

The Identity and Self-Image of Australian Muslim Youth

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Vertovec and Rogers' (eds, 1998) studies depict young Muslims' cultural values in various European countries as an amalgam of family and Muslim community values with those of the wider community. The former values, presumably, are influenced by the youths' elders who have experienced the settlement process in the receiving country. The latter are constructed through local geography, peer relationships, schooling, employment and unemployment patterns, and leisure activities (Vertovec 1998: 87). Thus at home these young Muslims are reminded of their ethnic and Islamic identity; outside, they struggle to find their place in the wider Western society. With the first generation migrants, identity tends to be closer to the "ideal" pattern of their country of origin; for example, they retain linguistic skills and the traditional family structure. But the identities of second and third generation young Muslims are more mobile and subject to change. The youngsters want to preserve their parental values at home but they adopt elements of the host culture outside. This means there is "an emergent identity construction" (Kucukcan 1998: 128).

Observably, in this process there is sometimes generational conflict when the young people want freedom and responsibility in a secularised Western society, whereas parents expect them to be "educated" but not "Westernised" (Morck 1998: 140). Conversely, in the face of parents' encouragement for them to be secular, ethnic or simply Muslim, youths may passionately adopt the *Umma* identity, for example, in the Palestinian cause or war in Chechnya (Cesari 1998: 30).

Research on Muslim youth attitudes in Australia is limited. My contribution is derived from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 225 Muslim youths in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, which I conducted in 2006-07. However, for this paper I have resorted to an in-depth analysis of 16 youths. Through an examination of these life stories, I sought to understand how they identified themselves, noting, in particular, the positive and negative factors that contributed to this construction. My paper draws on oral testimonies and secondary sources, including international literature.

Introduction

Cultural and personal identity is shaped to a large extent by our culture and the environment in which we live (Matsumoto and Juang 2004: 301). As we grow up our cultural milieu tends to mould our sense of self in ways that "make sense" within the cultural milieu. It follows that different cultures produce different self-concepts in their members, and in turn these different concepts influence all other aspects of individual behaviour. Even what people actually mean and understand as the "self" differs dramatically from one culture to another (Matsumoto and Juang 2004: 301). Sometimes, while living within one's cultural milieu, people can be influenced by other culture

depending on their geographical location and circumstances. For example, I am a transmigrant (born and raised in Bangladesh) who has lived in many places – Pakistan (then West Pakistan), the United States, Saudi Arabia, Oman and now Australia. My identity has been shaped and re-shaped with my movement to new countries and contact with other cultures (see Kabir 2007 a). So I brought a long-standing personal and professional interest to my study of the identity of 16 Australian Muslim youth in 2007. These young people were of diverse ethnic background; some of them were transmigrants like myself or simply migrants; whereas others were Australian-born, and felt connected to two countries.

In this paper I will focus on the identity of the 16 students; but first, I will describe the research methodology of this study. Second, I will discuss the cultural milieu that can influence one's identity; third, I will discuss the contemporary issues raised by some interviewees. Finally, I will discuss the identity of some specific ethnic groups and consider whether contemporary issues influenced their identity.

Methodology

During the period June 2006-August 2007, I conducted 225 interviews with students (15-18 years old) from 11 schools in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. However, this study draws on only a small sub-set of those interviews; it concerns the responses from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews of 16 Muslim students (15-18 years old) of diverse backgrounds conducted at a state school in Melbourne in July 2007. I chose to select such a small sample because I wanted to do a more in-depth study of each student's identity.

In the interviews, which took approximately 30-40 minutes, I asked the participants about their lives, including early school memories, family members, parents' work status, students' part-time

work, sporting activities, music, entertainment and cultural interests, together with their hopes, ambitions and dreams. For this study, I employed a form of narrative inquiry and interpretative method (Chase 2005: 656-657), whereby interview responses were regarded as a story about life generally and about one life in particular. The emphasis was also on identifying the connections, meanings and patterns that existed in the “story”.

Interpretation of a life story is a highly personal matter, even intuitive and empathic at times, because each narrative is seen as containing unique elements (Kabir and Rickards 2006). While interpreting these narratives, I found distinct themes across interviews and saw the similarities and differences across interviews. With the secondary sources (discussed next) and informed knowledge of contemporary issues (Brasted 2001; Kabir 2005; Noble 2007; Poynting 2007), I connected myself to the views of the participants and saw how it shaped and re-shaped their identity (Brah 2007). Sometimes my observation, interactive voice or supportive voice assisted the participants to reflect on their identity (see also Chase 2005: 664). Finally, it was easy for me to relate to and communicate with these students because of my ethno-religious background. The students felt relaxed because of my non-Caucasian appearance, and my familiarity with their cultural, social and religious issues. In this paper the interviewees are given fictitious names.

The Cultural Milieu

While conceptualising identity some scholars (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 224-253; Matsumoto and Juang 2004: 301-302; Gregg: 17-19) described two fundamentally different senses of self: on the one hand Western or individualistic construal of self, on the other hand the construal of self that is more common in many non-Western, collectivistic cultures. In the later case the individual is viewed as inherently connected and interdependent with others. Markus and Kitayama (1991: 224-253) illustrated how these divergent forms of self are embedded in what people notice and think

about, how they feel, and what motivates them. These two cultural models are “ideal typical” that is, an amalgam of typical characteristics but resembling no one in particular.

In individualistic cultures there is a strong belief in the separateness of individuals. The normative design in these cultures is to maintain the independence of the individual as a separate, self-contained entity (for example, the self is independent of the influence or advice of parents, siblings, co-workers or friends). When individuals successfully carry out cultural tasks, they feel satisfied with themselves, and self-esteem increases accordingly (Matsumoto and Juang 2004: 302).

In non-Western, collectivistic cultures overt separateness is neither assumed nor valued. Instead, the emphasis is on what may be called the “the fundamental connectedness of human beings”. The primary concern is for individuals to fit in and maintain interdependence among individuals. Under this construal of self, individuals focus on their interdependent status with other people and strive to meet or even create duties, obligations and social responsibilities (Matsumoto and Juang 2004: 302-303).

In collectivist cultures interdependent goals may include a person enhancing his or her family’s social standing, meeting a felt expectation of family members, or satisfying his or her obligation or indebtedness to the parents who have made enormous sacrifices to raise and support the student. For example, the Chinese student’s desire to achieve academically is socially rooted, and less likely to be concerned with a “me” personality (Matsumoto and Juang 2004: 307).

It is important to recognise that these cultural models are mere tendencies, and it is entirely possible for an individual to have both an individualistic and a collectivistic stance. For example, an American can build up his personality independently and also have a collectivistic stance, under the

influence of his family members. It may be the case that both an individualistic independent stance and a collectivistic interdependent stance are more likely to be seen among bi-cultural people, that is, people who are minorities and exposed to at least two cultures.

Studies by some scholars demonstrate that bi-cultural individuals can master shift identities between cultural frames with relative ease (Gregg 2007: 19). These developments may even signal convergence with discourse and narrative approaches, which have been established through the “self’s multiple voices” (Gregg 2007: 19). Some researchers studying ethnic identity have long recognised that disadvantaged minority status readily sets up dualities of identity, as individuals internalise both their in-group’s standards and the majority group’s stereotypes of them. Most models of ethnic identity development hypothesise dramatic shifts in reference groups and identities, ideally progressing towards a bi-cultural maturity. That is, a bi-cultural identity manages emotional and motivational tensions with personality and a sense of adaptability (Gregg 2007: 19).

Melucci (1997: 64) observed that (bi-cultural) identity of a self becomes a dynamic system defined by recognisable opportunities and constraints. Identity is both a system and a process, because the field is defined by recognisable opportunities and is simultaneously able to intervene to act upon and restructure itself. Two crucial and perplexing problems arise here: the continuity of the self, and the boundaries of the self. Synchronistically, the problem is one of deciding where the subject of action begins and where it ends; diachronically, one must establish how this subject persists through time. Mellucci (1997: 65) also noted that an individual’s (bi-cultural) identity floats within the primary bonds of belonging, like kinship or local and geographical ties (family, community, country of origin and place of residence). In other words, bi-cultural identity is more flexible and may move through both independent and interdependent collective stances.

Contemporary Issues

In this section I will discuss the Cronulla riot and the Australian media as it was discussed by some participants of this study. On 4 December 2005 a fight occurred at Cronulla beach between three surf lifesavers and a group of four Lebanese-background young men. There were disputed views of the incident. On the one side, it was said that the lifesavers had insulted their assailants with public taunts such as “Lebs can’t swim” (Kabir 2007b). On the other side, it was reported that the conflict arose because the Lebanese had come to the beach and verbally abused the local women with phrases such as “You’re a slut”, “you Aussie slut”, “you should be raped”. Following the fight, the popular commercial media, notably the tabloids and talkback radio, fanned the flames (Kabir 2007b).

On 11 December 2005 about 5,000 young Australians converged on Sydney’s Cronulla beach, many draped in Australian flags, singing *Waltzing Matilda* and *Advance Australia Fair* and chanting “Kill the Lebs”, “no more Lebs”, “get Lebs off the beach”, “F...k off, Lebs” and “F...k off wogs” (Kabir 2007b). Some of the young men had stripped to the waist and painted obscene slogans about Allah (the Muslim God) and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) on themselves. Some attacked people of Middle Eastern appearance (Kabir 2007b). Subsequently, on 12 December 2005 a group of Lebanese-Australians arrived at Punchbowl Park armed with guns, machetes, baseball bats, knives, chains and iron bars and launched a reprisal attack by smashing shops and cars and threatening people who got in their way. Allegedly the Lebanese-Australians hit at least 4 people (Kabir 2007b).

Some academics, such as Poynting (2006: 86; 2007: 158-170), believe there was a media “beat-up”. In particular, mention was made of the tabloid newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*. Poynting also singled out talkback radio Steve Price’s 2UE and Alan Jones’ 2GB for provoking anti-Arab and

anti-Islamic sentiments during the riot. In 2006 a comprehensive New South Wales Police report, “Strike Force Neil” confirmed that the 2GB talkback radio program between 5-9 December 2005 did indeed incite the Cronulla riots that occurred from 11-13 December 2005 through its derogatory comments on Lebanese-Australians (Kabir 2007b). Apart from the Cronulla riot, Kabir (2006a; 2006b) and Elund (2007) found that some Australian media held a negative opinion of Muslims in general.

Fifteen interviewees of this study were critical of the Australian media, and some gave examples to show how the media was against “them”. Only one participant did not hold a negative view of the media. In the next section I will discuss some specific ethnic groups, and analyse the students’ identities.

Youth Identity and Self-Image

As discussed above, culture plays an important role in the formation of one’s identity and self-image. Some people build up their image independently without the influence of family members, while others develop their identity interdependently under the influence of family members. In some cases, both independent and interdependent factors can influence one’s identity. In the following section, I will discuss the identity pattern of different ethnic groups.

Iraqi background:

The five interviewees discussed here were of Iraqi background; they migrated to Australia between 2004-2006.

Iraqi-born Farida (female) lived in Lebanon for a few years before migrating to Australia. Culturally, she felt very Arabic. She supported the Iraqi soccer team and watched Iraqi programs through satellite television. Farida placed great emphasis on the Iraqi cultural celebration *chobiya*,

which was different from the Lebanese traditional dance *dabke* and drum *derbekah*. Farida was also fond of Indian movies and Hindi movie songs. Her favourite Indian movie stars were Shahrukh Khan and Aswariyah Roy. When I commented, “It looks like you’ll learn Hindi very soon”. Farida replied, “Yeah, yeah, *namasti* (Indian-Hindu greetings)!” Farida was not yet fond of any English/Australian television programs. She went to a Shi’ite mosque. She had not heard about the Cronulla riot, but regarding the Australian media, Farida, commented, “Oh! media it’s really complicated, yeah”. When I asked Farida about her hopes, she was not sure, but about her dreams she said “Dream, to do all the best in future, make my parents happy”. Regarding her national identity, Farida replied, “Aussie Iraqi”!

Farida appeared to be absorbed in entertainment (movies etc). She was not bi-cultural in terms of English music or television shows but she reflected on her collectivistic identity when she said that she wants to make her parents happy. The second Iraqi-born female participant, Marium, like Farida, was fond of Bollywood (Indian movies). Marium maintained her religious identity by going to the Shi’ite mosque. Regarding her national identity, Marium replied, “Iraqi number one! I spent my childhood, and my teenage period, mostly in Iraq, so I feel mostly connected to it”. Perhaps, Marium felt less connected to Australia because she was encountering resistance in the job market. When I asked her, “Do you think women wearing *hijab* (head scarf) can get a job, a decent job (in Australia), and are you looking for a job?” Marium replied,

Nuh, I’ve tried to get a job but because of my *hijab* most of the managers rejected me. We have to wear long skirt. In the job advertisement they didn’t mention that *hijab* girls are not wanted but I can tell they prefer a girl who does not wear a *hijab*. They just tell me, “Put your resume in and we’ll think about it”. And I never heard from them. They have an image of us that we’re terrorists, but since we came here it’s alright cos there are a lot of Muslim people.

Marium added:

I’m comfortable here in my suburb because it is multicultural but in other areas of Australia they don’t like Muslim people that much. I can tell because when we first came here, if we

were walking down the street, we're all wearing *hijab* yeah, the guys would put their finger up and they would swear at us just because we're Muslim. They would say "F...king Muslims".

Marium was aware of contemporary issues, such as the Cronulla riot:

I just heard it. Some girls were talking about it. There was some misunderstanding and the Lebo stabbed the Australians.

Regarding the media, Marium said:

I watch a bit of news and I don't think they like us that much. Well, they keep talking about something against that Mufti (Al-Hilaly) in Sydney. And form an idea for the Australians that we're bad, that we're terrorists.

Regarding her hopes and dreams, Marium said, "My hope is to go to University, finish my studies there and maybe I'll find a decent job so that I can be independent". Marium's feelings about Sydney's former controversial Sunni Mufti Al-Hilaly, who equated scantily dressed women with uncovered meat, revealed that though she was a Shi'ite and lived in Melbourne, she identified with the broader Muslim community, rather than the wider Australian community, which had not yet provided her with a job and whose members had used derogatory words such as "F...king Muslims" or "Terrorists".

Another third Iraqi-born participant, Zohra, moved to Australia through her marriage. She was learning English, did not wear a *hijab*, and was looking for a part-time job. Zohra felt connected to Iraq because she had only moved to Australia a year ago. On the other hand, another female Iraqi-born participant, Wajma, who migrated to Australia in 2004, felt very connected to Australia. About her national identity she said "I lived for a long time in Australia; of course I would say Australia". Wajma held an optimistic view of the wider Australian society. She had not heard of the Cronulla riot. It appears that her thoughts were influenced by her relatives who had arrived in Australia 10 years ago and who had observed the changes over the years. As Wajma said:

I think I can get job easily and do whatever I want with a *hijab* because here in Australia we've got heaps of people wearing the scarf and before my uncle was here like 10 years

ago he said it was too hard then. Because it was about 2 or 3 people with a scarf and it was too hard, they didn't know why people wore a scarf. But now it's more accepted and if you see the celebrations or the festivals it's more of people wearing the scarf, that's why I'm too comfortable.

Regarding the media, Wajma remarked:

They (the media) do love to talk about Muslim people and what happens in their countries and why they moved here and they really like to support (encourage) our education and living. They allow most of people from different cultures to come to Australia and this is very good.

Regarding her hopes and dreams, Wajma said, "I'd really like to go to uni and do Medicine, *Inshallah* (God Willing)". Though Marium and Wajma had both arrived in 2004, Marium's Muslim-Iraqi identity was affected both by her negative experience in the job market and street abuse, whereas Wajma was influenced by the positive comments of her uncle so she felt connected to Australia. Thus an identity can be formed through the surrounding family, cultural and societal environment. However, Brah (2007: 143-144) observed:

Identity is not an already given thing but rather it is a process. It is not something fixed that we carry around with ourselves like a piece of luggage. Rather, it is constituted and changes with changing contexts. It is articulated and expressed through identifications within and across different discourses. To have a sense of being, say, Muslim is therefore different when confronted with non-Muslims than with friends and family. This sense of self will vary depending on whether the non-Muslims are friendly or hostile.

Therefore, according to one's personal experience, identity can be shaped and re-shaped. The identity of the next Iraqi-born male participant, Murad, was related to a more *Umma* (Muslim community) identity rather than a specific Shi'ite identity. Murad, who lived in Iran before migrating to Australia, said:

It does not really matter which mosque I go to. Yeah but when I go there (Sunni mosque) people look at me, funny you know, because they're all Sunni's and I'm a Shia and I'm praying between them.

Yeah that's why, my dad's one of the type that doesn't like meeting other (Sunni) people. I don't come across many Sunni Iraqi's but if I do sometimes, we're just normal, we're brothers, if not in religion, in Islam and if not in Islam, still Iraqis.

Murad connected himself with the broader Muslim community or simply with the Iraqis and he listened to *Nasheeds* (Islamic devotional songs). Murad did not know about the Cronulla riot, but he had heard from his friends about *Hizbut Tahrir*, the controversial Muslim group who aim to establish an Islamic Caliphate globally, turn the land of non-believers, *Dar-ul-Harb* into the land of believers, *Dar-ul-Islam*. Murad said, “I didn’t pay attention to it (its ideology) much”. Murad was very concerned about Muslim parents and their role in the upbringing of their children in Australian society:

I think the main reason for people losing their religion or their nationality is because of their parents are not paying enough attention. If the parents paid enough attention, I mean some students after school they don’t go home, they stay outside mucking around, even in their school uniform and then come back home at night. What the parents should do, they should actually make an agreement with their sons to come home first, have lunch, and pray. They should ask them what happened today, who did they hang around with, they should care about stuff like that, yeah and that’s it.

Murad spoke of his dream:

Well my dream is that everybody becomes like brothers. Our Muslim countries do whatever America says. Like for example Turkey, it’s trying to fit in with Europe and Europe is telling them, “Oh! the ladies have to take off their *hijab*, you have to change this, change that”, what’s the point of that, what’s so good about Europe? That’s something upsetting – yeah. And I hope to settle in as a Muslim, and I hope my generation stays as a Muslim and doesn’t get drifted away.

Grillo (2004) and Kabir (2007b) observed that an Islamic (*umma*) identity should not pose a problem to Australian society as long as a Muslim does not endorse an extremist militant ideology.

Regarding his national identity, Murad commented:

Well I’d say, well most important is that I’m a Muslim, so Muslim Australian. I can’t say that this is not my country because they welcomed me. Also I can’t forget my country because I was born there.

In this regard, I recall my research on the third and fourth generation Australian Muslims of Javanese origin in Mackay, Queensland. These participants identified themselves as Australian-

Javanese not because they felt a cultural affinity rather it was geographical: they have never been to Java. So identity is also related to the length of stay in the host country and one's sense of where home is (see also Kabir 2007c).

African background

The Somalian-born male interviewee, Saeed, who lived in Kenya before migrating to Australia in 1999 said about his national identity, "My mother country is Somalia, nothing can change that; I was born in Somalia, I wasn't born in Australia. So, of course, I don't love Australia as much as I love Somalia". Saeed was informed of the Cronulla riot and *Hizbut Tahrir* through the media.

Another Somalian-born male participant, Haneef, who had also lived in Kenya before migrating to Australia in 2000, said his national identity was both countries, Somalia and Australia. But when I asked him about the Somalian-Australian boy who went back, fought for Somalia and died there, Haneef replied:

Well, he was fighting for an Islamic regime because there was a transitional government that America put in, and so they were fighting against them. And now the Islamic regime is being ousted thrown out of the country by the transitional government.

However, this incident did not affect Haneef's sense of identity as he did not justify or condemn the incident. He did know about the Cronulla riot, but he did not specifically comment on it. On the Australian media, Haneef commented, "I'd say sometimes it is bad and also sometimes they defend its negative portrayal of Muslims". Both Saeed and Haneef spoke their traditional Somalian language at home and their families had satellite television through which they watched Somalian programs. However, they attended a state school, listened to English music, and played and watched sports. For example, Saeed was fond of tennis, played soccer and his favourite player was Harry Kewel. Saeed said he dreamt of leading a happy life, while Haneef said he hoped to lead a good life.

The Eritrean-born female participant, Shameema, who lived in the Sudan before migrating to Australia in 2001, said that she felt more connected to Australia. She spoke the traditional language Tigrinya, and also Arabic at home, and ate traditional food. However, Shameema's family did not have a satellite television, so there was less connection with her family origins through television programs, though she did listen to English and Arabic music. Regarding her religion, Shameema said, "We follow our religion, but in my country (Eritrea) the Muslim population was very small". Shameema's lack of influence by satellite television, and the fact that she did not have a big Eritrean Muslim community around her, may have induced her leaning towards Australian. Shameema dreamt of finishing University, working in a good place and travel.

Turkish Background

The three Turkish students in this study appeared to be steeped in the Turkish culture, which was also collectivistic. For example, Elaine migrated to Australia in 2004, watched Turkish programs through satellite television, spoke Turkish, had Turkish friends (as they all spoke Turkish). Elaine helped her parents to speak English, watched Australian TV shows, listened to Ribbon & Blues, Hip Hop music, went to a Turkish mosque (in their neighbourhood), and did not have any boy friends, "My parents say that you can have boyfriends but not in a serious way". She and her family celebrated Eid, which they call *Bayram yemegi*.

Perhaps being a recent arrival (2004) Elaine still felt more connected to Turkey. She commented on the Australia media with its negative portrayal of Muslims: "If somebody dies in car or train crash you don't know anything about them, but if there is a news about Muslims it is a big news". Elaine heard about the Cronulla riot through friends but did not comment on it. She was appreciative of the fact that she could wear a scarf in her Australian school, which was not allowed in schools in Turkey. She commented, "In Turkey, I wore scarf. But when I went to school, I took it off".

Interestingly, Elaine expressed her individualistic leanings by criticising her family and the Muslim community. When I asked her about her hopes and dreams, she reflected on her Muslim identity:

Muslim people, I want them to be more open, and more accepting of other people. If a Muslim girl wears tight pants (jeans), even my parents would say, "Oh my God, look at her! She's wearing tight pants". When I wear scarf, other Muslim Australians (who don't wear the scarf) would say, "Oh my God, look at that girl she's wearing that full scarf". Some parents don't teach the traditional way of Islam, wear scarfs, etc. I want to make all people good Muslims with their dress code.

The next interviewee, a second Australian-born Turkish girl, Noori, was enamoured with her Turkish culture. For example, Noori said:

I'm into music, I play the lute. It is Turkish, it's the Ud, which looks like a little guitar but it's more rounder. I get private lessons from my choir teacher. I sing Turkish classical music and ever since I can't listen to any other music. We've got a Turkish Association. We go there every Wednesday night, like tonight we're going to be there where we have little mini concerts and yeah... Oh we've got the circumcision and we've got our traditional hand of marriage(ing), those sort of stuff. I watch Turkish soapies!

Noori went to a gym and helped her father in his Kebab shop but also she felt connected to Australia. Noori said:

Because, I was born here, I was raised here, you know I went to Turkey for a few months and I couldn't do it there; literally I hated Turkey there. But after I went for a holiday, it was amazing. But I feel more connected to Australia.

However, Noori's identity kept oscillating from Turkish to Australian and then Muslim. Noori remarked:

Muslims are divided into different strategies. Like our family is open but we're really into our religion, but there's people who are not really close to their religion. And if we are Muslims we should not divide our culture. I reckon we should be all together and if we're not together we can't succeed.
My hope and dream is to become a nurse and finish school; not much, not much. Sports car... I want a Lancer!

Noori did not comment on the Cronulla riot, but regarding the media she said:

The media is treating Muslims very bad I reckon because for a terrorist attack they are putting Muslims on the spot that they did it. I think a terrorist cannot be a Muslim because a Muslim person can't kill, can't slaughter anyone. In the Qur'an it doesn't say anything like that and I don't think a terrorist is a Muslim. They're just standing behind Islam and putting Islam down.

The third interviewee, an Australian-born Turkish girl, Zainab, also spoke of the Turkish cultural traditions such as the traditional Turkish wedding and belly dance (*oryantal dansöz*). But she was also fond of English music (Techno and Trance) and worked at a mainstream Australian fast food shop. Regarding her sense of belonging, she said:

More Australia because I grew up here, I'm comfortable here. In Turkey, yeah you can go there for a holiday but at the end of the day I grew up, I was born here – it's where I should be.

Zainab has integrated into Australian society through music and work, but she knew the boundaries. When I asked her if she had a boyfriend, Zainab replied, "No, my parents would kill me"! Zainab knew about the Cronulla riot, and she was sympathetic to the Lebanese. She said:

Even Australians aren't even Australians; their ancestors were from England. I can say to them, "Go back to your country", do you know what I mean. Nobody owns this country do you know what I mean – Aboriginals – that's what I call pure Australians. Yeah, everybody is foreign, so they should be grateful that they've got this country.

But the media discussion evoked affinity with her Islamic identity.

What the media does is just blow something completely out of proportion. Some of the things they do, for example, say they're in a war zone and they're taking footage of something, they're not going to show complete, the full picture; they're just going to show that bit...

It's like that picture of David Hicks. They've got a picture of him holding a gun. He's not even shooting at somebody.

David Hicks was charged with supporting terrorism in Afghanistan and imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay for five years. I have also noted that the Australian media frequently showed his photo with the gun during his incarceration, perhaps to remind the audience that he was the “enemy”. Regarding her hopes and dreams, Zainab said, “I want to get into graphic design or landscape architecture, and dreams, I just dream to be happy”!

It appears that in the case of the Turkish students the length of stay in Australia and place of birth influenced their connection with Australia. The first Turkish participant, Elaine, identified herself only as Turkish, and she had arrived recently in Australia (2004).

Lebanese background

The Australian-born Lebanese male student, Mashroof, identified himself as Lebanese-Australian. He said, “If someone asked me what nation I’d say I’m Lebanese, but I also like to call myself Australian as well”. Mashroof was very keen on sport. He was associated with a football club and trained twice a week. He also supported the local Richmond Australian Football team (AFL). Regarding his favourite sports person, Mashroof said, “My favourite tennis player is Roger Federer; he’s number one and my new favourite player in the AFL, he’s the first practicing (Lebanese) Muslim, Bashir Houli. He plays for Essendon Football Club, that’s in Melbourne”. When I asked Mashroof about the Cronulla riot, he commented:

I don’t blame the Australians for anything that happens in this country, I blame number one the media who heat the situation against the Muslims. They will make a little thing into a big thing, such as terrorism, and they’ll set it up and show Islam in a bad way.

Perhaps, an indication that Mashroof had integrated well into Australian society was that he watched only Foxtel; whereas the other Lebanese-background interviewees (who will be discussed later) also watched occasional Arabic programs through the satellite. Yet when I asked Mashroof about his cultural activities, he said,

We've got the *dabke* and *derbekah*, a lot of different ones but usually the drum. After Ramadan we have Eid, that's what we celebrate there's two of them. There's one after Ramadan (the month of fasting), and the other during the time of Hajj (pilgrimage).

But when I asked him about his leisure time activities, Mashroof said:

Yeah, I am into music, Hip Hop, Rap, TV shows, Prison Break. I stay at home for special events like Formula One or Grand Final. I see the opening ceremonies, people holding the flags ceremony. Sometimes I held the flag, marched in a group in such ceremonies.

Overall, it was obvious that Mashroof was bi-cultural in his cultural orientation, but when I asked him about his hopes and dreams, Mashroof – who had never visited Lebanon – had strong Islamic aspirations:

I want to go to study at the Islamic university in Medina. It's in Saudi Arabia. I will learn good Arabic and the religion, just that sort of studying I mean.

Mashroof was linked with a Muslim association in Melbourne which was connected to Medina. He also attended two mosques in Melbourne, a local and another mosque that was attended mostly by the Lebanese. When I asked him, "What should Australian Muslims do to improve their situation?" he said:

I think parents should improve their mentality. They should be teaching the kids to be a part of the Australian society and work with others. Because people like my parents give the Lebanese children the wrong mentality of other people. If they're not trusting of others, it does not help.

Mashroof's responses show that he has maintained a balanced stance. When he spoke of his culture he revealed a collectivistic stance, but he also expressed his individualistic tendencies.

The second Lebanese participant, the Australian-born Farooque, also had bi-cultural interests: soccer, English music and television programs and Arabic comedy, with regular attendance at his

local mosque. Regarding his national identity Farooque said, “I’ve been here 17 years of my life, since the day I was born, yeah, Australia. Yeah very much Australian, but one day I’d just like to go to Lebanon”. Farooque had not heard of the Cronulla riot but commented on the media.

They think that we’re getting involved into some other fights, like they showed how the Lebanese punched the television camera man when they (the Lebanese) came out of the court, yeah.

I have also watched this video clipping on the television news. On 13 November 2005 about five men had beaten a Channel 7 cameraman and hit a *Herald Sun* newspaper photographer outside the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court after the Court’s verdict against nine men on terrorism charges (see Blair 2005). Perhaps, Farooque meant that these isolated incidents do not represent the mainstream Lebanese-Australian population, but the media tends to portray them negatively. It appears that the media has invigorated the ethnic identity of some Muslims. About his dreams, Farooque said, “Yeah I could buy a Skyline, Skyline R-34, that’s my Dream car”.

The third Australian-born participant, Wahab, hoped to become a builder. He was fond of sports, football, soccer, rugby and table tennis. He spoke of his culture and traditional food, baklava and kebabs. He also spoke of a beach in Melbourne that was attended mostly by Muslims, which they call “Halal beach”. Murad recalled the Cronulla beach riot as his cousin in Sydney was involved in it. He said:

Yeah we heard about it. My father called his brother and asked “What’s happening”? My Uncle replied, “Everyone’s going crazy in the street, and my oldest son has gone”. My father was upset about it.

Murad spoke of his favourite rugby player, Hassan El Masri. Interestingly, Hassan El Masri is a player with the Canterbury Bulldogs of the National Rugby League in Sydney. Many Australian-born youths of Lebanese heritage in Sydney support him. Though Murad lived in Melbourne, he felt

more connected to this player because his father knew Hassan's family. As with the Cronulla riot incident, Murad felt involved because of his family connection.

The fourth Australian-born Lebanese participant, Kishwar, discussed her interests such as music, reading etc. She read Malena Marchetti's books. Regarding her hopes, Kishwar said, "Yeah I think I'm going to do a psychology course. I like working with kids cos I love kids, particularly Muslim Australian kids". She spoke of her traditional cultural practices such as *dabke* and *derbakeh*, and *argilla* (smoke firing). She explained, "It's (*argilla*) like a pot thing and it's like you put tobacco in it but flavoured tobacco... And you can smoke it and we just share it around everyone (including women)". She further added, "Yeah, it's ...belly dancing is part of our culture too. We have *argilla* (smoke firing) and we dance, and listen to all sorts of music". When I asked if she had heard of the Cronulla Riot, Kishwar replied:

Yes, I heard of that. I wasn't so happy about that. One of my cousins was involved in it. I told him, "If there's stuff like that, don't get involved. You know we're living here, we shouldn't cause trouble. And if somebody causes trouble with you, just leave it. Just ignore him or say, "Look I don't like what you're saying". Yeah I told him, he did listen and now he's alright.

I asked Kishwar, "Can you give an example of how the media portrays us"?

Well, for example, you know if they find let's say a terrorist thing, they'd directly link it to Muslims. But how do they know that he was a Muslim. Have you heard of that guy that shot people in the university? He did that and yet they didn't call him a terrorist or anything. They said that he did it out of sadness and all that. But if it was a Muslim person they'd straight away say it was terrorist, which really like hurts me inside.

In this response, Kishwar referred to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute shooting where a Chinese-American student, Cho Seung Hui, killed many students and teachers on 17 April 2007. The media referred to the shooter as a "gunman" (for example, see *The West Australian*, 20 April 2007: 1, 6-7). Regarding Kishwar's national identity, she said:

I would say I'm not that connected to Lebanon, because I was born here and you know, I put on my scarf like two years ago. But with the sense of belonging, I do feel I belong here; sometimes though, I get racism at shopping centres. And because, I know the difference, because before I put on my scarf people would look at me normally, talk to me normally. Whereas when I put on my scarf people treat me differently. For example, the other day I was walking in the local shopping centre, a person asked me for the time, and I didn't have a watch on me, I go. "Oh, sorry", then one of their friends yelled out, "Oh, she probably doesn't know English".

This Western connection of *hijab* with ignorance and backwardness was observed by Howard Brasted (2001: 206-227). Through his research on the Muslim representation in Australian media from 1950-2000, Brasted noted that Muslims have received a less than fair, and at times a farcical press through the portrayal of images of mosques, bearded mullahs, Muslim crowds, and veiled women, which have collectively come to symbolise irrationality, fanaticism, intolerance and discrimination on an almost medieval scale. In another paper, Kabir and Evans (2002: 70-95) have documented the plight of some Muslim women in Australia. The *hijab* has often been a marker of difference. Australia-born Kishwar also believed that she did not get a job in a fast food shop because of her *hijab*. She said that she and her Asian friend sat for a written test. She had all the correct answers, whereas her friend who was a non-Muslim did not, but the next day Kishwar received a regretful letter, and her friend got the job.

Kishwar's views on job market experience could be subjective. But the fact that in 2006 the unemployment of Australian-born Muslim girls was three times higher than their Christian counterparts, suggests that there is discrimination occurring in the work place (Kabir and Evans 2002: 70-95; Kabir 2005: 266-278; Kabir 2007d:1290-1294). There is no doubt that Australian-born Muslims have integrated into Australian society in terms of their English language skills and to some extent culturally. But perhaps, their Muslim names, dress codes, and the geo-political events since September 11, 2001 have put them at a disadvantage.

Afghan-Iranian background

An Australian-born female participant of Afghan-Iranian background, Amina, spoke Persian and Dari. Her traditional diet was very similar to all Middle Eastern food. I asked her, “What are the cultural traditions you are holding on to?” Amina replied:

We don't have sex before marriage, and I don't support sex before marriage. But one thing that I don't agree with is when my parents say, “Oh you have to be married to do anything!” I want to travel but my parents would say, “You have to be married to travel by yourself, you have to be married to get a piercing!” They try to impose. Yeah, we've grown up, being nurtured in a different way. Yeah, deep down, they still value those things.

Regarding religion, Amina commented:

Religion is important to me, but I would explain to my kids the values that I believe in and that it's up to them. I'm not going to force upon them. I will advise them that they can balance the way they want to live, that's completely up to them how they want to do that and they can't be forced into just abandoning their religion because of the media or the atmosphere in the society that they live in.

About her national identity, Amina remarked:

I, deep down don't see myself as like a Persian. I see myself as an Australian-Persian. But say you went to a school like, a private school for debating, when the students of that (rich private) school comment on you, you are forced to see yourself as “different”. For example, I went on a debate at a private college and what they said to me was like, “Before you walk into the school, do you have any knives on you?” You see, that's the kind of mentality they grow up with. They are very self-centred, very self-driven. They don't care about other people. All they want is everything for themselves. You can't live in a world like this, in a rightful and a just way, if you're brought up that way. It's these people that turn into politicians, and then act the way they are right now you know.

Amina hoped to do urban planning and design and she said “My dream is to go to Africa and help people there. That's, I really want to do that”. Amina's life story shows an individualistic cultural pattern when she says that she will not impose restrictions on her children. She also pointed out that her Australian identity could be tarnished due to the wider community's conventional perception or the politicians' manipulation of minorities' issues. For example, after the Cronulla riot when the former Prime Minister John Howard said (of mainstream Australians), “We're not a bunch of

racists”, it indicated that the riot was the fault of the Australian-born people of Lebanese heritage. John Howard selectively ignored the point that it was a conflict between a couple of hundred Lebanese people and 5,000 mainstream Australians (Kabir 2007b). Earlier during the *Tampa* refugee crisis in 2001, some politicians manipulated the crisis in favour of their own electoral gains when they linked the asylum seekers to terrorists (Kabir 2005: 302-311).

Conclusion

In the abstract I referred to a study that found the identity of British Muslim youth was formed through the influence of their family, community and the wider society. It was noted in this study that on some occasions youths’ identity may differ from that of parents and assume an exclusive *umma* identity. In the cultural milieu section, I have discussed the construction of self, which could be individualistic or collectivistic, independent or interdependent. Some scholars have also observed that identity is an ongoing process that can change or be re-structured depending on circumstances, crises or opportunities.

The in-depth analysis of 16 interviewees for this study has revealed that the formation of Muslim youth identity reflects all of these possible patterns. Some have derived their interdependent collectivistic culture from their parents and observe traditional cultural and religious celebrations, thereby maintaining an ethno-religious identity. But most spoke also of the importance of Western music, television programs, sports and media in their lives, and in the context of their interview responses they were not afraid to comment critically about their parents or the Muslim community, thus exhibiting independent, individualistic tendencies. For me the latter reflects an emerging bi-cultural identity for most students, which I will return to below.

Some crisis situations, such as the Cronulla riot in Sydney, failed to impact on some of the students because they did not feel connected to it, perhaps because of their ethnicity and/or geographical location. However, the interviewees of Lebanese heritage expressed compassion for their Lebanese counterparts in Sydney. One Turkish interviewee (Zainab) also sided with the Lebanese in this conflict. Most of the students expressed a strong Muslim identity.

This study indicated that many factors were influencing the identity of these young Australians, but three unsolicited topics were most mentioned: Australian media, unemployment, and parental issues. For example, the last interviewee, Amina observed that though she was born in Australia, did not wear the *hijab*, and attended a state school, some Australian students at an earlier school had considered her to be the ‘other’, which she attributed in turn to the stance taken by some politicians and media. Similarly, some students (for example, Mariam) who wore the *hijab* found their Australian identity was questioned and they felt less connected to Australia because they felt rejected in the labour market.

As mentioned above, most of the interviewees held a form of bi-cultural identity, which, as one might expect, was less developed among the overseas-born new arrivals, like Farida and Saeed. In all instances the Australian-born interviewees felt more affiliated with Australian ways, but seemed keen to retain some aspects of the cultural heritage, especially their religion.

I take from these tentative findings two ideas: one, is that Australian Muslim youth identity is in a process of development and subject to change between the old and new aspects of their culture; two, if some form of bi-cultural identity is the outcome, it is most likely to be beneficial to the youths and to the host nation.

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