian side, definitely. (Turkish, age 20)

Most of the closed women said that their Muslim identity was of primary importance to their ethnicity, and additionally, being Australian usually took precedence over being Turkish. As Esmeray, a closed Muslim said: ‘I’m a Muslim-Oz-Turk’ (Turkish, age 23). This finding on the closed women’s ethnic identities suggests an interesting dynamic where Islamic dress may be symbolic of more than just religious identity. Other studies on the ‘ethnification of Islam’ have also found that some well-educated Muslim youth who live in Western countries assume their Islamic identities as an ‘ethnicity’ in order to connect with a larger, more meaningful diasporic group outside of their migrant communities (Schmidt 2002; see also Butler 1999; Jacobson 1997; Jacobsen 2001). In regards to the present study, Amatullah said:

It’d be weird to answer your ethnicity with your religion but there’s a word, an Islamic term umma, which means ‘nation’. It’s like the Islamic nation, so I’d say [laughs] I’m part of the Islamic nation. (Turkish, age 21)
Although all of the closed Turkish women made references to notions of the *umma* during their interviews, they still emphasised the importance of their national and transnational identities when they discussed their ethnicity. While religion was seen to be more important than culture, the women’s identities communicated their desire to belong to Australia, because they saw Australia as ‘home’. For example, Sahiba said: ‘I would say [I’m] Australian because I feel more at home here and I feel like I’ve got more freedom. I feel “myself” in Australia, that’s why I would say I’m Australian secondly [to being Muslim]’ (Turkish, age 19).

**Discussion: ‘To be Australian is to be multicultural in every sense’**

The most significant influence on these women’s identities was Australian cultural ideals of gender and multiculturalism. First, being Australian enabled the women to escape the fate of what each group respectively referred to as the ‘typical Latin girl’ or ‘typical Turkish girl’: they did not have to simply get married and be subordinate to their husbands’ demands. As they saw it, Australian culture encouraged women to seek out gender equality. Although the extent of Australia’s gender egalitarianism might be questioned, and despite the fact that gender liberation issues are important in Latin America and Turkey, these participants’ subjective perception that gender equality was an Australian ideal was central to their ‘partly Australian’ identities. As with other studies on the gendered constructions of Turkish ethnicity in Australia (Elley & Inglis 1995), as well as constructions of Latin American ethnicity in the Australian context (Moraes-Gorecki 1988; Pease & Crossley 2005; Zevallos 2003), the women in this study identified that their migrant communities continued to favour a ‘chauvinist’ or ‘macho’ gender division. In contrast, the 36 women in this ‘partly Australian’ category highly valued their life opportunities and social mobility as women, which they believed was possible only as a result of their Australian upbringing. They emphasised how their Australian citizenship gave them great benefits and ‘freedoms’ that they would not have in their families’ country of origin:

Kumru: Australia’s a place where you’re free to do anything you want to do. You’ve got the ability to do it, which is why I love Australia so much. You want an education; you go ahead and do. You want to work; get your foot in the door. An Australian might be someone who gives 100 percent to everything. (Turkish, age 26)

The second influence on these women’s ‘partly Australian’ identities was their understanding of Australian multiculturalism. As they described it, Australian national identity was about being ‘different’, and multiculturalism gave support to their ‘partly Australian’ identities. For example, Asuman said: ‘Being Australian is having some sort of cultural background’ (Turkish, age 22). Even as these women spoke of Australian multiculturalism as an asset to the nation, they claimed that they did not see a distinctive Australian culture outside of its multiculturalism, just as the women in the previous category had said. They saw themselves as Australian largely because they saw Australia as a country where ‘everyone’s a migrant, except for the Aboriginals’. As Solmaz said, ‘To be Australian I think it means to be multicultural in every sense’, and yet she also said of ‘Anglos’: ‘I think we’ve done more for this country than they have in that sense’ (Turkish, age 21). Australian culture was seen as not well defined independent of this multiculturalism.
Of the 36 women in this ‘partly Australian’ category, seven women exhibited a sense of ambivalence about their identities, mostly in reference to being Australian. They thought of themselves as Australian, but they were in two minds about this identity. For example, Aylin said: ‘I’d like to think of myself as Chilean-Australian [laughs] . . . but I also don’t feel like I’m Australian. I’m a bit of both’ (Latin, age 23). Despite their ambivalence, I have included these seven women in this ‘partly Australian’ category (instead of in a separate category or outside of the typology altogether). I made this decision because this ‘partly Australian’ category, which is premised upon a hybrid migrant-Australian identity, is one which embraces contradictions. Studies of hybridity necessarily envelop notions of ambivalence, given that migrants occupy a transnational subjectivity—a ‘third space’ in-between the country of origin and the ‘host’ country (Bhabha 1998; Noble et al. 1999). In relation to the present study, İrem highlights the notion of hybridity and ambivalence nicely. She said that she was both Turkish and Australian, but she also said ‘It depends on what context I guess’:

If I’m talking to someone who is from Turkey and has been born and raised there, yes I see myself as an Australian. But if I’m talking to someone who is from Australia, is Australian or Asian or is European or any other nationality, I kinda see myself as a Turkish person. (Turkish, age 21)

The contingency of the women’s ethnic identities is also highlighted in their overseas experiences. Notably, all 11 women who had gone to live in their families’ country of origin during their childhoods were represented in this category. Additionally, 13 of the 20 women who were born overseas in the total sample of 50 participants thought of themselves as ‘partly Australian’. Moira, who was born in El Salvador and came to Australia aged 6, said that she felt like she was ‘from’ Australia because ‘this is my country’:

_How do you feel about that question, ‘Where are you from’? Does it bother you?_

Moira: No, it doesn’t bother me. It’s just that, the way I figure, I was born there but I’m not really from there. To me, this is my country; it’s not over there. To me, _over there_ is going to another country, basically . . . I wouldn’t say, ‘That’s my country’. You know, I would say, ‘That’s where I was born’, but that’s not my country. (Latin, age 25)

In the Australian social context, then, most of the interviewees could only feel Australian while emphasising their migrant identities at the same time.

Of the 36 women with an ambivalent transnational subjectivity the majority (30 women) reported experiences of racism. While they overwhelmingly defied racial categorisations of Australian identity, claiming that ‘none was really Australian except Aboriginals’, the data suggest that racial categorisations still impacted them. As a result of their interactions with other people, while they might think of themselves as Australian, some of these participants did not often call themselves Australian. Karli, an open Muslim, shows that, even when the participants were defiant about their Australian identities, maintaining this identity required a lot of work in their everyday social exchanges:

_Do you call yourself Australian?_

Karli: Yeah of course! I speak Australian. Australian is my first language,
English is my first language. I went to Turkey two years ago and [was asked] ‘Where are you from?’ ‘I’m from Australia’. I didn’t go around saying I’m from Turkey. ‘I’m from Australia’, that’s what I’d say. When I’m in Australia and people ask me, ‘What are you?’ I say, ‘Turkish’ because they already know I’m Australian, because I live in Australia, they should automatically know that. They should automatically accept that. But . . . even when I say, ‘I’m Australian’ they go, ‘Nuh, but what language are you?’ Do you know what I mean? (Turkish, age 20)

The participants who held ‘partly Australian’ identities are still influenced by a hierarchy of national belonging, even as they take on an Australian identity centred on multicultural inclusiveness.

The Turkish women’s support of multicultural ideals of tolerance, inclusiveness, democracy and egalitarianism are especially pertinent in the current mainstream political climate that emphasises Islam’s incompatibility with ‘Western’ values and, in particular, in recent national debates about the policing of Australian citizenship (through the recent introduction of a citizenship test). In both the Turkish and Latin participants’ eyes, Australian culture accommodates other cultures, and ideally embraces diversity. Nevertheless, the women’s experiences of racism and marginalisation were incongruent with this multicultural ideal (see also Zevallos 2005b). Despite their experiences of social exclusion, these women continued to emphasise their connection to Australian culture through its multiculturalism. The multicultural Australian identity, then, had its limitations, as the women in this category described it. The women in this category were, after all, only partly Australian; being 100 per cent Australian was seen as the surrender of their migrant ethnicities, and this was not something they were prepared to do. As Moira said: ‘for me, to be 100 percent Australian would be to give up all of my culture’ (Latin, age 25).

‘Australian’

Xiomara was the only woman in the entire sample of 50 participants who thought of herself as exclusively Australian. This was the only instance of non-transnational subjectivity. Xiomara thought of herself as Australian even though she was born in Chile and had lived there for the first 8 years of her life. Xiomara was the only woman in the entire sample to reject her migrant ethnicity, and she expressed great ambivalence about Chilean culture in general. There was one major influence on Xiomara’s Australian identity, and this related to gender ideals.

Xiomara said that birthplace was not important to her sense of ethnicity, but her Australian citizenship was highly valued: ‘Even if I went back [to Chile], I would always plan to go back to Australia anyway. I decided really early that I was Australian not Chilean . . . ’ (Latin, age 25). Xiomara was ambivalent about her country-of-origin ethnicity because of her gender experiences in her family of origin, her Chilean community, and a 5 month trip to Chile in her late teens with her (then) boyfriend. This holiday was the catalyst for Xiomara’s rejection of Chilean culture. Her Australian gender ideals clashed with the people she encountered whilst travelling around Chile. She remembers:

I was expected to do everything for [my boyfriend] in every place that I went to [including hotels] . . . I kept thinking to myself, ‘If I had to live in
this environment I’d go nuts!’ I pretty much—what’s the word? Cachetada [slap on the face], push away, I just pushed that culture away. In my mind I just didn’t want to be a part of it anymore. When I came back I was like [whistles with relief] thank God, you know? I hated it. (Latin, age 25)

Xiomara’s discussion of gender is an extreme version of the ideals supported by the women in the ‘partly Australian’ category, but her discussion of ‘traditional’ gender norms mirrors the findings of other studies on Latin ethnicity (Moraes-Gorecki 1988; Pease & Crossley 2005; Zevallos 2003). Beyond her gender ideals, Xiomara emphasised her similarities with Australians, rather than emphasising her differences, as the other participants did:

I like intermingling with other cultures, and not just the people that look like me. I’ve made friendships with Asians. To [my sister] I think that would be really strange. I don’t think that she could ever relate to Asians or Australians because she’s got the dark skin, big eyes, brown, whatever. … she sees herself as different, whereas I don’t. I see myself and I look at everyone else and I don’t see a difference. Whereas I think she does. She looks at herself and she sees herself as very different even though she probably isn’t. (Latin, age 25)

Racial constructions draw upon artificial physical attributes to maintain social stratification. Xiomara’s case shows how these constructions of racial difference are reproduced even as they are resisted. In Xiomara’s account, ideas of whiteness shape both her sister’s and her own ethnic identities, even though Xiomara insists that when she looks at herself she does not see a difference from ‘everybody else’.

However, even Xiomara’s rejection of Chilean identity and a transnational subjectivity was not so absolute; she spoke positively about Chilean traditions (the food, language, music, festivity, and the value of family), and said she wanted to continue these practices when she had children. Nevertheless, Xiomara’s rejection of her migrant ethnicity symbolised her rejection of the gender inequality she saw as inherent in Chilean culture.

Discussion

The typology presented in this paper addressed the women’s construction of their ethnic identities. Looking at the whole sample of 50 women, adopting a hybrid migrant-Australian ethnic identity was much more common than rejecting an Australian identity altogether. A total of 37 women (74 per cent) in this study adopted an Australian identity (‘partly Australian’ and ‘Australian’). Significantly, though, only one of these women rejected her migrant identity in favour of an Australian identity. Perhaps a larger sample, or a sample derived from more varied sources other than snowballing from university groups, might have produced a different outcome. A larger sample might have seen more participants rejecting their migrant identities. The recruitment process for a qualitative study about specific ethnic groups limits the boundaries of the sample. It seems more likely that people who identify with their country-of-origin group, rather than reject it, would volunteer for a study such as this.

Ethnic identity, like the culture it seeks to reflect, is neither static nor monolithic. The identity categories presented in this paper necessarily simplified the complex
reality of the participants’ negotiation of ethnicity for the purposes of analysis. An elaboration of this reality recognises that the participants’ ethnic identities are specific to social context and subject to change over time. The women’s identities were much more fluid than the labels they gave during their interviews and the typological categories presented in this analysis. As we saw, their identities shifted when they travelled overseas.

Nevertheless, aside from Xiomara, the participants’ social location within Australia was highly ambivalent. Sometimes their sense of difference was a positive achievement that signalled the uniqueness of their cultural practices and adopted signifiers of identification (such as the hijab). This sense of difference also made them feel positive about their contribution to the multicultural nation. At other times, when their sense of difference was imposed by others or amplified beyond their volition, such as when they were hounded about their answer to the question ‘where are you from?’, their experience of being othered was not pleasurable (see also Ang 1996, p. 43; 2001, pp. 29–30; Zevallos 2003, p. 89). Some of the transnationalism literature characterises individuals as ‘free-floating’ entities sojourning through open-ended transnational possibilities (Anthias 2001, p. 628; see also Ang 2001; Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). Such a view gives primacy to individuals’ agency, but, as Anthias argues, this agency needs to be put into perspective:

It is important to recognize the role of agency, on the one hand, but explore also how it is exercised within a system of social constraints, linked to the positionality of actors (both individual and collective) within specific social contexts. (Anthias 2001, p. 629)

Social identities are given meaning through social interaction, and they anchor us to other individuals and groups through a sense of shared belonging or social distance. While people can hold multiple identities, these identities are usually constructed as esssentialised binaries (Hall 1997; Noble et al. 1999). That is, individual social identities are defined through oppositional identities: people feel a sense of sameness with each other because there are others who are seen as different. While the concept of otherness masks the similarities in the experiences that individuals and collectivities share, its focus on difference creates an avenue through which we can explore the power dynamics in the naming, expression, and social interactions that lead to the social construction of identities.

The participants in this study essentialised Australian culture as a defence for their own social positioning on the margins of the national culture. In their claims that Australians have ‘no culture of their own’, they are making an attempt to reposition themselves in relation to the Australian dominant group. They are, in effect, ‘othering’ Australians: ‘Anglos’ are pushed to the fringes of their idea of what makes up the multicultural nation, because they, as migrants, make a stronger and more unique contribution to the cultural fabric of the nation.

Three key issues arise from the data: first, there are distinct differences in the ways in which both groups conceived of their diasporic identities; second, transnational acts, specifically visiting overseas, had a strong influence on the participants’ fluid constructions of identity; and, finally, national belonging still plays a strong role in the women’s transnational identification. First, while diasporic identities were important to both groups interviewed, issues of pan-ethnicity were signified differently, specifically in reference to birthplace and
religion. Overall, the Turkish women mostly identified themselves as ‘partly Australian’ (23 out of 25 Turkish women), and most of these Turkish women were Australian born (20 women). In contrast, most significantly for the Latin sample, the majority of the Latin participants who identified as ‘partly Australian’ were mostly overseas born (11 of 25 Latin women). Being born in another country did not impede most of the Latin women’s adoption of an Australian identity, perhaps because they constructed Australian identity in terms of its multiculturalism. In claiming that ‘no one was really Australian, except the Aborigines’, the participants constructed Australia as a nation of migrants. This allowed them to adopt an Australian identity despite their overseas birthplace. In so doing, the Latin women were denouncing ethnic models of nationalism in favour of civic models of identity (cf. Jones 2000; Pakulski & Tranter 2000).

A more significant factor in the Turkish women’s diasporic identifications was related to religion. While the Latin women’s religious identities were not reflected in the way that they discussed their ethnicity, the closed Turkish women were more likely to take on their pan-ethnic identity as an ethnicity in comparison to the open Turkish women, and this pan-ethnic identity superseded their Australian and Turkish identities. Table 2 highlights this finding on the Turkish women’s ethno-religious identities.

Although wearing the hijab is a religious practice, clearly, the hijab had a wider importance to the Turkish women interviewed. The open Turkish women overwhelmingly wanted to close in the future, but they had not done so as yet, and it was no coincidence that, as open Muslims, they had not taken on their religion as an ethnic identity. Conversely, in this respect, wearing the hijab for the closed women is a marker of ethnic identity as well as their religious identity. This process is difficult to comment on, and it might be better understood with a sample of Muslim women from different ethnic backgrounds. It is noteworthy, however, that even though this study’s Turkish sample is limited to one national group, there was some diversity in the ways in which the Turkish women constructed their identities in relation to religion. While all the women referred to themselves as ‘religious Turks’, they could be religious Turks who wore the hijab, or they could be religious Turks who did not wear the hijab. At the same time, while the closed women’s dress reflected their belonging to an Islamic pan-ethnicity, this identity was still based on a national identification. With two exceptions, the closed Turkish women who described themselves as ‘partly Australian’ prioritised their Australian identity over their Turkish identity—albeit still incorporating both identities into their conceptualisation of their ‘Muslim-Oz-Turk’ identities. The growing literature on Islamic

| Table 2. Turkish participants’ ethnic identities in relation to religious dress |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                | Open            | Closed          |
| ‘Not Australian’               |                 |                 |
| Turkish                        | 2               | 0               |
| Muslim-Turk                    | 0               | 1               |
| ‘Partly Australian’            |                 |                 |
| Turkish-Australian             | 8               | 2               |
| Muslim-Australian-Turk         | 1               | 11              |
| ‘Australian’                   | 0               | 0               |
| Total                          | 11              | 14              |
pan-ethnicity suggests that religious identification supersedes other ethnic identifications for many young Muslims living in Western nations (Butler 1999; Jacobsen 2001; Schmidt 2002; for a discussion of some exceptions, see Jacobson 1997). This study supports this finding, but with qualification: for these Muslim-Turkish women living in Australia, Islam is a primary source of identification, but national and transnational identities are still important. Australian culture and a diasporic connection to Turkish culture both informed the Turkish participants’ adoption of Islam as an ethnic identity.

The second key finding of this research is that the participants exhibited agency in their identity choices and this was connected specifically to their transnational positioning. Transnational practices, such as return visitation to their families’ countries of origin bore strong significance on the women’s dynamic identity (re)constructions. The Latin-Australian women were especially critical of the gender relations in Latin America and in expressions of Latin culture within Australia. The women’s overseas visits influenced their ideals about preferred gender practices, and this, in turn, fed into their subjective decisions about why and how they shifted their identity choices in the different cultural contexts (overseas and Australia).

The third and most pivotal finding of this paper is that, despite the transnational positioning of migrants, whether an individual feels as if they are allowed to belong ‘where they are at’ remains salient to the ways in which people construct their identities (cf. Ang 2001). Identity is highly influenced by the setting in which migrants live. The women’s experiences of racism and their awareness of a hierarchy of belonging have a strong impact on the ways in which they claim their identities. I argue that the women’s (verbal) rejection or adoption of an Australian identity while in Australia reflected the problematic aspects of transnational belonging. As one woman put it: ‘an Australian is someone who gives 100 percent to everything’ and is deeply committed to egalitarianism, but, as another woman said: ‘to be 100 percent Australian would be to give up all of my culture’. Having a hybrid migrant-Australian identity was the women’s most favoured identity option, given that most of the participants fell into this category. This hybridity allowed the women to signal their difference from Anglo-Australians in terms of their cultural traditions, but at the same time they could benefit from the egalitarianism that Anglo-Australians were seen to exemplify.

The participants’ ambivalent conceptualisation of Australian culture highlights how the negotiation of identity is fraught with contradictions. The Australian identity is, in the women’s ideal, perfectly suited to the transnational lifestyle because it is a hybrid construction, specifically with respect to its multiculturalism. In reality, however, the women’s social interactions emphasised that it is not so straightforward to claim an Australian identity. The data presented suggest that transnational subjectivity might be seen to be consistent with multiculturalism for the participants interviewed, whereas narrower visions on Australian national identity generate problems for transnationals, sometimes generating alienation and rejection of an Australian identity.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr Meg Carter for her continued support and critical feedback in relation to this research. Additionally, the author would like to
thank the three anonymous referees for their thoughtful and critical suggestions and their thorough feedback on this paper.

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